

**Critical Comparative Approaches to Testimonial Literature**  
**Emergent from the Holocaust and the Atomic Bombings**

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**Abstract**

The thesis offers a critical comparative reading of testimonial literature emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Through identifying aspects of thematic and stylistic commonality between these literatures, this thesis aims towards establishing a series of narrative traits that characterise the testimonial genre. This comparative stance informs the structure of the thesis, in that each chapter deals with examples of testimonies emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings.

Chapter one engages with the history of autobiography criticism and genre theory, and through close readings of both testimonial and autobiographical works by Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, posits areas of potential difference between the two forms of life-writing. The traditional understanding of the autobiographical contract, as defined by Philippe Lejeune, is challenged through a comparative analysis of the way in which the self is constructed in Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies.

Chapter two focuses on the narrative challenges posed by the encounter with trauma. Informed by structuralist theories of language and critical readings of testimonial writing, this chapter examines the way in which the experience of trauma intensifies the arbitrary nature of the relationship between language and experience, to the extent that language appears to fail. Drawing on Blanchot's theory of the communicative possibilities of silence, the thematic and stylistic representation of silence, in its many forms, is considered in the context of Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies.

Chapter three explores the representation of the female experience in testimonial texts. Beginning with Cixous' and Irigaray's theories of *écriture féminine* and *fémininité* as an interpretative lens with which to approach women's narratives, this chapter considers the way in which women's testimonies are influenced by both a poetics of gender and a poetics of trauma.

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## Introduction

There are two events that have marked our century for all times: the Shoah and the atomic bomb. These two moments in human history, embodied by Auschwitz and Hiroshima, will be the icons of our century. (Blumenthal)

Auschwitz and Hiroshima are often presented as twin nadirs in the history of human suffering. They represent unprecedented, if not actually unique, chapters in history and thus occupy a privileged position in the revelation of man's inhumanity to man. Elie Wiesel establishes a causal relationship between the two events, arguing that, "Hiroshima was a consequence of Auschwitz. The world that allowed the murder of the Jewish people would eventually not care about the annihilation of a city far away" (Future of Remembering 3129). Wiesel, of course, is a well-known advocate of the view that the Holocaust is unique, and he is careful to assert that his link between Auschwitz and Hiroshima is not a comparison made on historical grounds, but rather an acknowledgement that nuclear assault was the inevitable outcome of the amorality that made the Holocaust possible. The relationship between Auschwitz and Hiroshima as presented by Wiesel and Blumenthal ostensibly offers an initial justification for the comparative focus adopted in this thesis.

However, fashioning the relationship between Auschwitz and Hiroshima in such a way that presents them as linked icons of amorality is not unproblematic. John Whittier Treat, the first English language literary critic to offer a sustained analysis of atomic bomb literature, argues that too often the relationship between these two discrete events is invoked casually and without acknowledgement of the historical and cultural specificities that divide them. He argues:

It has been common in writing on the Holocaust to add, perhaps for dramatic effect, 'Hiroshima' to the litany of sites illustrating modern man's savage treatment of himself: the first atomic bombing, which like the death camps should be understood as a *model* for contemporary knowledge, is instead treated as *an optional example* of some other idea typically more colloquial and thus less unsettling (e.g. 'man's inhumanity to man'). (Writing Ground Zero 9)

Treat's concern here is that Hiroshima comes to occupy a supporting role in discussions of the Holocaust and suffering; it functions only to emphasise issues made apparent by the Holocaust. Somewhat contradicting his assertion that the Auschwitz and Hiroshima jointly share a position as "icons of our century," Blumenthal argues that it is the Holocaust alone that represents a "paradigm of suffering." Other events may be discussed in the context of the Holocaust - Blumenthal suggests the Armenian genocide, slavery and the killing fields of Cambodia amongst others as examples – but they are most emphatically "not the Shoah" (Blumenthal). Whilst not arguing for the 'uniqueness' of Hiroshima, Treat objects to the use of Hiroshima as a comparative example rather than it being acknowledged as a paradigmatic event in the same way as the Holocaust.

A further objection Treat has to Wiesel's and Blumenthal's understanding of the relationship between the Holocaust and the atomic bombings is their use of the words 'Auschwitz' and 'Hiroshima.' He suggests that these terms have transcended their historical realities as an extermination camp and a bombed city, and are regarded as "no longer merely places but ideas, tropes of a new fact within the human condition: a condition compromised by our ability, in a matter of respective hours and seconds, to eliminate whole ghettos and cities of people" (Writing Ground Zero 9). The connection between the two events is thus established purely on a philosophical, contemplative level, which potentially jeopardises our appreciation of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings as real events in history. Just as the term 'Auschwitz' masks the multitude of different experiences of Holocaust victims, so the term 'Hiroshima' tends to obscure the fact that two cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were targeted for nuclear attack. Although the bombing of both cities marked the entrance into an age of nuclear warfare, the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki cannot be considered to be the same. The uranium bomb known as "Little Boy" was dropped on Hiroshima at 8.15am on August 6. Hiroshima was completely devastated, by both the initial impact of the bomb and also by the intense fire that subsequently raged through the city. Ironically, an all-clear siren had been sounded in the city fifteen minutes before the attack, and so the majority of people in Hiroshima were occupied with their daily activities in the home and at work when the bomb was dropped. Whilst casualty figures have never been satisfactorily confirmed, it is estimated that 59% of the

population were killed in the attack. In Nagasaki, the situation was somewhat different. Nagasaki was, in fact, not the intended target for the second bomb, a plutonium bomb known as “Fat Man”. The original target was Kokura, a city about 90 miles away from Nagasaki, but low visibility over Kokura on August 9 1945 led to the bombing-run pilot being given a command to fly on to Nagasaki. In contrast to the total annihilation of Hiroshima, Nagasaki was only partially destroyed, and a minority of the population lost their lives. Even so, estimated casualty figures place the loss of life between 21,762 (Nagasaki Prefecture Report, 1945) and 73, 884 (A-bomb Records Preservation Committee, 1949).<sup>1</sup> Precisely because the terms “Hiroshima” and “Auschwitz” function as synecdoches and so threaten to elide historical specificities, I have used the terms “Holocaust” and “atomic bombings” throughout this thesis. If testimonial writing is to be recognised as the narrative representation of experience, then the precise historical provenance of a text assumes significance. The use of synecdochic terminology, then, potentially threatens not only historical understandings of each event, but also the literary analysis of emergent eye-witness accounts.

Treat’s identification of both the Holocaust and the atomic bombings as paradigmatic events in the history of human kind inevitably invokes the spectre of uniqueness, which haunts discussions of the Holocaust in particular. The claim that the Holocaust is historically unique has formed a cornerstone of Holocaust remembrance and scholarship. Whilst having always been a fundamental aspect of Holocaust awareness, the issue of uniqueness was foregrounded in the 1986 *Historikerstreit*, or historians’ debate, which regarded the singularity or otherwise of the Holocaust as central to efforts to historicise the German past. Right-wing intentionalist historians disparaged the claim for uniqueness, by arguing that although the event was certainly unique in German history, it was not to be regarded as a peculiarly singular regime, for it had echoes and reflections in other totalitarian states, particularly in Stalinist Russia. Conversely, left-wing functionalists feared that to adopt this historical perspective, and enter into comparison, would result in

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<sup>1</sup> Casualty statistics for both Hiroshima and Nagasaki vary tremendously, depending on both the time at which the data was collected, and the authority which conducted the surveys. A full comparative account of the different suggested death tolls can be found in: Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical and Social Effects of The Atomic Bombing (see bibliography for publication details.)

diminishing the true horrors of the Nazi regime. Eberhard Jäckel's often-quoted response strongly asserts the justification of the claim for uniqueness. He wrote:

The Nazi extermination of the Jews was unique because never before had a state, under the responsible authority of its leader; decided and announced that a specific group of human beings, including the old, the women, the children and the infants, would be killed to the very last one, and implemented this decision with all the means at its disposal. (76)

However, in retrospect, despite the heated nature of the debate, the value of the *Historikerstreit* does not lie in the unearthing of any new historical insights or radical theory. The real significance of the debate was the attention that it brought to the project of historicising and remembering the past. The claim that the Holocaust is unique is problematic; indeed, it is a logically misleading statement. Every historical event is unique in its time and place with its own specific features, which excludes it from direct comparison with any other historical moment. In fact, as Norman Finkelstein has argued, it could be suggested that the uniqueness of the Holocaust is that it holds its historical singularity to be a distinguishing feature. (Finkelstein)

Indeed, this claim for uniqueness is notably absent in the context of atomic bomb remembrance. Whilst there are occasional testimonial voices which call for the recognition of the atomic bombings as unique (most notably from Ōta Yōko), the comparison with the Holocaust in particular has been embraced by the memorial discourse of the atomic bombings. Ian Buruma suggests that the comparison between the Holocaust and the atomic bombings is “officially condoned” in Japan (108), pointing to the founding of the Auschwitz-Hiroshima Committee and the proposal to build a Holocaust memorial near to the city of Hiroshima as evidence of this sanction (92). There is a Holocaust Education Centre located in Tokyo, and the Japanese Holocaust Centre in Fukuyama, forty-five minutes away from Hiroshima. Yet this linking of the atomic bombings with the Holocaust has been challenged as a misrepresentation of Japan's history. The connection between the atomic bombings and the Nazi persecutions in Europe both contributes to and emphasises a Japanese wartime discourse that identifies the Japanese solely as victims of atrocity. Lisa Yoneyama points out that Japanese memory of the war is dominated by A-bomb remembrance which has led to “a national victimology and phantasm of innocence



[developed] throughout most of the post war years” (13). By centralising the experience of the atomic bombings, Yoneyama argues that Japan recognises itself as a victimised nation, and so creates a wartime memorial discourse which excludes Japan’s history as an imperial aggressor. Indeed, the notorious “textbook trial” which ran from 1965 until 1993 demonstrates the extent to which atrocities committed by the Japanese in Asia were excised from the collective memory of the war. In 1952, Japanese historian Ienaga Saburo wrote a textbook for use in secondary schools which offered a detailed account of Japanese atrocities, including the Unit 731 medical experiments on Chinese civilians carried out by Japanese Imperial Army medics between 1942 and 1945, and the so-called “comfort women” forced into military brothels. The Ministry of Education disapproved of Ienaga’s representation of Japanese wartime history, and demanded that he rewrite it, omitting any references to Japanese atrocities. Ienaga initially complied and submitted a revised version of his book in 1962, but the Ministry of Education maintained that it still had a disagreeably anti-Japanese tone to it, and demanded a further revision. Frustrated by this decision, Ienaga decided to sue the government on the grounds of unconstitutional censorship. The case first came to court in 1970, and the judge found in favour of Ienaga. However, following an appeal made by the Ministry of Education in 1974, this decision was reversed. Subsequent appeals throughout the 1970s and 1980s resulted in rulings which accepted that the Ministry of Education was over-zealous in its censorship of Japanese history, but that it had not acted unconstitutionally. Ienaga took his case to court for a final time in 1992 – and lost once again. However, a year later, the Tokyo High Court reversed the 1992 decision and ruled that censorship of Japanese wartime atrocities was unconstitutional. Yet, writing in 1999, Yoneyama asserts that despite an official recognition of Japanese atrocities, A-bomb remembrance is still dominant in a Japanese wartime memory that identifies all Japanese as victims. The link between the atomic bombings and the Holocaust serves to bolster this perception.

Problematically, then, the claims for both uniqueness and comparison are revealed to be flawed. Yet discussions in this area centre primarily on the grounds of the historical (non)-relation between the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. As a critical comparison of the testimonial literature emergent from these events, this thesis represents a departure from this historical perspective. However, as Treat

acknowledges, “the atomic bombings and the Nazi atrocities differ in significant historical ways that have determined that their literatures would be different as well” (Writing Ground Zero 14). Therefore, prior to embarking upon a literary analysis of testimonial accounts of these atrocities, it is necessary to explore in more detail these arguments for uniqueness and comparison.

### **Historical and Literary Contexts: Exploring Uniqueness and Comparison**

The claim for historical uniqueness is troublesome from the perspective of the literary critic. Its ubiquity in Holocaust studies has arguably hindered the development of comparative literary studies in particular. There is a risk that the emphasis on the historical uniqueness of the event will be translated into a false assumption that by virtue of the subject, any representation of the event must be considered as unique. This restrictive critical philosophy makes it taboo to compare Holocaust literature with any other form of literature, as it is tantamount to comparing, and thereby potentially trivialising, the historical event itself. Certainly, this taboo has problematised previous attempts at comparative literary studies, a key example being Sheng-Mei Ma’s “Contrasting Two Survival Literatures: On the Jewish Holocaust and The Chinese Cultural Revolution.”

Written in 1987, Ma’s paper represents one of the earlier attempts to compare Holocaust literature with that emergent from another atrocity. His selection of these two events for comparison is based on the understanding that they are both examples of mass murder in the twentieth century that gave rise to a large body of survivor narratives. However, Ma’s comparative approach is hampered by his adherence to the credo that the Holocaust is unique. “The Holocaust,” he argues, “is understood as an incomparable event and the literature that describes it is unique” (82). In contrast, he suggests that the Chinese interpret the Cultural Revolution as “only one of many violent waves in the ceaseless tides of Chinese civilisation. It represents less of an independent and devastating watershed than an inevitable twist in the cycle of time, in which peace and chaos succeed and generate each other” (82). Ma’s insistence on the uniqueness of both Holocaust history and literature frustrates his attempt at comparison, and he concedes that “little similarity can be found between them” (81). In contrast to the approach taken in this thesis, Ma focuses exclusively on the

differences between these literatures. My concern here is to focus not only on difference, but also on commonalities between the literary responses to the atrocities of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. Whilst maintaining an awareness of the historical specificities of each event which inevitably condition the nature of testimonial responses to a certain extent, I argue that these eye-witness narratives reveal points of similarity in their responses to atrocity.

As the assertion of historical uniqueness potentially jeopardises the possibility of comparative literary study, it is appropriate to preface the forthcoming chapters with an interrogation of some of these claims for uniqueness, with a focus on historical coincidence between the Holocaust and the atomic bombings.

The historical uniqueness of the Holocaust in comparison to other events in history is still frequently debated. Some of the more recent significant works in this field include a collection of essays, entitled Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide. Edited by Alan Rosenbaum, this book includes essays that consider the uniqueness of the Holocaust in comparison to African American slavery, the Armenian Genocide, the Stalinist Terror and wartime Japanese atrocities. The Holocaust: The Unique and the Universal is a collection of essays which once again deals with questions of uniqueness and comparison, including considerations of the theological uniqueness of the Holocaust. In Rethinking the Holocaust, Yehuda Bauer devotes an entire chapter to “Comparisons with other Genocides,” before reaching the conclusion that the Holocaust is uniquely unprecedented (39-67). For Bauer, the central aspect of this claim for uniqueness is the “Nazi racial antisemitic ideology” (44). It is this ideology which conditions both the motivation behind, and the implementation of, the genocide in Europe. In “Political Functions of Genocide Comparisons,” Helen Fein has eloquently discussed the ideological politics that lie behind comparing the Holocaust to other atrocities, with particular reference to the Armenian genocide, the Khmer Rouge, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Stalinist Gulags.

In the context of the atomic bombings, there are significant historical parallels to be drawn in relation to the Holocaust. The most notable, of course, is their shared reliance on what Lifton has referred to as “technologies of murder,” for it was the

technological advances in the modern age that made these atrocities possible in a way which would have been inconceivable even fifty years earlier (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 9). However, whilst the manifestation of these atrocities was grounded in technological progress, care must be taken not to overstate the significance of technological advances when considering the underlying motivational factors behind the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. As Berel Lang points out, the absence of such technology would not necessarily have averted the catastrophes. Yet at the same time, they could not have happened as they did without such technological developments. “The argument presented,” Lang explains, “is not that genocide and omnicide have followed necessarily from the advances of technology, only that there is a material and conceptual connection between the two lines” (Genocide and Omnicide 120).

A further point to consider is that neither the Holocaust nor the atomic bombings could have taken place without full governmental complicity, and without a strong bureaucratic framework to support their implementation. Certainly, the dropping of the atomic bombs would not have been possible without the mutual cooperation of scientists, military strategists and politicians. For Zygmunt Bauman, the Holocaust was “clearly unthinkable without such bureaucracy” (17). It is this feature that identifies the Holocaust, and equally the atomic bombings, as events concomitant with the modern world.

Both the Holocaust and the atomic bombings were made possible by depersonalisation; the development of the gas chambers enabled the SS and other Nazis to perform acts of mass murder without suffering the psychological damage incurred through individual shootings, and the killing of over half the population of a city by a pilot in an aircraft high above. Both also depersonalised death, as any mourning for the loss of an individual became lost in a mass bereavement for whole families, whole communities and a whole way of life.

Yet it would be inaccurate, and damaging to the memorialisation of each event, not to acknowledge the factual specificities which were exclusive to both the Holocaust and the dropping of the A-bomb. Notwithstanding the fact that the experience of every survivor of each event was different in some way, there were

major distinctions between the two, most significantly the aim of the perpetrators. The aim of the Nazis in the Holocaust was genocide, which led to a stepping up of the murders, even when Germany was losing the war. Conversely, the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima was rationalised as a way actually to save lives, as the casualties, both civilian and military, during the Pacific War were so immense. Indeed, in a newspaper interview conducted to commemorate the anniversary of the dropping of the bomb, Paul Tibbets, pilot of the *Enola Gay*, said:

I knew we did the right thing because when I knew we'd be doing that I thought, yes, we're going to kill a lot of people, but by God we're going to save a lot of lives.

We won't have to invade [Japan]. (Tibbets 4)

Of civilians caught in the crossfire of any war, he remarked, "That's their tough luck for being there" (4). Tibbets' comments are informed by an extremely prejudicial perception of ethnicity. Official estimates place the number of dead in Hiroshima between 32,000 and 133,000; it is difficult to reconcile these figures with Tibbets' view that "by God we're going to save a lot of lives". Implicit in his statement is that the lives saved are those of Allied troops, rather than Japanese (civilian as well as military) lives. The view that the atomic bombing was necessary to bring an end to the war still holds currency in some circles today. Buruma, for example, asserts that whilst "there can be no justification for Auschwitz unless one believes in Hitler's murderous ideology, the case for Hiroshima is at least open for debate" (105). Yet military analysis of the event contradicts this claim. The 1946 US Strategic Bombing Survey concluded:

Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated. (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 7)

However, whilst acknowledging the role of perceptions of ethnicity in the dropping of the bomb, it is important to maintain the distinction between this and the motivation behind the Holocaust, to acknowledge the difference between a

militaristic strategy influenced by ethnic discrimination, and a genocidal strategy predicated solely on ethnicity.

## Comparing Literatures

The focus of this thesis, however, is to examine the claim for uniqueness not from a historical perspective, but from the point of view of the literary critic. The comparative approach to testimonial literature has few precedents; a specific comparison between Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies as considered in this thesis, even fewer. In addition to Ma's thwarted attempt at comparing Holocaust survival literatures with those from the Chinese Cultural Revolution as mentioned above, Kelly Oliver has posited a comparison between Holocaust testimony and African-American slavery narratives. However, her basis for comparison does not focus on the narrative strategies employed by testimonial authors, and explores instead aspects of shared authorial motivation. She argues that:

Testimonies from the Holocaust and slavery do not merely articulate a demand to be recognised or to be seen. Rather, they witness to pathos beyond recognition. The victims of oppression, slavery and torture are not merely seeking visibility and recognition, but they are also seeking witnesses to horrors beyond recognition. (78)

For Oliver, it is the shared need to 'tell the tale' that allows for a comparative reading of these texts. Chapter two of this thesis, "Absence and Presence: The Role of Silence in Testimonial Writing," identifies this narrative impulse as a site of commonality between Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies. However, for both *hibakusha* (A-bomb survivors) and Holocaust survivors, this urge to "tell the tale" is compromised by their shared inability to express their experiences of atrocity in narrative form. Chapter two focuses on interpretations of the "unrepresentable" nature of the experience of atrocity; of the way in which language is perceived to fail as a tool of communication in these narratives, and the subsequent utilisation of silence, in its many different forms, as a form of expression.

A-bomb literature has also been the subject of previous comparative readings. Ernestine Schlant and J.T. Rimer co-authored Legacies and Ambiguities: Postwar Fiction and Culture in West Germany and Japan, a book which dealt with A-bomb

literature and post-war German literature. However, in contrast to this thesis, they focussed exclusively on works of fiction, and shied away from any direct comparative readings of these two literatures. Inspired by Schlant and Rimer's approach, Reiko Tachibana's Narrative as Counter-Memory: A Half-Century of Postwar Writing in Germany and Japan focuses on the similarities and differences between *genbaku bungaku* ('atomic bomb literature') and the *Trümmerliteratur* ('literature of the rubble') of post-war Germany, exploring both testimonial and fictional works. Tachibana's comparative approach to these literatures is rooted in the fact that they both represent a response to the national and individual trauma of defeat in WWII. Buruma has also commented on this relationship between A-bomb literature and *Trümmerliteratur*, noting that these texts are commonly characterised by a tone of nihilistic despair (47-68).

However, little critical attention has been focussed on comparative approaches to testimonial literature emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. Robert Jay Lifton concludes his book Death in Life: The Survivors of Hiroshima with a discussion of creative responses to the A-bomb, in which he acknowledges that both A-bomb and Holocaust writers confront shared problems when trying to narrate their experiences of atrocity, but as a psychologist/historian his interest in literature is restricted to the way in which it reveals the psychology of survival. Writing exclusively on A-bomb testimonies from a literary perspective, in Writing From Ground Zero, Treat acknowledges his debt to critics of Holocaust testimonies, in particular Lawrence Langer, who provided him with a basic conceptual framework with which to approach testimonial narratives. In common with Lifton, Treat comments briefly on the fact that A-bomb and Holocaust writers share the problem of trying to represent the unrepresentable in their narratives. However, whilst both Lifton and Treat comment briefly on a potential relationship between A-bomb and Holocaust testimonies, neither follows this through with a comparative exploration of specific examples.

The specific scholastic contribution made by this thesis is then, as the title suggests, to develop a comparative analytical approach to eye-witness narratives emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By drawing on the work of Treat and Lifton who have made gestures towards such a

comparison, this thesis offers the first sustained analysis of thematic and stylistic commonalities present in these testimonial narratives. This focus has influenced the structuring of the material herein, in that each chapter addresses both Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies. Through exploring narratives from each event from a common perspective, (the representation of the self in chapter one, narrative strategies in chapter two, and an exploration of women's narratives in chapter three) points of convergence and divergence between Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies can be more clearly identified.

### **Recognising Testimony**

The primary concern of this thesis is to identify points of commonality (and difference) between A-bomb and Holocaust eye-witness accounts, and in so doing move towards a clearer understanding of what constitutes a testimonial genre. This focus on a comparison of narratives represents a significant departure from previous comparative approaches as outlined above, which consider the relationship between the Holocaust and atomic bombings from primarily historical and philosophical perspectives.

The recognition of testimony as a distinct genre in its own right forms the basis of chapter one. The attempt to distinguish between autobiographical and testimonial modes of writing informs the choice of texts in the analysis of Holocaust testimonies. Both Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel have authored works which I argue can be compared in such a way as to reveal autobiographical and testimonial ways of emplotting the history of the self. The question as to what constitutes testimonial writing is also brought to the forefront by an exploration of the A-bomb eye-witness accounts collected in The Witness of Those Two Days. Each account is very brief and anonymously authored, and they arguably bear few of the stylistic hallmarks that have come to be identified as typical of testimonial writing through an analysis of Holocaust narratives. Their inclusion, therefore, potentially challenges the tentative assumptions that have been made about the testimonial genre. Such brief accounts are actually quite characteristic of A-bomb testimonies, as many were written primarily in order to support applications for medical or financial aid in the austere post-war years. This motivation again adds another dimension to what it means to write testimonially.



There is a relative paucity of atomic bomb accounts compared to those dealing with the Holocaust, and even fewer that lend themselves to sustained literary criticism. This problem is intensified for non-Japanese speaking scholars, as comparatively few accounts are available in translation. This could be one reason why atomic bomb literature is currently quite neglected outside of Japan. Certainly there are very few critical works that focus on A-bomb testimonies from a literary perspective, the notable exception, of course, being Treat's Writing Ground Zero. My aim with this thesis is to contribute towards rectifying this problem. In addition to a lack of literary criticism, my research has suggested that the history of the atomic bomb, particularly in terms of its aftermath, is largely unfamiliar in the West. Available historical accounts tend to focus primarily on the act of dropping the bomb; history is therefore written from the perspective of the perpetrator rather than the victim, a markedly different approach to that taken with Holocaust studies. For this reason, I have provided relevant historical contextualisation for many of the A-bomb narratives discussed.

When referencing the texts by Japanese authors discussed in this thesis, I have adopted the Japanese convention, and placed surname prior to first name.

Autobiography as a generic term is widely accepted to cover a wide variety of subsets of life-writing. In the attempt to identify testimony as a genre it becomes apparent that there are distinctions between different forms of testimonial writing and it is this that informs the discussion in chapter three on women's narratives as potentially stylistically and thematically distinct from those authored by men.

Through a critical comparison of testimonial literatures emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings, it is hoped that the understanding of testimony as a distinct genre will be furthered.

## Chapter 1

### Autobiography, Testimony and Constructions of the Self

The act of autobiographical storytelling constructs and in fact, constitutes the self. (Lear and Sharrad vii)

#### **1.1 Introduction: Defining Autobiography, Defining Testimony**

The latter decades of the twentieth century have seen a noticeable increase in interest in life writing and texts that deal with self-representation, resulting in a literary phenomenon that Leigh Gilmore has termed as the “memoir boom” (1). In support of this, Gilmore has pointed to the increased popular and scholarly interest in autobiographical literature of all kinds. Yet the very term “autobiographical literature”, however broadly applied, is misleading in its suggestion of a stylistic and/or thematic homogeneity inherent in all forms of narrative self-representation; testimony, memoir, diary, autobiography to name but a few examples. Identifying each of these forms as either distinct subsets of autobiographical literature, or even as separate literary genres in their own right is, however, complicated by the fact that the term “autobiography” itself does not offer a fixed definition of genre. As James Olney astutely observes, “everyone knows what autobiography is, but no two observers, however assured they may be, are in agreement” (7).

Etymologically, the term “autobiography” stems from the Greek *autos/bios/graphe*, meaning self/life/writing, and critical interpretation of what constitutes autobiography is dependent upon the relative significance ascribed to each of these components. Leigh Gilmore defines the traditional interpretation of autobiography as a “discourse of self representation”, which “features a rational and representative ‘I’ at its center” (2). Indeed, Roy Pascal, writing in 1960, argues that it is the presence of the “I”, of a coherent sense of the self, that separates autobiography from other forms of life writing: “in the autobiography proper, attention is focussed on the self, in the memoir or reminiscence on others” (5). Explicit in both Gilmore’s and Pascal’s definitions is an assumption of a pre-existing narrating self which provides a solid (if not always reliable) perspective from which the story of the life, or *bios* can be narrated. This traditional focus on the *bios* aspect of autobiography has created a narrow definition of who may participate in autobiographical practice.

Georges Gusdorf's now strongly criticised interpretation of autobiography presents it as a product of Western Enlightenment culture, and the preserve only of those who are sufficiently developed to arrive at a consciousness of self and an awareness of their place in history. In this context, the autobiographical subject should have a story worth telling, a *bios* that reflects and contributes to a sense of historical significance. In his defence of this restricted eligibility for autobiographical practice, Pascal explains that:

Autobiography means [...] discrimination and selection in face of the endless complexity of life [...] everything depends on the standpoint chosen; and it is clear that the more arbitrary the standpoint, the greater is the likelihood that the autobiography will be one-sided, blinkered or downright false. This is the reason, I believe, why the best autobiographies are written by men and women of outstanding achievement in life. Their standpoint is not as it were chosen by them [...]: it is there, the indubitable result of their life's work, often acknowledged publicly, but at any rate for them the concrete reality of the meaning of their life. (10)

In Pascal's *bios*-centred perspective, the value of the *autos* appears to be dependent upon the acts and the achievements of the individual. The way in which the *autos* is represented in the text is apparently the product of the "standpoint" or perspective from which the story of the *bios* is told: the self could be represented in a multitude of different ways depending upon which aspects of the *bios* are emphasised or omitted. The *bios* also influences the quality of the narrative and as such lies at the heart of autobiographical literature. Whilst it would be overly simplistic to categorise all early autobiographical criticism as *bios*-centric, and contemporary criticism as *autos*-centric, there has been, as James Olney has noted, a significant "shift of attention from *bios* to *autos* - from the life to the self" (19) and it is no coincidence that a scholarly interest in testimony has accompanied this. Addressing the self, the "I", as the most significant element within the autobiographical trinity allows for a wider qualification of what constitutes autobiographical literature and admits discussion of trauma narratives. The majority of trauma narrative authors cannot be considered to have reached "outstanding achievement" in Pascal's sense, and thus the focus on *bios* excludes them for consideration in the canon of autobiographical writing. Through shifting the critical emphasis from *bios* to *autos*, Pascal's autobiographical prerequisite is removed, thereby broadening the autobiographical canon and

permitting an exploration of texts by authors who have been historically marginalised by their failure to satisfy the narrow requirements of *bios*-centred autobiographical works.

A singular focus on *autos*, however, does not necessarily open pathways into the critical analysis of testimony. Indeed, Bella Brodzki argues that the defining feature of testimony is that it “tests the prescriptive and descriptive boundaries of the autobiographical genre by presenting extreme-limit cases of what could constitute self/life/writing” (870). When self-representation encounters the experience of trauma, singular approaches to a definition of autobiographical writing which focus on only one aspect of *autos/bios/graphe* compromise a full analytical appreciation of the text. More helpful is Sidonie Smith’s approach, which rejects placing a focus on simply one constituent part of autobiographical writing. This approach masks what is actually a symbiotic relationship between *autos*, *bios*, and *graphe*. It is this combined approach that is particularly appropriate for the critical study of testimony as a genre distinct from autobiography. Smith contests the view that there is an inherent autonomous self which can offer a narratorial account of the *bios*. In fact, Smith notes, “there is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narration” (Performativity 1); the “I” comes into existence only through the narrative process of self representation. If the construction of the self is to be perceived as a narrative act, then the mode of narration is key to the way in which the self is portrayed.

When looking at personal accounts of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings, however, the precise mode of this narration is under question. Writing of Holocaust testimonies, Lawrence L. Langer makes the point that:

Tragedy as a literary form offered catharsis to men contemplating with pity and terror the image of their own mortality; but we have not yet discovered a form to fuse six million deaths into a reflection of our destiny in the modern era. (Divided Voice 34)

Here, Langer is implicitly positing a distinction between literary traditions of tragedy and trauma. Classical catharsis offers the prospect of an end to a tragedy; through the literary articulation of pain, grief and terror, recovery is made possible. The

experience of trauma, on the other hand, is frequently characterised by the fact that it is unending; the impossibility of bearing witness to the reality of trauma through literary expression recurs throughout trauma narratives. The experience of trauma thus denies the possibility of catharsis. If the experience of trauma cannot be adequately dealt with using classical modes of cathartic writing then, Langer concludes, the development of a new form of writing is necessitated.

The term most commonly used to describe this new form is “testimony”, and a primary concern of this chapter will be to establish exactly what defines this mode of narration and distinguishes it from other forms of literature. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of this genre lends credence to Shoshana Felman’s interpretation of the problems associated with regarding testimony as a literary genre. She acknowledges that whilst “testimony has become a crucial mode of our relation to the events of our times,” “the more closely we look at texts, the more they show us that unwittingly, we do not even know what testimony is and that, in any case, it is not simply what we thought it was” (Felman and Laub 5,7). The OED offers the definition that a testimony is “1. a statement under oath or affirmation. 2. a declaration or statement of fact.” Whilst this is undeniably a defining feature of testimonial writings, especially when individual testimony is considered in the context of the valuable role it played in post-war prosecutions (most significantly in the 1961 Eichman trial in Israel), the OED’s definition is complicated by contemporary understandings of factuality, and the potentially compromising relationship between factual authenticity and individual memory and recollection. Yet the style of legal testimony is often considered to be the appropriate stylistic pattern for literary testimony. Indeed, in his foreword to Filip Müller’s testimony *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers*, Yehuda Bauer commends the plain and factual style of the narrative and in so doing distinguishes clearly between testimony and art: “he tells his story in a simple, straightforward language. There is no embellishment, no deviation. This is not a work of art. It is a testimony” (Müller ix).

Attempts to define the characteristics of testimony which distinguish it as a genre separate from other forms of autobiographical writing have usually centred around Holocaust narratives. Critics have repeatedly made attempts to identify

features which distinguish personal accounts of the Holocaust from other forms of autobiography. Lawrence L. Langer suggests that the primary difference lies in the fact that “the content of a written survivor memoir may be more harrowing and gruesome than most autobiographies,” but that the narrative features, such as chronology, description and characterisation remain the same (Holocaust Testimonies 41). Mirna Cicioni concurs with Langer, noting that whilst Holocaust narratives may detail horrific events, they nevertheless conform to conventional linear chronology:

Most memoirs, however, have similar structures in that they describe the same sequence of events (arrest, journey to the camp, arrival, initiation, conditions, liberation). (26)

Robert Eaglestone, however, contests this, arguing that:

whilst most testimony narratives follow an autobiographical chronology, several have moments where the flow of the narrative stops and the text, in its style and content becomes ‘historical’, offering descriptive history or reportage. (119)

This form of disruption in chronology, style and genre is frequent; Primo Levi often interrupts his accounts of his Holocaust experiences in If This is a Man with attempts to interpret his experiences, drawing on both philosophical and scientific theories. In Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered, Ruth Klüger blends the story of her wartime childhood with vignettes from her adult life and feminist ideology which she uses as a tool to understand her experiences. Charlotte Delbo, a French political prisoner in Auschwitz, deliberately abandons simple chronology in Auschwitz and After, creating a very self-consciously styled text, fragmented in structure and jumping in style from straightforward first-person prose chapters, to challenging poetic interludes, to seemingly detached (although not dispassionate) observations, to non-contextualised isolated passages of dialogue. Lea Wernick Fridman suggests that Delbo makes a “technical and philosophical choice to scrap narrative or story” (112), but it is more complicated than this. Delbo is not eschewing narrative, but rather employing the literary device of fragmenting her narrative to mirror the chaos of her experience. This is a deviation from “normal”

autobiographical practice which seeks to impose order and coherency on the uncertainty and disorder of real life experience.<sup>1</sup>

Although directly referring to accounts of the Holocaust, many of these features, which together begin to form a style that can be defined as specifically common to testimonial writing, can also be identified in experiential accounts of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>2</sup> John Whittier Treat suggests that “testimonial literature is the earliest and still most voluminous genre of atomic bomb literature” (Writing Ground Zero 49), and whilst it is important to maintain an awareness of the historical specificity of each event, it is possible to identify likenesses in the structures of testimonial accounts emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. Whilst the content of A-bomb accounts is evidently very different to Holocaust accounts, they also reveal a “more harrowing and gruesome” content than other forms of autobiographical writing. They also often share common chronological outlines, usually beginning with a brief insight into an everyday morning, followed by an account of their direct experience of the bomb, followed by a series of episodic descriptions of what they saw on that day. The narrators often conclude their testimonies with accounts of how the mental and physical effects of the bombing still affect their lives on a daily basis. Equally frequently, however, these fragile chronologies are interrupted, as Eaglestone argues to be the case with Holocaust testimonies. The nature of these interruptions is quite different to that in Holocaust narratives. Most commonly, interruptions in A-bomb narratives take the form of repeated interjections of scientific and geographical information, demonstrating a dependence upon objective data as descriptive language fails the author. Authors frequently provide precise data regarding, for example, their exact distance from the epicentre and the heat of the bomb blast.

Also common in testimonial accounts of the atomic bombings is a reaction against the order and coherence provided by straightforward linear narrative. In Summer Flowers, Hara Tamiki exemplifies this narrative approach by opening with

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Three for a more detailed exploration of Charlotte Delbo’s Holocaust narratives.

<sup>2</sup> The characteristics which can be considered to identify testimony as a distinct genre can also be noted in the narration of other traumatic experiences, such as illness, sexual and physical abuse and other historical events. For the purpose of this thesis, however, discussion will remain centred on testimonial narratives emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings.

an account of the bombing which leads into a description of life in the following days. He then subverts the reader's narratorial expectations by concluding his narrative with a section entitled "Prelude to Annihilation", the final words denying the prospect of completion: "There were still more than forty hours to go before the atomic bomb paid its visit" (113). The ending becomes irresolute as linear progression is rejected in favour of a returning, or cyclical, structure which denies an exit from the text, and so the event.

Identifying points of stylistic commonality between Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies must not only be tempered by an awareness of the historical specificity of each event, but also by an understanding of the different literary contexts from which the authors emerge. Whilst those who try to record their experiences of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings are equally faced with the challenges of trying to represent events that defy representation, the differing literary traditions of Europe and Japan result in authors facing challenges that are unique to each event. Kurihara Sadako, an eminent poet and critic of post-Hiroshima Japanese culture, takes account of these differences, commenting:

European post-war literature could confront the fact of Auschwitz because throughout the Second World War there had existed, especially in the cultural tradition of France, a resistance movement born of *humanité*. Japanese culture, however, with its dilettantish concern for elegant pursuits and the beauties of nature has never known such *humanité*. Consequently there has been no soil for a literature of defiance to take root and grow, and postwar literature in Japan has continued, unchanged, to be dominated by quotidian, domestic and egocentric fiction. Perhaps nothing can be done about this lack of a historical sense, a lack which means that atomic-bomb literature cannot be seen as anything other than a literature of pariahs. (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 104-5)

For Kurihara, the existence in Europe of a twentieth-century literary tradition that attempts to deal with the complexities of the representation of atrocity, a tradition that goes back at least to the First World War, eases the burden of incommunicability. Indeed, it is this European heritage of a literature of atrocity that contests Wiesel's point that it is the generation of Holocaust survivors who invented the testimonial genre. Whilst Kurihara could be accused of presenting a Japan-centric perspective that minimises or even overlooks the significant problems faced by European



survivors who tried to narrate their wartime experiences, the fact that A-bomb writers believed themselves to be forging an entirely new literary space must be taken into consideration when reading A-bomb testimonies.<sup>3</sup>

Concomitant with the attempt to define “testimony” is, however, the question as to whether such a definition is desirable, or even useful. Julian Wolfreys argues that “any gesture in the direction of regulating a response to trauma or establishing a methodology or mode of analysis should be resisted, if one is to do justice to trauma and the work of testimony” (126). By framing his response in this way, Wolfreys intimates that to taxonomise testimony as a distinct genre constitutes a betrayal of the experience, a betrayal that Wiesel is actively seeking to avoid by the process of writing and the invocation of the testimonial genre. Wolfreys continues:

Testimony, in order to be such, cannot be calculated, for every testimony must respond to the singular specificity of the traumatic experience [...] Testimony is irreducible to some concept or figure, some genre or species of narrative within historical narrative or literature. (130)

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to suggest that Japan does not have a thriving tradition of autobiographical authorship. The tradition of *nikki bungaku*, or ‘diary literature,’ dates back to the tenth century. Stylistically distant from Western interpretations of life-writing and autobiography, *nikki bungaku* can be more accurately described as a form of literary memoir as it was usually written long after the events it describes. Written primarily by aristocrats and female courtiers, *nikki bungaku* is characterised by careful composition, reflections and meditations on the emotional inner self, and multiple narrating voices. It was not until the seventeenth century that Japanese writing developed a stronger historical consciousness and became more self-reflective in style. Yet little in this autobiographical tradition paved the way for an authentically Japanese literature of atrocity. Writers aimed towards achieving a *miyabi* or ‘courtly’ style, attempting to evoke philosophical thought and reflection on beauty and manners through a condensed and economic use of language. This style clashed with the attempt by *hibakusha* authors to represent horror and violence in a context where language failed, and could no longer evoke meaning (see Chapter 2 for further discussion of the relationship between language and trauma narratives). A further key characteristic of Japanese literature is that of emulating, and so honouring, the style and sensibility of earlier writers, an approach which is of little use to those who needed to develop new forms of writing in response to an unprecedented event. As Japanese culture was increasingly exposed to Western influences throughout the Meiji Restoration period of 1868-1911, the literary forms of Japanese naturalism and realism emerged. One of the most significant genres to emerge from this new forms was *shishōsetsu* of the ‘I-novel,’ a form of fictive autobiographical writing. Written from the perspective of a single authoritative narrative voice, I-novels often focus tightly on the details of everyday life. Whilst the traditions of the I-novel and *nikki bungaku* offered a basic model for *hibakusha* authors, there is little in Japanese literary culture that offered a stylistic solution to the difficulties, impossibilities even, or representing atrocity. For Kurihara, this is why the experience of the *hibakusha* author is so different to that of the European Holocaust survivor author. For a more detailed discussion of pre-WWII Japanese literary style, Donald Keene’s Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers remains a classic account.

Whilst it is to be accepted that each testimony is unique in that it is responding to an individual experience of a specific event, the fact that not every narrative conforms to a prescribed pattern is not in itself a denial of genre. As Tzvetan Todorov points out:

The fact that a work ‘disobeys’ its genre does not mean that the genre does not exist. It is tempting to say ‘quite the contrary’ for two reasons. First because, in order to exist as such, the transgression requires a law – precisely the one that is to be violated. We might go even further and observe that the norm only becomes visible – comes into existence – owing only to its transgressions. (196)

Wolfreys’ objection to the development of testimony as a genre is based on the Derridean theory that genre places a limit on texts, “and when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: ‘Do’, ‘do not’ says ‘genre’, the word ‘genre’, the figure, the voice or the law of genre” (Derrida, Law of Genre 56). However, as Todorov points out, it is only by contravening these “norms” that genre can be recognised at all.

Todorov continues that as much as a genre comes to be recognised as such through the discourse upon it – the authority that imposes the norms – it is not simply metadiscursive. For example, the volume of writing on the tragedy genre that seemingly sets its limits “does not mean that the tragedies themselves lack common features” (198). As much as codifying these common features into a recognisable genre, Todorov argues that the genre theorist should also be engaged in a search for narrative commonalities. It is in this way that testimony can be engaged with as a genre or, perhaps, a potential genre. The repetition of certain narrative elements indicates that personal accounts of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings share certain characteristics that set them apart from other forms of literature.

## **1.2 Fragmented Selves: A Comparison of the Testimonial and Autobiographical Writings of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel**

If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony. (Wiesel, Holocaust as Literary Inspiration 9)

In a lecture entitled “The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration” delivered at Northwestern University in 1977, Elie Wiesel directly confronts the seeming impossibility of the Holocaust as a narratable event.

There is no such thing [as literature of the Holocaust], not with Auschwitz in the equation. “The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration” is a contradiction in terms. As in everything else, the Holocaust negates all systems, destroys all doctrines. (7)

For Wiesel, the very extremity of the Holocaust denies the possibility of traditional literary conventions, compromising both fictional and non-fictional modes by the restrictions it places on language, identification and imagination. The “sacred awe” (9) that Wiesel claims the Holocaust evokes prohibits the translation of this particular experience into literature. He questions the moral and ethical difficulties of narrating the Holocaust, commenting:

Wouldn't that mean, then, that Treblinka and Belzec, Ponar and Babi Yar all ended in fantasy, in words, in beauty, that it was simply a matter of literature? (7)

“And yet”, to cite Wiesel’s self-confessed “two favourite words, applicable to every situation, be it happy or bleak,” there is, indisputably, Holocaust literature in the form of the writings of witnesses and survivors (All Rivers 16). It is these writings that Wiesel claims constitute a “new literature”, and that shall be the concern of this chapter.

Wiesel names this new literature “testimony” (Holocaust as Literary Inspiration 9). For Wiesel, the classification of witness and survivor writings as “testimony” positively brands these forms of writing as distinct and unique as he perceives the Holocaust itself to be. However, such an emphatic declaration of a new genre is not unproblematic. Wiesel is attempting to fix a definitive label to a form of writing that so far eludes a concrete definition. Indeed, Wiesel’s own narrative style problematises any simple categorisation. Critics frequently respond to Wiesel’s entire body of work, both fictional and non-fictional, as autobiographical. Robert McAfee Brown writes that “the story of Elie Wiesel is the story of his characters, and the story of his characters is the story of Elie Wiesel” (12). David Daiches, in a review of

Wiesel's novel The Gates of the Forest, clarifies this point even further, claiming that, "all his works are clearly autobiographical, directly or indirectly, and they represent a genuine and sometimes painful endeavour to come to terms with post-Auschwitz life" (qtd. in Downing 1442). Irving Abrahamson concurs, commenting that "in a very special and complex sense, all that Wiesel has written is 'autobiography' [...] autobiography constitutes an integral element of Wiesel's work and plays a central and complex role in it" (3). However, these multiple confirmations of Wiesel's work as autobiographical, speaking of both his fiction and non-fiction as they do, serve more to complicate the question of genre rather than clarify it. Central to this complication is that the term "autobiography" is in itself fluid and indefinable. As James Olney points out:

there is no way to bring autobiography to heel as a literary genre with its own proper form, terminology and observances [...] all sorts of generic boundaries (and even lines dividing discipline from discipline) are simply wiped away. (4)

Such flexibility, Olney continues, makes real the possibility of every narrative being interpreted as autobiographical, in that "all writing that aspires to be literature is autobiography and nothing else" (4). Conversely, he argues, that in the wake of deconstructionist criticism and the dissolution of the self into the text, it is equally valid to argue that the loss of the self has resulted in the death of autobiography (22).

Wiesel's work is, it appears, at once definable and indefinable, an ambiguity that he adds to with a personal interpretation of his work. In concordance with those who critique his work, he comments that, "I would say ...that the mood of all of my books is autobiographical" (qtd. in Downing 1443). However, despite this understanding of his work as autobiographical, he seems to be curiously resistant to using this term to describe his most conventionally autobiographical work, All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs. In the first chapter of this book, Wiesel offers an explanatory description of his intentions:

I mean to recount not the story of my life, but my stories. Through them you may understand the rest a little better. Some see their work as a commentary on their life; for others it is the other way around. I

count myself among the latter. Consider this account then, as a kind of commentary. (17)

This statement presents an ambiguity about the text from the beginning. “The story of my life” seems to be, superficially at least, the simplest rule for defining an autobiographical narrative. By rejecting this description, Wiesel appears to be attempting to define his work as something other than autobiography. The grey area generated by his comment that the text is not “the story of my life” but rather “my stories” prohibits simple classification. Yet, as the passage continues, Wiesel claims that his life is a commentary on his work. By asking the reader to consider this text to be a commentary, he is, then, asking implicitly that it be perceived as his life, thereby seemingly returning the text to the fold of autobiographical narratives. The complicated questions that this produces about genre and literature, and in particular about Holocaust literature, appears to be an extension of his call for the recognition of a “new literature”. Not only is Wiesel proposing that testimony should be considered as a new form of literature, he also appears to be suggesting that all previously recognised literary genres need to be reconsidered and re-evaluated in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Wiesel is not the only author to reject the simple classification of his personal narrative. Levi is equally ambiguous about the nature of his “autobiography”, The Periodic Table. The text is structured as a series of chapters detailing Levi’s life, each titled for a different element within the periodic table. In the final chapter, “Carbon”, he attempts to give his own definition of his text:

The reader, at this point, will have realised for some time now that this is not a chemical treatise [...] Nor is it an autobiography, save in the partial and symbolic limits in which every piece of writing is autobiographical, indeed every human work; but it is in some fashion a history. (224)

In common with Wiesel, Levi is swift to deny that he has written his autobiography, but he is keen to describe it as “a history”. This is as equivocal as Wiesel’s “stories”; an autobiography, after all, can be defined as a history, a history of the self, but Levi is keen to draw a line of distinction between the two. Levi’s preference for the term “history” rather than “autobiography” seems to indicate a supposition that “history”

permits a greater engagement with the place of the self in the world than autobiography allows. If autobiography proper is an account of the private history of the self, then perhaps a “history” permits a greater collusion between private and public history, and so Levi’s personal history is not the only story revealed in The Periodic Table. Despite his insight that all writing is autobiographical to some extent, he is wary of definitively categorising this account of his life as such. However, again in common with Wiesel, Levi later blurs this distinction. During an interview with Philip Roth, Levi submits that all of his past work is for the most part “plain or disguised autobiography” (Roth 15).

The comparison between Levi and Wiesel is apt, as in addition to these books which are conventionally recognised as autobiographies (regardless of authorial interpretation), both have also written personal Holocaust narratives which are regarded as “testimonial”. Wiesel’s Night details the occupation and ghettoisation of his home town of Sighet, and his family’s deportation to Auschwitz. Separated from his mother and sisters on arrival, the rest of the narrative is concerned with his and his father’s experiences in the camp. Wiesel attempts his own definition of this text, describing it as “an autobiographical story, a kind of testimony of one witness speaking of his own life, his own death” (qtd. in Downing 1450). Wiesel’s cautious use of the word “testimony” seems to contradict his confident call for testimony to be recognised as a “new literature”. However, it is at the point when he suggests that as a form of testimony Night is a narrative concerned with a story of death, a thanatography, rather than simply a story of life, that potential distinctions between autobiography and testimony begin to emerge. Wiesel frequently recognises his work as a means of bearing witness to those who died, as opposed to a personal account of the self. The subtle, but significant, distinction between witnessing and testifying will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In the introduction to Levi’s The Drowned and the Saved, Paul Bailey writes that in this book, “as always, Levi assumes the role of the witness” (xv). In common with Wiesel once more, Levi takes on the position of a witness, seemingly reluctant to employ the term “testimony”. Indeed, in the preface to If This is a Man, Levi is keener to explain what his work is not, rather than what it is:

As an account of atrocities, therefore, this book of mine adds nothing to what is already known to readers through the world on the disturbing question of the death camps. It has not been written in order to formulate new accusations. (15)

The closest that Levi comes to defining his text is in describing it as “an interior liberation,” suggesting a classical cathartic intention in his writing (15). He sees its purpose as being able to “furnish documentation for a quiet study of aspects of the human mind” (15); indeed, it is in many ways a philosophical investigation into what it is to be a man, as is implied in the title (an implication that is lost in the clumsy re-titling of the book as Survival in Auschwitz for the American market).

### Writing the Self and Authenticity

George Yúdice presents the following definition of testimony:

an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution etc.) (44)

In this definition, Yúdice argues for three features which must be present for a work to be considered testimonial: it must be an authentic narrative; it must be created by a person who witnessed the event, (be it as a victim, a perpetrator or a bystander); and it must emerge from a traumatic event. Each of these three points may be present in any form of life-writing, or *littérature intime* as Philippe Lejeune terms it, but it is the combination of the three that, for Yúdice, determines a work as testimonial. However, each point also needs to be examined more carefully if Wiesel’s claim that testimony is a “new literature”, distinct from other forms of life writing, is to be justified.

The ascertaining of authenticity is a preoccupation which stretches across all modes of life writing, as demonstrated by Philippe Lejeune’s efforts to determine a definition of autobiography as:

A retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focussing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality. [...] For there to be autobiography (and more generally *littérature intime*), there must be identity between the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist*. (193)

However, Lejeune's central thesis that identity between author, narrator and protagonist is a guarantee of authenticity is problematic. He continues with a definition of this tripartite but unified "identity":

The narrator and the protagonist are the entities referred to, within the text, by the subject of the speech act, i.e. the utterer, and the subject of the utterance; the author, who is represented on the outer edge of the text by his name, is, then, the referent who is designated, through the autobiographical contract, by the utterer. (211)

Essentially, for Lejeune, the utterer, or narrator, is confirmed as having the same identity as the author by way of the declaration of the author's name on the title page of the text. By using the term "I", the narrator is then transferring this authenticity of authorship to the subject of utterance, or protagonist. Whilst significant dissimilarities between narrator and protagonist may be present in the narrative (due to timespan between the narrated event and the narrating, memory flaws, and other mitigating factors), this does not compromise the *identity* between author, protagonist and narrator which is ultimately authenticated by the author's name on the text. Further to this, Lejeune also claims that if the name of the protagonist is not the same as that of the author, then "this alone excludes the possibility of autobiography" (204). For the autobiographical contract to operate, assumptions of authenticity must rest ultimately upon the authorial name, an assumption Lejeune judges as fair, commenting that "everyone knows only too well how much each of us values his own name" (202).

This assumption is, however, misplaced when it comes to reading the Holocaust accounts of Elie Wiesel and Levi. The sense of an identical relationship between protagonist, narrator and author based upon a uniformity of names is jeopardised, particularly in Night and If This is A Man. Rather than being focussed on an individual self in the way in which Lejeune intimates as a definitive rule for autobiography, these two accounts are based on the recognition of a divided self. The protagonist does not automatically correspond to either narrator or author. Of course, this division, or split self, has been observed as a feature in many autobiographical narratives. William Howarth writes of autobiographical writing in general that:



We must carefully distinguish this character [Lejeune's utterer] from the author himself, since it performs as a double persona: telling the story as a narrative, enacting it as a protagonist. Although these two figures are the same person, artist and model, we may still distinguish their essential points of separation. They share the same name, but not the same time and space. A narrator always knows more than his protagonist, yet he remains faithful to the latter's ignorance for the sake of credible suspense. Eventually the reverse images have to merge; as past approaches present, the protagonist's deeds should begin to match his narrator's thoughts. (87)

Whilst Howarth's point is valid, it is essentially an extension of Lejeune's argument, in that although there may be "points of separation" between narrator and protagonist, these eventually converge, together with the author, to create the unified autobiographical persona. However, there is a fundamental difference between the way that Howarth and Lejeune envision autobiographical identity and the way in which the self is constructed in the Holocaust accounts by Levi and Wiesel which are considered to be testimonial. A notable characteristic that sets these accounts apart from conventional autobiographical narratives is that in both Night and If This is a Man, protagonist, narrator and author are driven apart by the extremity of experience, resulting in a text in which the narratable self is constructed as separate from the narrated self. Lawrence L. Langer argues that there is no final reconciliation between the three in Holocaust testimonies. In Holocaust Testimonies, he distinguishes between two, rather than three, personas and writes extensively of the way in which Holocaust survivors repeatedly testify to the sense of a past experiential self that lives alongside a post-war narratorial/authorial self. The tension between these selves, a product of their Holocaust experiences, is never resolved in the way that Lejeune and Howarth propose.

Apropos Lejeune, the significance of naming is crucial to identifying this divided self. The fracturing of identity is revealed by the adoption of era-specific names in the testimonial narratives of both Levi and Elie Wiesel.

### **Naming and the Representation of the Divided Self**

The Nazis were well aware of the value that is attached to personal naming,

and the part that an individual's name plays in constructing their identity. From the very beginning in 1942, Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz had their prisoner numbers tattooed onto their left forearms. Men were tattooed on the outer arm, women on the inner arm. The only victims who escaped this were those who were sent directly to their deaths.<sup>4</sup> This replacement of personal, given names with allocated, identifying numbers had a powerful dehumanising effect on the prisoners, as Levi's poem "Shema" demonstrates. The poem is the epigraph to If This is a Man, and its title is a post Auschwitz echo of the Jewish prayer, the Shema. The poem contains the lines:

Consider if this is a woman,  
Without hair and *without name* (17)

From the very beginning of his testimony, Levi is calling upon the reader to consider the significance of the relationship between naming and identity. Without a name, we are asked to consider if this is a woman, if this is an individual. In this way, naming is constructed here as something crucial to the definition of an individual self, and the loss of name represents a crisis in the understanding of what constitutes an individual identity.

In reading Levi's life writings, it can be seen that the way in which he narratively reconstructs his past self centres around his name. From his autobiography, or "history" as he prefers to term it, we learn that Levi was born into an assimilated Jewish family in 1919 in Turin, north-west Italy. He graduated from the University of Turin in 1941 with a chemistry degree, and commenced work in a factory in Milan. The fall of Italian fascism in 1943, and the subsequent Nazi occupation led Levi to join a partisan resistance group. The group was betrayed, and arrested by the Fascists on December 13 1943. Fearing immediate execution as a political activist, Levi willingly declared himself to be "an Italian citizen of Jewish race" in the hope of leniency (If This is a Man 19). However, he was taken to a holding camp in Fossoli in January 1944, and was deported to

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<sup>4</sup> French survivor Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, who was a prisoner in Auschwitz, where she arrived on January 1 1943, testified to this at the Nuremberg Trials:

M.Dubost: Then they [those sent directly to the gas chambers, primarily women and children] were not registered?

Vaillant-Couturier: No.

M. Dubost: They were not tattooed?

Vaillant-Coutreier: No, they were not even counted. (qtd. in Arad 360).

Auschwitz on February 21 1944, where he remained until he was liberated by the Russian army on January 27 1945.

The first chapter of his autobiography, The Periodic Table, “Argon”, focuses on Levi’s ancestors, and situates him firmly within his family history. As with many chapters in the book, the chemical element of the title reflects the content. Nicholas Patruno discusses this relevance, arguing that:

To him [Levi], the family is a noble body whose traits are coincidental with those of the element argon. Whereas argon is an inert or nonreactive element, however, the family has diverged from this characteristic slightly over time in integrating itself into the goyim who largely form the Turinese population. (59)

The nobility which Levi perceives within the family is revealed in the affectionate familiarity of tone in this chapter, a tone that seems to indicate a unity between Levi the author and Levi the narrator. By focussing on both the distant and the close members of his family, Levi is constructing a solid heritage from which he has descended, providing a familial context for both his identity and his name. Indeed, the entire chapter is saturated with the importance of names. He introduces each member of the family by name, at times in exhaustively inclusive lists:

Barbaiòtô (Uncle Elijah), Barbasachín (Uncle Isaac), Magnaiéta (Aunt Maria), Barbasmelín (Uncle Moses) [...] Barbasmelín (Uncle Samuel), Magnaviagaia (Aunt Abigail). (6)

It is tempting to read this inclusivity, this urge to leave no family member unmentioned, as reflective of his style and purpose in If This is a Man, where he repeatedly describes fellow prisoners in an effort to give voices to his fellow prisoners.<sup>5</sup> The fact that each family member’s name is preceded by a familial affiliation – uncle, aunt, and at other points in the chapter, grandmother and

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<sup>5</sup> That the Holocaust haunts this chapter is undoubted. He opens the chapter with the migratory history of his family before they arrived in Turin, where they encountered anti-Semitism, albeit much less violent than in other parts of Europe. He recalls an old anti-Semitic chant “Pig’s ear, donkey’s ear, give’em to the Jew that’s here”, which was a convoluted insult to pious Jews who would ritually show each other the hem of their prayer shawls when called to read the Torah at synagogue. He continues “I remember here, in passing, that the vilification of the prayer shawl is as old as anti-Semitism – from those shawls, taken from deportees, the SS would make underwear which was then distributed to the Jews imprisoned in the *Lager*” (5).

grandfather – serves only to emphasise his attachment to them, and their part in constructing his identity as it is to be revealed in the following chapters. The very names of his family bear testament to the integration and assimilation referred to by Patruno. Levi writes:

The attribute *barba* (“uncle”), or, respectively, *magna* (“aunt”) tends gradually to merge with the name, and, with the concurrence of ingenious diminutives and an unsuspected phonetic analogy between Hebrew and the Piedmontese dialect, became fixed in complex, strange-sounding appellations, which are handed down unchanged from generation to generation along with the events, memories and sayings of those who had borne them for many years. (6)

Inscribed within the very names of the family is both their religious and national identity, both of which are passed down to Levi. Patruno claims that “Levi did considerable research to uncover the language of his ancestors” (58). The fact that Levi the author had to research this unusual heritage, rather than receive it through the oral history of his family (as Levi the narrator claims to be the case), suggests that the comfortable ease with which Levi the narrator recalls his family history is, in fact, an artificial construct. Such a construct reveals an otherwise concealed division between Levi the author and Levi the narrator, thereby preparing the reader for the catastrophic crisis in identity that came with the Holocaust.

This crisis is narrated later in the text, in the chapter entitled “Cerium”:

At a distance of thirty years I find it difficult to reconstruct the sort of human being that corresponded, in November 1944, to my name or, better, to my number: 174517. (139)

The protagonist of this chapter, 174517, is represented as unrecognisable. Cicioni observes that in Levi’s personal accounts, “his narrated self is one of the characters in his narration” and this division between narrated and narratable self is exaggerated here (45). The self-aware narration in this extract seems to suggest the interjection of an authorial voice which cannot reconcile itself to the subject of narration, and it is the difference in name that symbolises this breakdown in the self. This chapter relates 174517’s thefts from the chemical lab in Buna in which he worked as a prisoner. He stole some rods of iron-cerium (the element for which the chapter is named) which,

with the aid of his comrade Alberto, he managed to file down into cigarette lighter flints, which the pair planned to use to buy bread on the flourishing black market.<sup>6</sup> The plan never came to fruition as the camp was evacuated due to the approach of the Russian army, and whilst Levi remained in the camp and was eventually liberated, Alberto was lost on the death march. The following chapter, “Chromium”, begins abruptly: “The entrée was fish, but the wine was red” (147), describing the menu of a post-war dinner, as if Levi is keen to dismiss this crisis in identity which occupied the previous chapter. However, the mis-matched wine and fish, which continues to be the subject of the narration for some time, seems to echo the mis-matched selves of the preceding chapter.

Evidence of such fracturing in identity is, however, minimal in the first chapter, and for the most part Levi is sharing traditional family stories that have been passed down through the generations, and so prioritising the familial closeness which characterises this chapter. Members of the family are introduced anecdotally, and often comically. Amongst others, his Grandmother Fina is remembered as once having fed an erudite rabbi a pork cutlet without his knowing, as she had no other food to offer. His great-grandfather, Grandpa Leonin, is remembered for his eccentric exclamations, including the inexplicable curse: “*C’ai takeissa ’na medà meshônà feita a paraqua’* (‘May he have an accident shaped like an umbrella’)” (13). As Myriam Anissimov points out in her biography of Levi, it is incidental “whether all the anecdotes were completely reliable, they belonged to the saga, to the way the family saw itself” (17). It is the sense of a preserved and treasured continuity that binds the family together that is of significance here.

Levi the protagonist is not introduced until the end of the chapter, and his arrival is heralded by the voice of his father, thereby further cementing his relationship with his family. His father, Cesare, proudly declares to Levi’s grandmother that “He’s at the head of his class!” (Periodic Table 19). In this simple announcement, Patruno reads a further affirmation of Levi’s Jewish identity:

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<sup>6</sup> This episode is not narrated in If This is a Man. Levi is careful not to repeat material between the two books, and twice in “Cerium” he halts his narration with the explanation that what was to follow has been narrated elsewhere.

Implicit in this statement is the expectation that Levi must fulfil a familial promise to carry on the educational and intellectual tradition of his predecessors. This is an established and significant aspiration for the Jews, who for centuries have been continuously rejected and ejected and, both symbolically and in fact, have never been given an opportunity to put down roots. (59)

The chapter concludes with Levi's own childhood memories of the embarrassment at being offered a "worm-eaten" chocolate by his grandmother, and so neatly brings the narrative to the point where Levi can continue with his own story, securely supported in his identity by the family heritage which precedes him. The implicit suggestion earlier in the chapter that Levi the author and Levi the narrator are divided is overshadowed by the explicit harmony between Levi the narrator and Levi the protagonist at the end of the chapter. This permits an ending to the chapter which is in accordance with Lejeune's autobiographical pact, thereby seemingly confirming, for Lejeune at least, the status of The Periodic Table as autobiography.

This security of identity, built upon family, and so implicitly upon name, is harshly demolished in If This is a Man. Within the first few pages of his testimony, Levi narrates the trauma of having his name forcibly removed in Auschwitz, and replaced with a prisoner number, 174517. David Patterson comments that:

The number was calculated to obliterate the name because the name is full of memory – the memory of a life, the memory of a tradition in which others bore the same name, the memory of the response to the name. Stealing away the name, the number murders memory. (165)

In having his name forcibly removed, Levi lost everything that allowed him to recognise himself as Levi. He became dislocated from the family he embraced in The Periodic Table, and his number came to represent his new self in the camps.

Levi soon recognised that the tattooed numbers represent a new genealogy in Auschwitz. As the traditional family stories in The Periodic Table told Levi of his history, so in If This is a Man:

to the old hands of the camp, the numbers told everything: the period of entry into the camp, the convoy of which one formed a part, and consequently the nationality. Everyone will treat with respect the

numbers from 30,000 to 80,000: there are only a few hundred left and they represented the few survivals from the Polish ghettos. It is as well to watch out in commercial dealings with a 116,000 or a 117,000: they now only number about forty, but they represent the Jews of Salonica, so take care they do not pull the wool over your eyes. As for the high numbers they carry an essentially comic air about them, like the words 'freshman' or 'conscript' in ordinary life. The typically high number is a corpulent, docile and stupid fellow. (34)

Levi retains the same conversationally anecdotal style in relating this new camp lineage. Whereas the anecdotes in The Periodic Table operated to familiarise the reader with Levi's family, these anecdotes breed only alienation. It is impossible to become complicit in Levi's dark mockery of the "high numbers". The reverence accorded to the elderly in ordinary life is horribly distorted into a respect for the low numbers, the survivors of the Polish ghettos. Equally, Levi's comic wariness of the stereotypically canny Greeks is overwhelmed by the realisation of the statistics of mass murder – "they now only number about forty". As Wiesel recognised that Night was a piece of life writing concerned with writing death, so these anecdotes are stories of death, in contrast to the vibrancy of the stories of life which feature so prominently in the opening chapter of The Periodic Table.

The Holocaust Encyclopedia cites that 405,000 prisoners were tattooed in total at Auschwitz, and the process of being tattooed is narrated in many Auschwitz survivor accounts. Miklos Nyisli, a doctor who was forced to work alongside Dr Mengele in his pseudo-scientific experiments in Auschwitz, writes of his own feeling of loss, of becoming someone other than he had always recognised himself as being: "Henceforth I would be, merely, KZ prisoner Number A 8450" (30). Patterson interprets the experience of being tattooed as the defining symbol of fractured identity in personal accounts of the Holocaust. He observes that:

The number is the opposite of the name [...] used as [a] weapon to rob the human being of his or her name and thereby remove any identity that may determine the *who* of the human being. (164)

This loss of name, argues Patterson, was particularly damaging to Jewish understanding of self-identity, for "it is, indeed, a part of Jewish tradition that the name and the soul, the name and the person are of a piece" (164). Patterson's

interpretation of the Jewish tradition of naming is slightly misleading here. Rather than a name asserting identity between name, soul and person, tradition calls for patronymic naming which affirms a continuity between individual Jews and their ancestors and confirms their commitment to the covenant. In this context, the theft of name is symbolic more of a loss of Jewish identity rather than human identity. The replacement of the name with a tattooed number is a further violation of Jewish identity, for the act of tattooing is forbidden by God in Leviticus 19.28. By removing the name, the Nazis were putting into question the very notion of being and selfhood in their prisoners. Levi comments specifically on the way in which tattooing compromised humanity in The Drowned and the Saved:

The operation was not very painful and lasted no more than a minute but it was traumatic. Its symbolic meaning was clear to everyone: this is an indelible mark, you will never leave here; this is the mark with which slaves are branded and cattle sent to the slaughter, and that is what you have become. You no longer have a name; this is your new name. The violence of the tattoo was gratuitous, an end in itself, pure offence. (95)

By interpreting the tattoo as meaning “you will never leave here,” Levi is not merely paraphrasing Dante, in whose writings he seeks solace in If This is a Man but also echoing those survivors who write that their “Holocaust self” has never left them. For instance, Charlotte Delbo writes of her “Auschwitz double,” that lives alongside her (Days and Memory 3). For Delbo, and also for Levi, a post-Auschwitz life is unattainable, for the self that was born in the camps lives alongside the individual forever, testifying to Langer’s view of the irreconcilable split self in testimonial writing. Levi is also emphasising the dehumanising nature of the tattoo. Without a name, the individual is subsumed into a mass, like “cattle”. The use of the words “slaves” and “cattle” also points to the view of the victims becoming objectified as property, an ideology confirmed by the frequent Nazi use of the word “*Stücke*”, pieces, to describe the Jews.

Levi powerfully evokes the experience of being tattooed in If This is a Man:

I have learnt that I am Häftling. My number is 174517; we have been baptized, we will carry the tattoo on our left arm until we die. [...]  
And for many days, while the habits of freedom still led me to look for



the time on my wristwatch, my new name ironically appeared instead, a number tattooed in bluish characters under the skin. (33)

Levi's response to this experience bears witness to the dehumanising effect of replacing a given name with an allotted number. He opens his account of this experience with the bald statement, "I have learnt that I am Häftling". He is not *a* Häftling; such a construction implies that for Levi, Häftling has become his definition rather than a description of his status.<sup>7</sup> His new Häftling identity is confirmed by the new name with which he is "baptized"; 174517. Such a phrasing implies the birth of a new self, a birth that is both incongruous and paradoxical within the context of the death camp.

This is a significant moment in *If This is a Man*, for it is here that Lejeune's autobiographical contract begins to break down. The name of the protagonist, 174517, and the authorial name, Primo Levi, have divided. Such a fracturing indicates that this text is deviating from "autobiography", implying that this book constitutes something else, something that can be termed "testimonial". The name "Primo" does not return for the protagonist until the final chapter, "The Story of Ten Days", when Charles, a fellow prisoner, calls to him "*Dis donc, Primo, on est dehors*" 'I say, Primo, we're outside' (173). The significance of the resumption of the name cannot be underestimated, for it is on this day, the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1945 that Levi emerged from the hospital block, known as Ka-Be, to discover that the camp was deserted, that both prisoners and guards had evacuated the site. Although they had not been officially liberated at this point, Levi was in effect a free man, and therefore able to resume his name. However, this reunion of name between the author's, narrator's and protagonist's voice cannot be viewed as a return to the autobiographical contract. The tattooed number is inscribed on the body "until we die"; post-Auschwitz, therefore, his name "Primo" will always be shadowed by the indelible numbers on his arm, denying continuity between pre-war and post-war identity.

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<sup>7</sup> This lack of an indefinite article could be a quirk of translation. In both German and Levi's native Italian, this word would not require an indefinite article in this context as it does in English. However, the fact that it is preceded by an indefinite article at other points in the translation suggests that its absence here is of significance.

Throughout the text, there seems to be a deliberate plan to refer to fellow prisoners by their name, and we are introduced to Steinlauf, Elias, and Alberto amongst others. Such an effort is testament to Levi's refusal to comply with the Nazi process of dehumanisation through narrative style. If This is a Man is primarily the story of people in the camps, and an attempt to understand what happened to humanity under such conditions. The retention of names is, then, not simply a sign of Levi's familiarity with his co-prisoners, but also part of an actively philosophical statement. The significant exception to this rule is Null-Achtzehn, a *Muselmann*.<sup>8</sup> Unnamed and unknown, Null Achtzehn is presented not as a prisoner but as a figural representation of dehumanisation. Levi writes that it "is as if everyone was aware that only a man is worthy of a name, and that Null Achtzehn is no longer a man" (48). This episode in the text serves to reinforce the relationship between naming and identity; the loss of Null Achtzehn's name is to be recognised as the loss of his humanity, of his identity.

The breakdown of the relationship between naming and identity is also central to Wiesel's Night. Wiesel was deported to Auschwitz in 1944 along with the rest of his family. He was separated from his mother and sisters on arrival, but managed to stay with his father throughout their internment in the camp. Whilst Wiesel does not focus on the process of being tattooed to the same extent as Levi, he also clearly presents the way in which the loss of the name compromises individuality. He records the experience simply in one line: "I became A-7713. After that I had no name" (54). It is, though, the following episode that better illustrates the consequences of this loss. During roll call, a prisoner calls out "Which of you is Wiesel from Sighet?" Wiesel's father replies "I'm Wiesel of Sighet." Wiesel's father and the man who called out study each other in incomprehension for some time before the man speaks out: "You don't recognise me – you don't recognise me. I'm a relative of yours. Stein. Have you forgotten me already? Stein! Stein of Antwerp. Reizel's husband. Your wife was Reizel's aunt" (54). That Wiesel's father was unable to recognise Stein is perhaps not unsurprising; not only was Stein a fairly distant relative, but the process of shaving inmates' heads, and clothing their

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<sup>8</sup> This was the term used to describe those prisoners who were near death who, as a result of the brutality of camp life, were physically and mentally unable to hold on to life. The word literally means "Muslim" and whilst the reason as to why this word was used remains unknown, it has been suggested that the stance of the *muselmann* was similar to that of a devout Muslim at prayer.

weakened bodies in identical uniforms had the effect of making all look alike. Yet Stein, desperate to be recognised, clings to his name as the one feature that would distinguish him from all others. However, the identifying power of individuals names is destroyed in this context, for in the camp “Stein” has ceased to exist, and has been replaced by a number. The genealogy which he eagerly recounts is now false, unrelated to his new, numbered self. The possibility of knowing and identifying the self through name becomes an impossibility.

Throughout Night, naming is central to Wiesel’s portrayal of the divided self. Wiesel’s testimony emphasises the division of the self throughout by the adoption of era-specific names. Wiesel the adolescent who endured the camps is named Eliezer, whereas Wiesel the narratorial/authorial survivor writing Night is named Elie.<sup>9</sup> For Colin Davies, these must be read as a unified figure. He terms Night a “témoignage” ‘testimony’, and claims that:

for its impact, the text requires our belief in the literal truth of the facts that are described. In consequence, we should identify the Eliezer who narrates *La Nuit* with the Elie given on the title page as the author of the text. [...] If we do not accept the identification of Eliezer with Elie, then the direct link between the text and historical reality will be broken. Moreover, the moral urgency of the text depends upon our acceptance of it as truthful; without that claim to truthfulness the ethical underpinning of the témoignage would be lost; it would become fiction, a novel rather than a historical document. (32)

In making such an assertion, Davis is reconfirming that textual authenticity is reliant on identity between author, narrator and protagonist. The historical truth of the text is reliant on the reader’s acceptance of the autobiographical contract. The adoption of different names functions, for Davis, as a literary conceit rather than as evidence of a dualised self.

Both Elie and Eliezer appear in Night as seemingly different characters, with Elie interjecting parenthetically to comment on Eliezer’s experiences. For example,

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that Joseph Sungolowsky contests the significance of this discrepancy, noting that in the original Yiddish edition of Night, both author and protagonist are called ‘Eliezer’. However, the decision to change ‘Eliezer’ to ‘Elie’ in the more widely read English edition cannot be ignored, and to me suggests the importance Wiesel attributes to the dissociation between the camp self and the post-war self.

the account in the text of the imposition of the Nuremberg laws in Wiesel's small town in Transylvania records Wiesel's father poignantly commenting: "The yellow star? Oh well, what of it? You don't die of it...." Elie the narrator deposes the position of Eliezer the adolescent, replacing any words the son may have spoken to his father at the time with hindsight, commenting: "(Poor Father! Of what then did you die?)" (21). Significantly, these retrospective comments on the father's naivety in the face of oncoming catastrophe are absent in his autobiographical account, All Rivers Run to the Sea. Indeed, the narratorial voice in All Rivers Run to the Sea is contemporaneous with his father's in Night, commenting "The yellow star? That scarcely bothered me" (61). In the same text, he writes again of his father's initial disregard for the dangers of the growing anti-Semitism: "Never mind, my father said, it will pass. Everything passes, even the thirst for Jewish blood" (57). His father's (mis)understanding of the situation here is not corrected by a narratorial voice.

This is not to suggest that retrospective commentary is exclusive to Wiesel's testimonial writing. Indeed, in relating his mother's response to the Warsaw ghetto uprising in All Rivers Run to the Sea, he adopts a very similar style:

"Why did our young Jews do that?" she mused. "Why couldn't they have just waited calmly for the war to end?" That was the word she used – calmly.

My poor mother. (38-39)

Retrospective commentary is, then, a feature in both his testimony and his autobiography, but it is only in his testimony that this narratorial voice interacts as a character by actually responding to his father. The participatory nature of this interjecting voice emphasises duality in testimony, and prioritises the sense of the split self to a far greater extent than in autobiographical writing.

The distinction between the narrated, experiential self and the narrator becomes further exaggerated by the conclusion of Night:

One day I was able to get up, after gathering all my strength. I wanted to see myself in the mirror hanging on the opposite wall. I had not seen myself since the ghetto.

From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me. (126)

This passage evokes a sense of the uncanny in the form of the living corpse that gazes back from the mirror. It is the corpse of the experiential self that can never be fully laid to rest, and returns as an animate object to haunt the narratorial self, resulting in a permanent doubling of the traumatised self. In The Uncanny, Freud refers to the figure of the double as the “uncanny harbinger of death” (142). In Wiesel’s construction of the dualised self, however, the double is less a portent of death, and more a symbol of the inability to escape from trauma. Robert Jay Lifton comments on the widespread phenomenon of the sense of a split self in survivors of trauma:

Extreme trauma creates a second self.[...] in extreme trauma, one’s sense of self is radically altered. And there is a traumatised self that is created. Of course, its not a totally new self, it’s what one brought into the trauma as affected significantly and painfully, confusedly, but in a very primal way, by that trauma. And recovery from post-traumatic effects, or from survivor conflicts cannot really occur until that traumatic self is reintegrated. It’s a form of doubling in the traumatised person. (qtd. in Caruth, Interview 137)

Much of Lifton’s previous research into the phenomenon of doubling focussed on the perpetrators, most notably in his book The Nazi Doctors which sought to use doubling as an explanation as to how educated people could perform acts of barbarity in the name of medicine in the camps. However, Lifton recognises here that the survivor of trauma can also be subjected to a sense of duality, which can be reconciled only through recovery from the trauma. Wiesel’s later works, however, testify to the impossibility of recovery. He returns to the image of the reflected double in his fictional novel Dawn. Despite the fictional nature of this book, there is, Colin Davis argues, identification between the author Wiesel and the young protagonist Elisha, and seems to represent a fictional progression from Night. The action in Dawn takes place over one night in a house in Palestine, during which Elisha contemplates the execution that he must perform at dawn. His victim is John Dawson, a British officer who has been taken hostage and is to be executed in retaliation for the execution of David, a young Israeli, by the British. Elisha, a Holocaust survivor, is visited throughout the night by the ghosts of the dead who

haunt his thoughts. The figure of a beggar reveals a secret to Elisha which invokes the uncanny spectre that haunts Wiesel at the end of Night:

“I’m teaching you the art of distinguishing between day and night. Always look at a window and failing that look into the eyes of a man. If you see a face, any face, then you can be sure that night has succeeded day. For, believe me, night has a face.” (Dawn 126)

The double is manifested as night in the beggar’s tale, night that is the symbol of the Holocaust, of death, Wiesel’s Kingdom of Night. The presence of night as it succeeds day is the presence of the living corpse, the symbol of the impossibility of Lifton’s “recovery” from the trauma of the Holocaust. The novel ends with an echo of Night’s concluding passage, serving to further blur the definition of Dawn as purely fictional:

I [Elisha] went to the window.[...] The night lifted, leaving behind it a greyish light the color of stagnant water. Soon there was only a tattered fragment of darkness hanging in midair, the other side of the window. Fear caught my throat. The tattered fragments of darkness had a face. Looking at it, I understood the reason for my fear. The face was my own. (204)

The fear that Elisha feels is the uncanny fear of the recognition of the double. Here, the face can be recognised in a way that is impossible for Wiesel at the end of Night. The unrecognisable living corpse of Night is recognised in Dawn as the self. It is the awareness of the Holocaust experiential self that lives parallel to the survivor self. This recognition of the dualised self is testified to by many Holocaust survivors. Survivor Irene W. similarly tries to explain this haunting presence as:

a sort of division, a sort of schizophrenic division, you know, a compartmentalisation of what happened, and it’s kept tightly separated, and yet as I said, it isn’t. There is this past of daily living that one has to attend to and adhere to, and family and children and everyday needs and work and so on, and that must not interfere, the other must not become so overwhelming that it will make normal life unable to function. Yet it’s always there. (qtd. in Langer, Holocaust Testimonies 59)

The “other” to which Irene W. refers to is an other that refuses to remain so. It cannot be “compartmentalised” and kept separate. The double is manifested not as an other, but as part of the self.

Wiesel returned to this sense of duality in his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech:

I remember: it happened yesterday, or eternities ago. A young Jewish boy discovered the Kingdom of Night. I remember *his* bewilderment, I remember *his* anguish. It all happened so fast. The ghetto. The deportation. The sealed cattle car. The fiery altar upon which the history of our people and the future of mankind were meant to be sacrificed.

I remember *he* asked his father: “Can this be true? This is the twentieth century, not the Middle Ages. Who would allow such crimes to be committed? How could the world remain silent?”

And now *the boy* is turning to me. “Tell me,” he asks, “what have you done with my future, what have you done with your life?” And I tell *him* that I have tried. That I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices.

And then I explain to *him* how naïve we were, that the world did know and remained silent. And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation.

The demarcation between man and boy, between past and present self is emphasised through the conceit of a conversation between Wiesel’s experiential self and his survivor self. Wiesel’s Holocaust self is literally constructed as another, referred to throughout only as “him”, or even more impersonally, as “the boy”. The adult Wiesel seems to exist only as a response to the child Wiesel, emphasised by “the boy”’s reproachful questioning: “what have *you* done with *my* future, what have *you* done with *your* life?” Wiesel’s detachment from his past seems complete with the suggestion that his father is related only to his past Holocaust self: “the boy” asks “his father”. The survivor Wiesel seems unrelated to this man, the father/son relationship belongs to the past. Yet the concept of the past too is distorted, with the events of Wiesel’s Holocaust happening both “yesterday” and “eternities ago”. He echoes this sentiment in All Rivers Run to The Sea, writing that “Elsewhere I have told of what happened next – or rather I have tried to tell it. But it feels like yesterday. It feels like now” (76).

The Holocaust is represented as an event that can never be over. Robert Eaglestone argues that “the impossibility of closure is simply a fact of life for the

survivors” (134), a perspective he supports by referencing the number of survivors who return to their experiences again and again in successive testimonial and fictional narratives. This impossibility of understanding the Holocaust as a past event and resultant sense of incompleteness surrounding the catastrophe disturbs the chronology of testimonial narratives. Such a disruption in the temporal order feeds into the complexities of representing the self in Holocaust testimonies, as the linear progression through life is disrupted, and the subject of the testimonial narrative fails to be recognised by the narrating self.

### **“An Event Without Witness”: Testifying and Witnessing**

For George Yúdice, the second defining feature of a testimony is that it must be written by a witness. The Holocaust, however, by its very extremity complicates the process of witnessing. Dori Laub regards the Holocaust as an event without a witness, a criterion which he judges to be central to the claim of uniqueness. “A witness,” claims Laub, “is a witness to the truth of what happens during an event” (Felman and Laub 81). However, he claims that it is “inconceivable” that any individual would have been capable of perceiving this “truth”. The extremity of the experience means that no

historical insider could remove herself sufficiently from the contaminating power of the event so as to remain a fully lucid, unaffected witness [...] No observer could remain untainted, that is to maintain an integrity - a wholeness and a separateness - that could keep itself uncompromised, unharmed, by his or her very witnessing.  
(81)

The impartiality of the witness which enables the perception of the truth of the event is made impossible, since there is no “unviolated, unencumbered, and thus sane, point of reference in the witness” (81). Evidently, it is the case that for every event the act of witnessing cannot be completely objective; for Laub however, the extremity of the Holocaust exacerbates the impossibility of objectivity. Paradoxically, then, the experience of being present and therefore capable of being a witness is exactly what prevents the possibility of witnessing.



Laub's understanding of "witnessing" is based on the idea of *historical* witnessing, that the witness must recount the historical truth of an event. This form of witnessing belongs, however, to historical discourse, rather than testimonial discourse. For Paul Veyne, "history is simply an account of the past, all else flows from that" (19). Veyne's configuration of "history" is concomitant with Laub's understanding of witnessing, in that it is the "relating of true events" (11). Felman points out that whilst on initial observation "the essence of the testimony is historical, and that its function is to record events and to report the facts of a historical occurrence, [...] the historical event *fails* to exhaustively account for the nature of the testimony" (Felman and Laub 8). This is not to contest the significance of history, of the event, in testimonial writings but rather to point out that the historical event alone does not shape the literary form of the testimony. Yúdice's third defining feature of testimony is that it is directly spawned from a specific historical event; indeed, it is this very historical specificity which complicates any simple comparison of testimonies emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. The focus on a specific event has been noted as a feature which distinguishes testimonial writing from conventional autobiographical writing. In his analysis of Holocaust autobiography, Joseph Sungolowsky states that:

While autobiography may choose to embrace a greater or smaller part of one's life, Holocaust autobiography will essentially deal with the period marked by the events of the Nazi genocide. Just as any autobiography related to a troubled historical period acquires an added significance, so does Holocaust autobiography exert a unique fascination upon the reader because of its central motive. (137)

Although Sungolowsky chooses to use the term "autobiography" to define the genre he is discussing, it is clear that he sees a significant distinction between autobiography concerning accounts of the Holocaust and other forms of autobiography. This differentiation can be recognised as one of the features that marks the testimonial genre as separate from other forms of life-writing, suggesting that texts which he labels "Holocaust autobiographies" could be more accurately termed "testimonies". For Sungolowsky, the authorial decision to focus on a distinct aspect of the past life is a crucial and defining feature of the testimonial genre. Autobiography, he argues, is a tale of a life; testimony by contrast is the narration of a specific event in a life, be it the Holocaust or any "troubled historical period." For

Sungolwosky and Yúdice, testimonial writing can be identified through its focus on the event.

However, as Felman acknowledges, this focussing on the historical event does not fully reveal the nature of testimony. There is disparity, it would seem, between witnessing and testimony, a distinction clarified by Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer. Witnessing, they argue, is the “moment of seeing in which the witness is confronted with the [...] event renders him speechless and terrified,” whereas testimony is the “witness’s obedience to the compulsion to speak, though what the witness says is neither a reflection of the event [...] nor unaffected by it” (xii). As codified here, testimony is not simply the narration of an event, but rather a narrative representation of the witnessing of an event. According to Bernard-Donals and Glejzer’s formulation of testimony, it is not focussed on the event in the simplistic way suggested by Sungolowsky and Yúdice. Rather, the event haunts the narrative representation of the self at a particular point in history, making testimony a narrative composite of an account of the event itself, and an account of the event as it is perceived by the witness.

Such a perspective reinforces the centrality of the representation of the self and the experiences of the self when comparing autobiographical and testimonial narratives. In reviewing Wiesel’s Night and All Rivers Run to the Sea, it becomes clear that each account renders somewhat different versions of his Holocaust experiences. In each book, the experiences of the experiential self, or protagonist, are related differently by the narratorial self. The experiential self is named Eliezer in both texts. Significantly, in All Rivers Run to the Sea, the experiential self is referred to as “Eliezer, son of Shlomo” (21), thereby reinforcing the father/son bond that is so crucial to the construction of the experiential self. Eliezer’s identity in Night, (and also in the Nobel speech) is bound up with his relationship with his father; the experiential self is a son. In All Rivers Run to the Sea, Wiesel returns to the significance of the father/son relationship, stating, “in the camp I had no more childhood. I had only my father, my best friend, my only friend” (50). Whilst the narratorial voice does address the father, Elie is never so explicitly configured as a son. The familial bonds are broken, leaving Elie with a different heritage to that of Eliezer.

As previously noted, Wiesel sees a clear difference between his two accounts. In his autobiographical account, All Rivers Run To The Sea, he writes:

My intent here is not to repeat what I recounted in Night, but to review that testimony as I see it now. Was I explicit enough? Did I miss what was essential? Did I serve memory well? In fact, if I had to do it over, I would change nothing in my deposition. (79)

Not only is this comment significant in that it is one of the few occasions on which Wiesel directly refers to Night as a testimony, but his use of the word “deposition” is also interesting as it reinforces the definition of testimony as a legal document. From his words, it is clear that Wiesel sees All Rivers Run to the Sea as a form of clarifying appendix to Night. Written at a date closer to the event, Night stands as a narrative representation of his witnessing of the Holocaust: a testimony. All Rivers Run to the Sea functions as a commentary on this former representation, situating his autobiographical narrative as twice removed from the event itself.

The very structure of the two books reflects the different representations of witnessing that are to be found in Wiesel’s autobiographical and testimonial texts. Night opens with the return of Moché the Beadle. Having escaped as the only survivor from a transport of murdered Jews, Moché has returned to warn the remaining Jews of Sighet of their impending fate. His warning is repeatedly ignored until eventually he falls into silence. The figure of Moché also appears at a later stage in All Rivers Run to the Sea, where Wiesel refers to him as “the first survivor,” a man who “lived our destiny before any of us” (60). As such he represents an end, a destiny, and his presence at the beginning of Night heralds the impossibility of simple linear chronology in the text. It begins with an end. Moché serves to invert the Jewish story of exile and return, where the return symbolises not the end of exile, but only the beginning. Significantly, however, this was not Wiesel’s planned opening to the book. The original manuscript began with “two pages which sought to describe the premises and early phases of the tragedy” (All Rivers 319). At his editor Jérôme Lindon’s suggestion, Wiesel excised these two pages and opened with the story of Moché. Wiesel notes that many survivors open their testimonies in way he had planned to, “evoking loved ones as well as one’s hometown before the annihilation,

as if breathing life into them one last time” (319). Such an affirmation of life at the beginning of the text could be read as contradicting the published testimony which opens with a confirmation of death. However, this invocation of the presence of a town and community at the inception of the testimony would in actuality not offer a significantly different beginning to the narrative. Destroyed in the Holocaust, the description of the town and its community would stand as a reminder of the presence of an absence, and this is exactly the function fulfilled by Moché’s story. His presence serves to make clear the absence of the murdered Jews on the transport he escaped. Read with either Wiesel’s planned opening or with the opening as published, Night thus becomes a cyclical text, where death is present at both beginning and end, and the very structure of the narrative comes to represent the inescapability of the Holocaust. At the same time, as a survivor, Moché represents life, structurally setting up the motif of doubling which dominates Night.

In contrast to this cyclical structure in the testimony, Wiesel’s autobiography struggles to maintain a conventional linear chronology. The narratorial voice outwardly and openly battles to keep events in their place. Of his little sister Tzipora (the only one of his three sisters whose fate is made known in Night) he says: “My little sister was a blessing. But...no, no buts. Not yet. Everything in its time” (All Rivers 25). He later speaks of his grandfather, “my maternal grandfather, Reb Dovid (Dodye) Feig, lived until...But no, let us not yet speak of his death. First I need to see him alive” (41). Through the ellipses the narratorial voice censors itself. The urgency of the interjecting, retrospective parenthetical voice in Night is denied in Wiesel’s autobiography in order to sustain the linearity of the narrative.

Whilst the structure of the texts may alter from a cyclical testimonial narrative to a linear autobiographical narrative, so too does the focus of the content differ. Wiesel’s home town Sighet haunts his writing: “in all my novels, it serves as background and vantage point [...] even when I tell Biblical, Talmudic, or Hasidic tales, it is from my town that they take flight” (All Rivers 32). However, it is something of a phantom town, an imaginal place that is a site of duality in itself. Transitory country borders shift its name repeatedly from the Romanian Sighet to the Hungarian Máramarossziget, and Wiesel’s representation of the town shifts equally in Night and All Rivers Run to the Sea. The Sighet of Night is a peaceful town, where

Wiesel's father owns a shop, and Wiesel is left free (despite his father's disapproval) to study Kabbalah. Even after the trauma of the expulsion of the foreign Jews, life returned to normality: "I continued to devote myself to my studies [...] My father was occupied with his business and the doings of the community. [...] My mother began to think it was high time to find a suitable young man for Hilda" (Night 18). The tranquillity of Sighet was destroyed only with the arrival of the occupying German forces and the swift formation of the two ghettos in 1944.

The Sighet of All Rivers Run to the Sea is painted as a very different place, strewn with hostility and antisemitism. Wiesel writes of violent pogroms, launched "on the slightest pretext." "My sisters," he continues, "often didn't go to school. On those days the store was bolted shut [and] at the slightest warning we rushed to the cellar, though I had no idea why [...] We couldn't rely on the police, who not only failed to protect us from these murderers but helped them. We lived in terror" (18). Wiesel fails to date these occurrences, but the ordering of the text places them firmly in the pre-war period. Why is there such a marked difference between the Sighet of testimony and the Sighet of autobiography? Understanding testimony as the narrative representation of the witnessing of an event, and autobiography as the narrative representation of a life is key to interpreting these opposing representations of the town. Night is the story of Wiesel's Holocaust experiences, and to portray Sighet as a peaceful idyll accentuates the horror of the Holocaust that follows. The representation of the town can be interpreted as a narrative shorthand to stress the violent rupturing in life brought about by the Holocaust. Autobiography, conversely, need not focus expressly on a specific event, indeed All Rivers Run to the Sea covers Wiesel's post-war experiences as a displaced person, as a student in Paris and as a writer. The author of an autobiography, then, can be considered to be freer in what he writes, not needing to prioritise any event over another. Yet with Wiesel, it is difficult to maintain such a claim, as his Holocaust experiences are central to his understanding of his self, and so must be considered to be central to any life-writing that he has produced.

One of the most significant episodes to be excluded from Night is the arrest of Wiesel's father. His father worked with the underground network in Budapest aiding Polish refugees. He arranged to supply the refugees with foreign currency, having

discovered that anyone caught in possession of such monies would be sent directly to the counterespionage bureau in Budapest, rather than being deported directly back to Poland. Once in Budapest, other members of the underground would help the refugees. This measure, according to Wiesel, ensured the survival of almost all whom Wiesel's father helped. Unfortunately, one refugee was arrested, and gave up Shlomo's name under torture. His father was arrested, and held in prison in Sighet, and then in Debrecen for several weeks. He was eventually released, thanks to the efforts of his underground contacts who bribed various officials, and returned to his family in Sighet.

This episode has haunted Wiesel throughout his life, as he reveals in All Rivers Run To The Sea: "I will never forget my father's arrest, nor the look on his face after his release; all the things he never said could be read in his eyes" (31). In these words, Wiesel once again resurrects the image of the eyes that gaze back as a symbol of something that cannot be escaped. Whilst he writes that his father's unspoken experiences could be read through his eyes, Wiesel cannot escape from the fact that he does not know what happened to his father during his imprisonment. Wiesel's elder sister Bea, a marginal figure in Night, collected their father on his release, and it was to her that he imparted the secrets of what he endured. These experiences were, however, to remain hidden always from Wiesel, for his sister died without revealing them to her brother despite his pleas for her to tell him. In All Rivers Run To The Sea, he berates himself, "I could have asked him in the camp, where we shared our grief and fear, but I was too shy even to mention his imprisonment. I told myself it wasn't the time or the place. I was wrong" (31).

The fragmentation of the self as represented in both autobiographical and testimonial narratives is the product of the encounter with trauma. Similarly, testimonial accounts of the atomic bombings reveal that the experience of atrocity transforms the self, denying the possibility of identity between the pre-bomb and post-bomb selves. Indeed, in a post-nuclear world, it will be argued, the very concept of the self is compromised to the extent that it is not only fragmented, but utterly absented.

### 1.3 Anonymous Selves: Representing the *Hibakusha* Experience

Narrating one's own experience of surviving the bomb, whether in speech, in writing or in pictorial forms, is inextricably tied to the construction of a narrator's subjecthood. (Yoneyama 85)

Yoneyama adds a historical specificity to Anne Lear's perspective that the construction of the self is revealed through the act of autobiographical storytelling. However, as with Holocaust testimonies, the "I" that is constructed is difficult to locate. John Whitter Treat considers the identification of a "self" to be rendered nearly impossible in the context of the A-bomb. "Atomic-bomb literature," he argues, "asks of us to accept a post-Hiroshima imperative to use culture, and with its ideology of the self, to represent the antithesis of culture implicit in our use of total weapons on 'populations' within which the 'self' is an irrelevant, anachronistic word" (Writing Ground Zero 79). The presence of the A-bomb must, then, result in the absence of an individual self. The recognition of the self is further complicated by anonymity of testimonial voices that is frequently encountered in collections of eye-witness accounts. The Witness of Those Two Days, a collection first published in 1989, is characterised by the absence of an author's, narrator's or protagonist's name. In these anonymous narratives of the atomic bombings, the narration of experience appears as detached from an experiential self. This situation is not confined to this collection of testimonies; of the many survivors interviewed in Robert Lifton's seminal work on A-bomb survivors, Death in Life, many are left as anonymous voices whose words support the psychological theorising of the author. Numerous other collections, such as Hibakusha: Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Children of Hiroshima, and Hibaku: Recollections of A-bomb Survivors give the names of the authors, but no other information. The names become free-floating, attached only to the experience of the A-bomb, restricting the authors to a single identity, that of the survivor. Whilst considering the way in which the absence of any name affects the representation of the self in personal accounts, the historical context of testifiers concealing their names must not be overlooked. Many *hibakusha* faced discrimination in their post-war lives, encountering difficulties in post-war employment and social relations, and so attempted to hide their A-bomb experiences. Shizue Koga, one of only three in her seven-strong family to survive the Nagasaki

bombing, speaks of her sister's concealment of her *hibakusha* identity from even the closest members of her family:

My sister [...] has keloid scars on her right arm and never wears short-sleeved clothes, even in summer. She does not want her children to know that she is an A-bomb survivor, and therefore she has never applied for her health allowance even though she was eligible for it. I finally did the application for her, and she started getting it only last year. She is still adamant that her children should not know that she is an A-bomb survivor. (114)

### Dehumanisation, Objectification and Hibakusha Identity

The Japanese term "*hibakusha*"<sup>10</sup> was coined in direct response to the dropping of the atomic bomb, and its literal translation reads as "explosion affected person", or "exposed one". David L. Swain and Eisei Ishikawa, translators of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings, a volume compiled by The Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, translate *hibakusha* simply as "A-bomb and H-bomb victims" (592). Whilst the literature, from personal narratives to scientific investigations, almost invariably employs the term *hibakusha* when using Japanese terminology, Robert Jay Lifton, following extensive interviews with survivors of the atomic bombing, claims that the term "*hagaisha*", an extant Japanese word meaning "victim" or "injured party", is commonly used alongside *hibakusha* (Death in Life 13). The term most frequently used in reference to those who lived through the Holocaust, "*seizonsha*" 'survivor', is almost never used in the context of the atomic bombings, and Lifton reports that:

I was told that Japanese avoid *seizonsha* because it emphasises the idea of being alive – with the implication that this emphasis is unfair to the less fortunate people who were killed. (13)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Pronounced hi-bak'-sha

<sup>11</sup> The problematics of terminology recur with equal frequency in studies on the Holocaust. Primo Levi in particular returns to this question of how to describe those who lived through the Holocaust, sharing the concern that the word "survivor" is in some way triumphal, and thus dictates an image of those who lived as superior to those who perished. This is a theme that he returns to repeatedly, most significantly in If This is a Man and The Drowned and the Saved. Such an attitude complicates the retitling of the former text as Survival in Auschwitz for the American market. Interestingly, Lifton points out that Americans tend to translate *hibakusha* as meaning "survivor", a fact that he attributes largely to "the American tendency toward 'detoxifying' the experience". Using the word "survivor" has the effect of focussing on the living, at the risk of dismissing the dead, and as such its usage is



The sensitivity surrounding the name given to those who lived through the atomic bombings is not simply a matter of semantics. Firstly, the definition of *hibakusha* is not stable. It is used to refer to both direct and indirect victims, that is those who were actually caught in the explosion of the bomb, and those who came into the cities to give aid afterwards, as well as to those who suffered *in utero* exposure to the bomb. It is also used to describe those born to *hibakusha* parents years after the event, who suffered from deformities and health complications as a result of their parents' exposure. Treat stretches the definition even further, claiming that in a world where nuclear strikes are still possible, "the concept of the potential *hibakusha* now has to extend to everyone alive today" (Writing Ground Zero x). Secondly, just as the process of tattooing in Auschwitz impacted upon the individual's recognition of self, so does the attribution of the term *hibakusha* affect the self-formulation of those who lived through the atomic bombings. "Exposure to the atomic bomb," claims Robert Jay Lifton, one of the first scholars to draw parallels between the experiences of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings, "changed the survivor's status as a human being, in his own eyes as well as in others'. [...] He assumed the identity of the *hibakusha*" (Death in Life 176).

The defining centrality of being a *hibakusha* in the post-war identity of those who lived through the bomb is starkly revealed in Hong Kai's play, I am a Hibakusha. Hong's intention with the play was to illuminate the plight of the Korean victims of the bomb, whose experiences have been largely marginalised in the memory of the event. The following scene is set in an American hospital in Japan, where Youngjoo, a young Korean *hibakusha*, has gone to seek treatment for "A-bomb disease" after her first child died hours after birth due to Youngjoo's exposure to the bomb. Her naïve expectation that she will be cured is shattered by the angry response of Shimura, a Japanese *hibakusha* and self proclaimed "prophet of the atomic age" (134):

Shimura:        Now you want to be cured so that you can be normal  
                          again. To be a woman just like any other woman.  
                          (more coughs)

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significant in recent debates on the "detoxification", or domestication of horror, exemplified by the ongoing argument that the remembrance of the Holocaust is becoming "Americanised".

How dare you? You are a hibakusha, don't you forget.  
Once a hibakusha, always a hibakusha. As you cannot  
escape being a Korean, so you cannot escape being an  
*atomic man*. (120)

*Hibakusha* identity is showed here as inescapable, equated with national identity. To become a hibakusha is to be othered by the dominant norm of culture, from which the *hibakusha* is permanently exiled. The use of the term "*atomic man*" is particularly significant, as it suggests a gendered understanding of what it is to be a *hibakusha*. Japan's post-war peace movement, largely dominated by women, employs an essentialist rhetoric which links peace with femininity, and atomic violence with masculinity. Youngjoo's exposure to the bomb has left her unable to bear children, and from an essentialist perspective this has compromised her femininity; she can no longer be a "woman just like any other woman". Hong's stage directions allow that the phrase may be changed to "atomic person" or "atomic woman", but if this change is instigated, the line must be accompanied by a "knowing wink" to the audience. This wink functions to suggest that the atomic violence has in some sense defeminised Youngjoo, and that exposure to the bomb has compromised her identity as a gendered self.

Holocaust testimonies, as previously discussed, often bear witness to the sense of a new self that is born through the experience of the Holocaust. The phrasing here, "once a *hibakusha*, always a *hibakusha*," plays on this sense of the event creating a dualised self. The *hibakusha* self as represented here, however, seems to eliminate the self that came before, the preceding pre-war self overwhelmed by the *hibakusha* self. Matsutani Sumiko, who survived the A-bombing of Nagasaki, testifies to this: "The shock of losing all of my family at once was so great that amnesia erased all memory of my life up to the day of the atomic bomb" (128). For Matsutani, life began not at her birth, but on August 6 1945. Hayashi Kyōko, a Hiroshima *hibakusha* comments that "my life has been one built on August 9<sup>th</sup> or, to put it another way, on my bomb-victim health booklet" (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 110). In this understanding of "always a *hibakusha*," a phrase that permanently detaches the individual from the pre-event self, there can be perceived an echo from one historical context to another, in its reflection of the way in which Levi perceived the replacement of his name with a tattooed number as detaching him

from his Italian-Jewish familial ancestry. Youngjoo is identified primarily as a *hibakusha*, not as a daughter, sister, cousin or wife, and so emerges from an atomic, rather than familial, heritage.

In his running commentary on the play, Hong suggests that Shimura's final line could be extended to include the words "an entirely new species of being not quite human kind" (120). This sentiment of being other than "human kind" is echoed in the testimony of an anonymous *hibakusha* interviewed by Lifton: "perhaps *hibakusha* are mentally – or both physically and mentally – different from others" (Death in Life 176). *Hibakusha* identity is configured as a dehumanised other. A 1978 international investigation into the social consequences of the atomic bombings reported that:

the very existence and the dropping of the A-bombs are a social and political phenomenon. The atomic bomb destroyed the total "society". They destroyed "home", "workplace", and even "community" [...] Human beings became dehumanised. (Editorial Committee of JNPC, Findings 69)

Whilst the acknowledgement that the effect of the atomic bomb was to dehumanise its victims is significant, this report seems to focus more on the dehumanisation of individuals as a result of their own behaviour *in extremis*. It continues, "human beings [found] themselves ruled by the instinct for self-preservation and they respond[ed] in ways which indicate a complete loss of moral values" (69). This curiously condemnatory attitude seems to suggest that individuals became dehumanised through their own morally dubious actions. Such a judgement is at odds with both Hong's representation of the dehumanised individual and Lifton's anonymous survivor's account, both of which present dehumanisation as central to the *hibakusha* identity, regardless of individual behaviour.

Lifton's anonymous survivor bears witness to a physical otherness of the *hiakusha*. The most potent visual symbol of this is the keloid, the prominent scar tissue formed on the skin, particularly the faces and hands, of *hibakusha* who suffered severe burns in the bombings. Lifton refers to these scars as "A-bomb stigmata" (Death in Life 183), a curiously Christian terminology to apply to the physical

appearance of, for the most part, non-Christian victims. The keloid as a symbol of the physical othering of *hibakusha* carries echoes of the tattoo as a physical symbol of dehumanisation on the body of the Auschwitz survivor. Such a parallel, however, cannot be drawn without considerable caution. Whilst the effect of tattooing in Auschwitz was to render the individual nameless, paradoxically identifying the prisoner and yet also rendering the individual as unidentifiable from any other, as shown through Wiesel's account of his meeting with Stein in Night, the actual process of tattooing was highly personalised. Levi envisions the process as a dialogue between victim and perpetrator: "You no longer have a name; this is your new name" (Drowned and the Saved 95). The dropping of the A-bomb, conversely, was an indiscriminate attack that did not focus on any individual and so precluded the possibility of any such dialogue. The personalisation of the process of tattooing in Auschwitz constituted an integral part of the offence, a part that it necessarily absent for the dehumanised victims of the A-bomb. Whilst the keloid as visual symbol of dehumanisation may, then, carry echoes of the Auschwitz tattoo, the historical differences crucially disallow any direct comparison of the two.

The gaze that fell on the visual symbol of dehumanisation serves to objectify the *hibakusha* as a spectacle. The image of the *hibakusha* as an object of the gaze is revealed in the simple one line testimony given by an anonymous female survivor of the bombing, recorded in the The Witness of the Those Two Days project. She writes, "Camera flashes make my blood freeze" (Nihon Hidankyo 2: 126). The image of her blood freezing evokes a sense of the uncanny in her account as it brings together the animate in the form of her blood, a symbol of life, and the inanimate, the blood as stilled and frozen. The sudden brightness of the flash of the camera revives the fear this woman experienced when she witnessed the bright flash, or *pika*, of the atomic explosion. This sudden bright flash is an integral part of the visual remembrance of the A-bomb; indeed, many *hibakusha* refer to the A-bomb as the *pikadon*, a word which roughly translated means "flash-bang". Utilising the image of a camera also, however, encourages the *hibakusha* to be perceived as an image caught in a photograph. The fear she experiences is not only a latent fear of the bomb itself, but also the fear of the removal of autonomy which leaves the *hibakusha* as an object of the gaze.

The creation of the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) in the immediate post-war period of occupation was resented by many *hibakusha* as institutionalising the gaze which sought to objectify the victims of the A-bomb. The ABCC was conceived of as a joint venture between American and Japanese scientists and physicians to look at the after-effects of the atomic bomb on the survivors. In practice, this attempt at coalition was fraught with tensions. M. Susan Lindee refers to the venture as an example of “colonial science” (20), a phrasing which confirms a process of racial othering, whereby the *hibakusha* were perceived as objects to be studied scientifically by the dominant American colonisers. In practice, however, the division between “colonisers” and “colonised”, or more appropriately, occupiers and occupied, was more blurred than such terminology suggests. Japanese physicians and scientists had already begun studies into the after effects of the atomic bomb, and their work was vital to the newly arrived American team, none of whom was familiar with Japanese culture or fluent in the Japanese language. Lindee points to various misunderstandings on the part of the American team that hampered their studies. For example, the study of the effects of the A-bomb on infants was confused by the American misunderstanding of how the Japanese culture fixed the ages of individuals. In Japan, babies are considered to be one year old when they are born, and all the children born in a given year turn two on the following new year. Thus, a child born a few hours before the turn of the new year would be considered to be two years old according to Japanese calculations, whereas American calculations would place the child at less than a day old. In addition to this, the inability of the American team to read or write Japanese Kanji also meant that they could not record the names of their subjects properly, as many sounds and meanings cannot be transliterated into the roman alphabet, thereby complicating attempts to relocate individuals for follow-up studies. These factors led to considerable doubts on the part of the Japanese team as to the value of American involvement in the project. However, this scepticism from the Japanese was matched by an equal mistrust of the Japanese by the Americans. The American team was not convinced that Japanese scientific ability matched their own, and also doubted the capability of the Japanese to produce objective data that was not contaminated by post-war anti-Americanism. As a result of the need that the American team had of the Japanese scientists and physicians, Lindee redefined the term “colonial science” to give it historical specificity to this instance, viewing it as “science, conducted by outsiders, that depends on local

knowledge, particularly when that knowledge is invisible to the colonizers themselves” (20).

Tensions between America and Japan were heightened by the controversial no treatment policy operated by the ABCC, and fuelled the sense of the objectification of the *hibakusha*. ABCC policy dictated that the victims be studied only; any treatment was to be withheld. The first director of the ABCC, Grant Taylor explained the policy, saying that “I sympathise with you, but you are not the only ones who suffered effects of the war. Therefore there is no cause to render special aid to the victims of Hiroshima” (qtd. in Lindee 123). The occupying forces viewed the A-bomb victims as no different to any other victims of the war, and saw no need to offer them any special treatment. A further explanation of the no treatment policy was the expense that treating all of the survivors would incur. However, as early as 1956, a report argued that the cost of treatment would be only \$30,000 (a figure Lindee considers to be realistic) and so well within the budget constraints of a project that repeatedly spent over \$1,000,000 per year (Lindee 132). It was also argued that if the ABCC offered treatment, the practices of local Japanese doctors would be destroyed, and would therefore impede the economic redevelopment of Japan. Lifton points out that the Japanese doctors were actually in agreement with this. Whilst he maintains that “American authorities must bear responsibility for the ultimate decision,” he argues that Japanese physicians were hostile towards the ABCC offering treatment, fearing that it would generate a “professional competition” (Death in Life 365). However, the underlying reason for the policy, it has been repeatedly suggested, was politically motivated. To offer treatment would be tantamount to a tacit admission of culpability on the part of the Americans, and was therefore to be avoided at all costs.

Lindee, however, suggests that the no-treatment policy was not adhered to in practice, and points out that the “staff in Hiroshima interpreted it loosely, provided occasional chemotherapy, and overlooked the actions of individual physicians who chose to ignore the restrictions” (128). Yet regardless of this, the popular perception of the ABCC promoted by the Japanese media and accepted by the majority of the public was that it used the *hibakusha* as guinea pigs for scientific study. Outlandish rumours emerged, claiming that the A-bomb had been dropped solely to facilitate American military research. Such rumours still had credence as recently as 1982

when a report on the A-bomb published by Nihon Hidankyo (the Japanese Confederation of A-bomb and H-Bomb Sufferers' Organisations) claimed that the bomb was dropped in order to:

do research and study on the power of an atomic bomb in preparation for the further use of nuclear weapons in the future. This is why Hiroshima and Nagasaki were chosen as targets for conducting living body tests. For this reason the US kept the damage of the atomic bombing a military secret, and refused to aid the Hibakusha in spite of an offer made by the International Red Cross.

The US forcibly took many Hibakusha to military hospitals in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where they took samples of their blood and cut off affected parts of their weakening bodies for pathological research, treating the victims as 'guinea-pigs'. But they gave them no medical treatment. (Hibakusha 17)

Lifton describes the image of the *hibakusha* as guinea pigs as being rooted in a resentment of being "historically victimised on a racial basis" (Death in Life 362). In this discourse, the *hibakusha* are doubly objectified, firstly on the basis of race, and secondly on the basis of being victims.

This process of objectification appears to begin in the moment of death. The overwhelming catastrophe brought about by the atomic bomb distorts any understanding of death as a natural part of the life cycle. Lifton explains that:

only man [...] 'knows death', or at least knows that he will die. To which we must add: only man could invent grotesquely absurd death. Only man, through his technology, could render the meaningful totally meaningless. (Death in Life 572)

Atomic death contradicts the possibility of our knowledge of death. It is unprecedented, extreme, and unknown and in this context death becomes unrecognisable as a human experience. At a 1977 symposium held to discuss the damage and the after-effects of the atomic bomb, Masaharu Hamatani delivered a report on a three-phase study which explored the problems of *hibakusha*. Masaharu described the way in which objectification became embedded in the attempt to understand death caused by the atomic bomb:

Many *hibakusha* spoke of the extraordinary nature of death as they had seen it, and the idea of ‘death of an object’ – ‘the atrocious way of dying’ which cannot be called ‘death of a human being’ – the tortures of the A-bomb survivors. (n.pag.)

Through the experience of death, victims were both dehumanised and objectified, and these attributes are carried over to include not only those who died, but all “explosion-affected” people; all *hibakusha*. Shigeto Fumio, director of the Red Cross Hospital in Hiroshima tried to explain the way in which the experience of the atomic bomb unified all those present on that day:

I’m not sure how much people can understand if they haven’t experienced the atomic bomb. People often say that dying by an atomic bomb is no different from dying by an ordinary bomb. Of course, dying is the same with either, but in the case of the ordinary bombs there was always the hope that you would survive. If you suffered a direct hit that was just bad luck. But the atomic bomb blasted the whole of Hiroshima so everybody suffered a direct hit. That’s a fact. (qtd. in Ogura, Atomic Bomb and Hiroshima 71)

Whilst Shigeto is not historically accurate in suggesting that “everybody suffered a direct hit,” he makes the point in order to emphasise his doubts about the capacity of those who were not there to understand the experience of atrocity, a sentiment he shares with many Holocaust survivors. For Shigeto then, all those in the bombed cities shared a unique experience that separates them from all others who were not there. From this perspective, the survivors of the bomb have more in common with those who died than the living who did not experience the bomb. The dead and the survivors experienced equally the trauma of “a direct hit,” and *hibakusha* thus become partially defined through a strong identification with the dead. It is this aspect of *hibakusha* identity that sheds light on Ōe Kenzaburō’s description of the ABCC hospital as “a land of the dead” (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 243). The presence of *hibakusha* marked the hospital as a cemetery rather than a site of treatment and recovery. Lifton suggests that the bomb precipitated “a widespread sense that life and death were put of phase with one another, no longer properly distinguishable” (Death in Life 31). Certainly, the boundaries between survival and death seemed to become fluid, as the after-effects of radiation meant that living through the bomb did not assure survival. Many *hibakusha* testify to life-long fears that they are not survivors, but merely waiting to die from the after effects of the



atomic bomb. Ōta Yōko felt an urgent need to complete her testimonial account, City of Corpses, swiftly, fearing that she may die any day. In her testimony, Hosaka Sakae, a young nurse working in Hiroshima at the time of the bombing, writes:

The terrible thing about radiation is that nobody knows how or when it will make its effects felt. I have known someone who had virtually no health problems in thirty years die suddenly of leukaemia. Whenever I fall ill, I am afraid that I will never get well again. (46)

Much of this fear originated in the fact that the after-effects of radiation, or A-bomb disease as it came to be popularly known, were not understood. Particularly frightening was the fact that many who came into the cities only after the explosion suffered gruesome deaths apparently without cause. Many *hibakusha* understandably became morbidly obsessed with the state of their health, and were consequently diagnosed with A-bomb neurosis, a loose term used to cover all aspects of mental health problems in survivors, ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder to hypochondria. Lifton argues that in fact this fear of A-bomb disease was often exaggerated and misplaced, as medical evidence does not support the widely held belief that all those who came into contact with the radiation would eventually die from its effects. Nevertheless, this “death taint,” as he has termed it, and a resulting identification with the dead, dominates *hibakusha* identity.

The taint of death dominates not only the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also the landscape itself. Shortly after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, rumours began to circulate that the city itself would die, that nothing would grow there for seventy years, that the air and water would be contaminated for decades to come. Again, scientific evidence and the passage of time has proved this not to be the case, but nevertheless fuelled amongst *hibakusha* an identification not only with death but with the extinction of all forms of life.

This overwhelming encounter with death, Lifton suggests, leads to a “life-long identification with death, dying and with an anonymous group of the dead” (Death in Life 178). The anonymity of death and suffering is inevitable in a catastrophe of this scale. The victims can never be known as individuals; even a rough consensus on the number of dead has never been reached, with estimates

ranging from 63,000 to 240,000. Yet those who survived are bound by their identification with this “anonymous group of the dead” to somehow testify to their experiences. Ito Takeshi, secretary general of the Japan Confederation of A-and H-Bomb Sufferers Organisation in the 1970s, declared that “to convey to others the meaning of those experiences, we believe, is what those who survived the conflagration must do on behalf of those who died” (30). Frequently in *hibakusha* testimony, the experience of death and suffering is represented as dehumanised and anonymous.

### **Hara Tamiki’s Summer Flowers: Crises of Witnessing, Identity and Images of Anonymity**

Hara Tamiki was born the fifth of twelve children into a wealthy Hiroshima family in 1905. Although his family were prosperous for the time, his early life was marred by tragedy, losing his father and four siblings before he was nineteen years old. Hara eventually left Hiroshima in 1924 in order to study literature at Keiō University, where he developed an interest in left-wing and Communist politics. His increasingly radical political activism led to his arrest in 1931, an experience that shook Hara greatly, leading him to abandon politics all together. His marriage to Nigai Sadae in 1933 marked a period in his life when he largely withdrew from the world and focussed on his literary interests, primarily writing poetry. However, following the death of his mother in 1936, and the untimely death of Sadae from tuberculosis in 1944, Hara decided to return to his family home in Hiroshima in January 1945. It was here that he was living on August 6 when the bomb was dropped.

Hara’s account of his experience of the bombings, Summer Flowers, can be read not simply as an eye-witness account of the bombing but rather as a testimony to a crisis of witnessing. The three sections which make up the full tryptich were published individually in Japanese literary journals prior to the publication of the complete text in February 1949. The first two sections, “Summer Flowers” and “From the Ruins,” were published in June and November 1947 respectively in Mita Bungaku. The third and final section, “Prelude to Annihilation” was first published in

January 1949 in Kindai Bungaku.<sup>12</sup> “Summer Flowers” gives an account of the day of the bombing. “From the Ruins” continues the linear narrative with an account of the days following the attack. “Prelude to Annihilation” then returns the reader to the days preceding the bombing, ending on August 4, two days before the attack. The most widely read Japanese publication of the full text places the sections in chronological order, placing “Prelude to Annihilation” first, followed by “Summer Flowers” and “From the Ruins”. The English translation of the text, however, follows Hara’s intentions and places the sections in order of composition, concluding with “Prelude to Annihilation”.

The structuring of the sections contributes to the sense of a crisis of witnessing throughout the text. Inverting the chronological narrative of the event and presenting a non-linear account reflects the unending trauma of the atomic experience. Neither the experience nor the narrative culminates with a sense of resolution, and in being returned to the beginning, the reader is presented with an inescapable text. This approach also functions to destabilise the testimonial account of the bombing itself. There is an implicit suggestion that the preceding testimony has not fulfilled its purpose, has not told the tale that “Prelude to Annihilation” is leading into. The “Annihilation” of the title refers not only to the destruction caused by the bomb, but also an annihilation of witnessing and representation.

As discussed earlier, Laub recognises in the Holocaust a unique crisis in witnessing, predicated on the impossibility of anyone present being able to bear witness to the truth of the Holocaust. Without any reference to Laub’s theory, Kyo Maclear argues for a similar crisis emerging from the experience of the atomic bomb:

These events [...] have produced a unique crisis of witnessing. The almost complete vaporisation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki appeared to take place in the absence of any *outside* witnesses. Moreover, those

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<sup>12</sup> In common with other *hibakusha* authors, Hara faced issues of censorship when he tried to publish his account of the atomic bomb. Hara had initially hoped to publish all three of the sections in Kindai Bungaku. However, this journal was subjected to the Occupation Press Code which banned any unofficial accounts of the bombing. Mita Bungaku, a university affiliated journal with only a small occupation escaped the attention of the Occupation Authorities. By 1949, the restrictive policy of the Press Code was no longer enforced and it became possible for Hara to publish “Prelude to Annihilation” in this journal. See chapter 2 for a more lengthy discussion of Occupation censorship and the silencing of *hibakusha* voices.

who survived the atomic bomb experience, those who might have acted as *inside* witnesses to the actual occurrence, were left confounded by an event that had no historical precedent. There was little in the way of prior imagery that could help lend form to the sudden destruction of an entire city by a single weapon. Even the tragic effects, which included invisible radiation disease, extended beyond the bounds of [...] representation. (5-6)

Whilst both Maclear and Laub claim this crisis of witnessing to be unique to either the atomic bombings or the Holocaust, the similarity of their interpretation of this crisis reveals it as a phenomenon which actually unifies those who seek to represent these atrocities. The difference in their interpretation of crisis, however, lies in the possibility of the *act* of witnessing. Laub maintains that the act of witnessing was impossible for those who experienced the Holocaust, as an account from those who were inside the whirlwind cannot testify to the full truth of the event. This then jeopardises the possibility of survivor representation of the Holocaust. In contrast, Maclear does not explicitly deny the act of witnessing, but argues that those who experienced the atomic bombings cannot *bear* witness in that they cannot describe or account for their experiences of such an unprecedented atrocity.

Maclear makes a distinction between outside witnesses, designated as the perpetrators, and the inside witnesses, the victims. Certainly, the nature of bombing, an impersonal attack taking place many hundreds of feet above the cities, excludes the possibility of the pilots and those on the bombing runs as being witnesses to the catastrophe wrought on the ground by their actions. The difficulties faced by the Occupying forces in their attempt to investigate the aftermath of the bombings, as described above, also compromises their role as witnesses to the event. The absence of inside witnesses once again can be seen to parallel the crisis in Holocaust witnessing. As it is frequently said with reference to the Holocaust that only those who died could be true witnesses to the event, so with the atomic bombings only those who perished could bear witness to the totality of the A-bomb experience. *Hibakusha*, then, can offer only a partial and non-representative account, and for Maclear even this is rendered impossible by an inability to bear witness to unprecedented atrocity.

Hara evokes this crisis in witnessing not only the structure of his testimony, but also through his representation of his experiences in Summer Flowers. At the time the bomb was dropped, Hara was in his outside privy, and this building protected him from the immediate impact of the explosion. Apart from an injury to his eye, he was fortunate enough to emerge practically unscathed and after surveying the destruction around him, he almost immediately came to the conclusion that “I must set these things down in writing” (49). Yet this compulsion was clouded with a prescient awareness that as an ‘inside witness,’ he had “virtually no idea of the true state of things brought about by this air raid” (49). In the immediate aftermath of the explosion, Hara is unable to reconcile the scene of destruction around him with reality:

As the situation around me, though still hazy, began to resolve itself, I soon felt as if I were standing on a stage that had been set for tragedy. I had surely seen spectacles like this at the movies. (46)

Hara identifies the scene before him as a theatrical and cinematic enactment of tragedy, a tragedy that he occupies doubly as both a participating actor on the stage, and as a spectator in an audience. This description pinpoints a moment of crisis in witnessing, in that despite being inside the event, he is only able to describe it using a frame of reference which is outside the event – as a spectacle at a movie.

This crisis in witnessing suggests a concomitant crisis in identity. Hara appears to make a division between the self who experienced the atomic bomb and the self who struggles to bear witness to the experience. In common with other *hibakusha*, Hara senses acutely the fracturing of identity wrought by the experience of atomic catastrophe. In “From the Ruins,” he announces: “I felt almost like a new person, someone born with the atomic thunderclap” (62). The transition into this “new person” is revealed in “Summer Flowers” through Hara’s diminishing ability to recognise himself in the aftermath of the bomb. In the seconds immediately following the explosion as he struggled out of the small building that had saved his life, Hara recounts that “amid the hail of sound, I heard my own voice distinctly” (46). Yet as he stands and gradually surveys the destruction around him, this understanding of the self as a distinct and unified individual is lost as he cries out again only to discover that “my cry sounded in my ear like someone else’s voice” (46). It is in this failure to

recognise the sound of his own voice that the rupturing of the self becomes apparent. The unrecognisable cry is that of the newborn self, Hara's *hibakusha* self.

The sound of voices comes to act as an identifying motif for Hara's *hibakusha* self as the other. Treat suggests that, "since the bombing, everything [Hara] encountered seemed radically alien to him, with his past no longer continuous with his present, there were no familiar landmarks to guide him" (Writing Ground Zero 151). In the days following the bomb Hara recalls that:

Every now and then, normal human voices terrified me. When someone over at the barn let out a sudden cry, that cry immediately called to mind the wailing voices of those dying on the riverbed. (65)

The voices of living human beings are startling to Hara's *hibakusha* self, and as his own unrecognisable cry heralded the death of his pre-bomb self, so the voices in this passage are associated not with life and survival but with death.

In keeping with his description of the event as a spectacle from a movie, Hara's account presents the victims he sees as anonymous objects under his gaze. He recounts his slow progress through the city as he sought a place of relative safety, and describes in painful detail the suffering of others:

As we proceeded up the narrow stone path running along the river, I saw for the first time a group of people defying description [...] What kind of people?...Their faces were swollen and crumpled and it was impossible to tell which were men and which were women; their eyes were narrowed to slits; their lips were festering horribly. Baring their hideously painful arms and legs, they lay on their sides, more dead than alive. (52)

In this description, Hara responds to the physical injuries of the dead with a dismembering of their bodies in his prose. Their sex indeterminable and their distinct features homogenised by horrific injuries, the victims he describes lose their individuality. They "defy description" as people, and instead are described as dissembled body parts, dehumanised and inanimate in their appearance. As the narrative progresses, the images of dehumanisation intensify, culminating in a

passage in which the destruction of human bodies becomes indistinguishable from the destruction of material objects:

This was without doubt a new hell, brought to pass by precision craftsmanship. Here everything human had been obliterated – for example, the expressions on the faces of the corpses had been replaced by something model-like, automaton-like. The limbs had a sort of bewitching rhythm, as if rigor mortis had frozen them even as they thrashed about in agony. With the electric wires jumbled and fallen, and the countless splinters and fragments, one sensed a spastic design amid the nothingness. (58)

Evoking impressions of the uncanny, the figures are caught in a “bewitching rhythm” that is characterised by stillness rather than movement. Accompanying this is a paradoxical sense of order and coherence in the chaos, the precision of the aerial attack matched by a curious design and pattern in the destruction.

Yet these descriptions of dehumanised individuals should not characterise Hara as a detached observer of anonymous death without empathy. Indeed, in his poetry Hara sought to revitalise the victims, and reinstate the condition of humanity in the hideously disfigured corpses. Echoing Levi’s attempt to restore humanity to objectified individuals in his post-Holocaust articulation of the Shema, Hara’s poetic collection Atomic Bomb Landscapes published in 1950 opens with a poem entitled “This is a human being”:

This is a human being  
Please note what changes have been affected by the atomic bomb.  
The body is grotesquely bloated,  
Male and female characteristics are indistinguishable.  
Oh that black, seared, smashed and  
Festering face, from whose swollen lips oozes a voice.  
“Help me”  
In faint quiet words.  
This is a human being.  
The face of a human being. (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 168)

Within this poem, the images of dehumanised suffering, familiar from Summer Flowers, are utilised once again to great effect. The human body is presented again as broken down into disfigured body parts, lending an ironic sense to the opening line “this is a human being.” The shift from dehumanised anonymity to individual human

suffering occurs with the introduction of the voice in line seven. Whereas in Summer Flowers the voice is associated with death and is unrecognisable as a human cry to Hara, in this poem it is the presence of the voice that determines that “this is a human being.”

### **“The Witness of Those Two Days” Project**

In 1985, as part of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the atomic bombings, Nihon Hidankyo conducted a survey of some 13,000 *hibakusha*. Each was questioned on their experiences, and according to their responses, 1,000 were selected for printing in an initial two-volume project, The Witness of Those Two Days: Hiroshima and Nagasaki, August 6 and 9 1945, published in 1989. However, the overwhelming response from *hibakusha* led Nihon Hidankyo to extend its publication plans to encompass a further two volume work, The Deaths of Hibakusha: The Days of the Bombings to the End of 1945, which followed in 1991.

In his foreword to The Witness of Those Two Days, Ōe Kenzaburō, the celebrated author of Hiroshima Notes, wrote that “this witness of the survivors is indeed their own” (Nihon Hidankyo, 1: vii). Ōe’s description of the volume is, however, misleadingly simplistic. The anonymity of the accounts complicates the provenance of these testimonies. The self who “owns” the witnessing is unknown. Instead of naming the contributors to The Witness of those Two Days, the editors have attributed identifying numbers to them. Each entry is headed with the name of the city, either Hiroshima or Nagasaki, followed by the distance of the survivor from the epicentre, their gender, their age at the time of the attack, and their identifying number. For example, the aforementioned survivor who spoke of her fear of camera flashes is labelled simply “Hiroshima, female, 3 km, 22, 13-32-037.” Attributing numbers rather than names to the individual contributors in these volumes encourages complicity with the perpetrator’s rhetoric of dehumanisation, which recognised the victims only as mass statistics rather than individuals. In The Politics of Memory, Raul Hilberg notes that the individuality or otherwise of the victims is dependent on the perspective of the narrative, commenting that “the victims do not have much individuality in [perpetrator] documents” (32). Speaking explicitly of the representation of Jews in German documentation of the Holocaust, he notes that



“they are coalesced into categories: foreign Jews, Jewish labourers, Jewish children; or into numbers: 20,105 Jews, 363,211 Jews, 1,274,000 Jews” (32). This process of categorisation, although derived from very different historical circumstances, can also be seen at work in the way in which the victims of the A-bomb are represented. A British report for the Home Office written in 1946 refers to 32,959 dead in Hiroshima, 9,451 missing. The statistics are broken down further; 95% of those within a quarter mile radius of the blast centre were killed, within a half mile radius, 85% were killed, within a three quarter mile radius, 58% were killed, within a mile radius, 35% were killed (Great Britain Home Office 18). The experiences of individual *hibakusha* are subsumed into a generalised notation of death.

Curiously, The Project of Those Two Days echoes the method of recording these statistics in the way in which the testimonies are organised in the collection. Those within a one kilometre range of the blast centre are listed first, followed by those within a two to three kilometre radius, and then those who were outside of the three kilometre radius. The testimonies of those who entered the cities after the bomb to offer aid to the victims complete the volume. As their proximity to the bomb affected their actual experience of the event, so does it affect the positioning of their testimonies in the volume. The deliberate ordering of the responses in this way imposes a false homogeneity on the testimonies, suggesting that all those in a specific spatial area shared the same experience of the A-bomb, when this was not the case. For example, in his autobiographical graphic novel Barefoot Gen: The Day After, Nakazawa Keiji recounts that a woman standing directly in front of him was killed by the force of the explosion whilst he escaped unscathed, protected from the main force of the blast by his proximity to a wall. Similarly in Summer Flowers, Hara explains that “I too had survived only by chance. The young man on the second floor next door had been killed instantly, and he was only the width of a single fence from where I was” (63). The ordering of the accounts in The Witness of Those Two Days also places an emphasis on the actual explosion, rather than the individual’s experience of witnessing the explosion, thereby accenting the historical event, rather than the individual experience of the event. Taking both Felman’s and Bernard-Donals and Glejzer’s interpretation of testimony being more than just an account of history, this structuring of the volumes jeopardises the testimonial status of the accounts.

By anonymising the accounts and structuring the collection in this way, The Witness of Those Two Days seems to conceal, rather than reveal, the experiences of the self. A female survivor makes a tacit protest against this focus on the historical event, writing: “For me it is not just a historical fact, it is something that happened to me only a little while ago” (Nihon Hidankyo 1: 107). A male survivor, 28 years old at the time of the bombing concludes his brief testimony with the words: “I don’t want to write any further. I would rather keep it to myself” (1: 48). This suggests that the account he has given is rudimentary at best, and that the narratorial self has censored the experiential self.

Not only is the experiential self censored to a large extent in this collection, but so too is the autonomous narratorial self. The responses were garnered through a restrictive and stringent questioning process. This collection represents a form of controlled testimony, the voice of the *hibakusha* filtered through the very specific questioning of the anonymous compilers. The explanatory notes that preface the first volume of The Witness of Those Two Days reveal that the statements were given in response to the following question:

Do you have anything unforgettable, terrifying or regrettable in your memory about your experiences on the day when the atomic bomb was dropped and immediately after? If you have, what was it? Please describe what happened, what were the circumstances and what you felt. (1: viii)

There is an oddly neutral styling in this question. Implicit in the phrasing is the suggestion that aspects of the A-bomb experience were forgettable, mundane even, a perspective which is undermined by the content of the following statements. The contributing *hibakusha* were asked to relate their experiences “in keeping with the following guidelines” (1: viii). The guidelines offered are put in place seemingly to aid the witnesses with structuring their responses, requesting that they record:

- A: How people died or were dying. What the victims suffered.
- B: What you felt witnessing it.
- C: If you could not do anything for those crying for help or water, what regrets do you feel? (1: viii)

Such a specific line of questioning seems to align the following accounts with legal testimony, where a specific answer is required. Certainly it is not a method favoured by interviewers searching for a personal response to catastrophe. Lifton states that when interviewing *hibakusha* for his book Death in Life he was keen to encourage “spontaneous expression of thoughts and feelings of any kind” (16). The methodology underlying The Witness of the Those Two Days eliminates any such possibilities. Indeed, one contributor actually felt the need to apologise for not conforming to the structure advocated by the compilers, beginning her account with the words, “I am sorry but I want to answer in the form of ‘*tanka*’ [a poem comprised of 31 syllables]” (2: 59). A review of the total number of accounts in the first volume of The Witness of Those Two Days reveals that 55 out of the 498 narratives are structured in the form of lettered bullet points, directly corresponding to the format requested by the compilers. Following these fairly rigid guidelines leads to the creation of a very constrained text; what is written is less what the *hibakusha* feels compelled to bear witness to and more simply an account of what the compilers want to hear. A male contributor, numbered 34-2623, testifies to this sense of restraint, concluding his brief testimony with the words, “that’s all I can say on this limited piece of paper, though many more things come to my mind intermittently. I’d like to write much more on another occasion” (2: 17). His anonymity in this collection means that it can never be known whether he did record the “many more things” that he recalls.

A female survivor, numbered 13-19-025, further testifies to the narrative restraints that such a form of questioning imposes. Seventeen years old at the time of the bombing, she was 1.5km away from the epicentre. She begins her testimony:

I am hesitating whether to write in this space or not, to the last extremity. Though I have finished other spaces, I don’t feel like writing. If I were able to write this page smoothly, I could have easily written like a memorandum of 5 or 6 pieces of manuscript during the past 40 years. I feel sorry for leaving this space blank as it is the widest one. So I will try to write something following the examples of A to C. (2: 56)

She then proceeds to list her experiences in accordance with the requirements. This introduction, however, bears witness to the indescribability of what she witnessed. To

suggest that if she was able “write this page smoothly” she would have already done so brings to the fore the unavailability of words to describe her experiences. In common with the contributor who responded in *tanka*, this *hibakusha* gives an apology for the difficulties she faces in trying to narrate her experiences. She is unable to respond personally to the event, and can bear witness only in a proscribed format. The narration of her experiences is, then, governed by the questions of the compilers. As this is a universal format recommended to all contributors, this potentially jeopardises the uniqueness which is expected in the narration of the experiences of an individual self. It could be the case that the absence of such guidelines would have resulted in a very different account; conversely it could be that, as she implies, the absence of these questions would have resulted in an absence of any testimony at all. Again, the anonymity of this contributor means that any attempt to analyse how she may have narrated her experiences outside of the project can only be conjecture.

Significantly, it is possible numerically to address the responses formulated in accordance with the A-C guidelines. Looking at the structure of testimonies, of the *hibakusha* who were within 2km of the epicentre, 13.8% responded in a bullet point format; of those who were 2-3km away from the epicentre, 10.5% responded using a bullet point format; of those beyond 3km of the epicentre, 0% responded using bullet points. Such figures suggest that greater proximity to the blast resulted in a greater difficulty in creating spontaneous responses to the event. The will to tell the tale, so common in *hibakusha* who have gone on to play a role in post-war peace activism, is also notably diminished in the accounts of survivors within the 2km radius of the epicentre. The complete account given by one 18-year-old male survivor, numbered 22-0052, reads:

1. I was engaged in the work of pulling corpses out of the Ota river. The terrible sight still stays in my memory.
2. There was a mother who fell to the ground, giving her burnt breast to her baby. Please do not make me remember. (2: 16)

Unable to respond to the required three questions, the author finishes with a request to leave his memories untouched and unquestioned. This simple request is discomfiting for the reader, implying an intrusion into a personal, private experience

that the author is reluctant to make part of wider and more public historical record. A working document entitled “Atomic Bomb and Human Beings” delivered at a 1977 symposium on the atomic bomb suggested that “the shorter the distance from the center, the greater the shock” (Editorial Committee of JNPC 119). As physical injury was nearly always greater the closer the *hibakusha* was to the epicentre, John Whittier Treat suggests that the differing magnitudes of shock can also be traced in the narrative representations of the event:

The geographical difference that determined living from dying is also a difference that determines meaning. First there is meaning in language, as greater distance from the silent epicenter parallels the greater ease with which the victim of nuclear war can speak of the fact of that day. (Writing Ground Zero x)

This idea of the “silent epicenter” can be used to explain the greater use of the designated A-C format by those closest to the centre of the explosion. The difficulty of spontaneous narrative recreation of the event is heightened by proximity to the bomb, and analysing the structure of the testimonies compiled in The Witness of Those Two Days leads to the conclusion that responding within strictly set parameters is the only way that some survivors can narrate their experiences.

The following volume, The Deaths of Hibakusha, takes a different perspective to that of the preceding two volumes in the project. As the title suggests, the accounts in this book focus not on the survivor’s experiences, but on those who died. The testimonies included were selected from about 13,000 responses submitted to the editors, and describe the deaths of close relatives, often in painfully graphic detail. The contributions are from *hibakusha* who were in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the days of the bombings, and also from those who entered the cities after the attacks to search for missing friends and relatives. The contributors are once again anonymous, identified only by a given number, age, gender and distance from the epicentre. Whereas in The Witness of Those Two Days, the accounts are ordered according to the experience of the *hibakusha* in terms of their distance from the epicentre, the accounts in The Deaths of Hibakusha are, as the title suggests, ordered according to the experiences of those who died. Listed first are the accounts concerning those who died during or immediately after the bombing, followed by those who died during the

days and weeks afterwards. This approach recognises the survivors as representatives of those who died, thereby structurally and thematically reinforcing the identification with the dead expressed by so many *hibakusha* in accounts of their personal experiences.

The anonymity of the contributors and the way in which they are identified with the dead rather than the living constructs a dehumanised representation of *hibakusha* identity throughout the volume. In his foreword to the text, Takahashi Shinji comments that:

Through the analyses of former Hibakusha surveys I have drawn one conclusion. I have come to define the “atomic bomb hell” as a condition in which one cannot stay human and remain alive at the same time. [...] we learn that the people who saved others or were in charge of medical and other relief activities often had to die prematurely. In other words, those who stayed human, exactly because of their humanness, could not remain alive. Therefore we realise that the “atomic bomb hell” long outlasted August 6 1945 in Hiroshima and August 9 1945 in Nagasaki. It has persisted throughout all the postwar years. (English Translation Group v)

Takahashi’s conclusion presents a damning analysis of *hibakusha* identity as dehumanised, devoid of all finer human feelings such as compassion and sympathy for suffering. His condemnation finds the root of dehumanisation not in the act of violence perpetrated against the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but rather in their responses to the catastrophe. It was only by abandoning the principles of humanity, such as saving fellow human beings, that those who survived managed to stay alive. Certainly expressions of survivor guilt are frequent in *hibakusha* testimony in the struggle to accept the fact of their own survival when so many perished. Yet much of the guilt in testimonial accounts is rooted in the inability, rather than the unwillingness, of the survivor to help those who died. Takahashi’s radical misinterpretation of survivor guilt culminates in his misleading categorisation of acts of human and inhuman behaviour by the dead and the survivors.

Takahashi’s conclusions are ultimately drawn from a dehistoricised interpretation of the events of August 6 and 9, 1945. He constructs a false relationship between humanity and survival which does not take into account the harsh realities of

the aftermath of the bombings. By removing any trace of a perpetrator from his account, Takahashi presents the experience of the atomic bomb as outside of human control. In contrast, actions taken by victims in the aftermath are within the limits of human control and as such can be subjected to judgement. References to images of hell, presented through Christian and Buddhist interpretations, are common in *hibakusha* testimony. Hara describes being “enveloped in the dreadfully gloomy faint green light of the medieval paintings of Buddhist hell” (51). Umehara Sumiko, a female Hiroshima survivor recalls that “What I saw around me was a scene of living hell” (137). Takahashi’s vision of the “atomic bomb hell” however, is extraordinarily literal in its scope. There is no space in his atomic landscape of hell for good deeds. Those who tried to help others, and in doing so retained their humanity, “had to die prematurely,” leaving only dehumanised souls to wander through an earthly hell. The reference to premature death implicitly draws on the concept of sacrifice, thereby building on the images of hell and judgment which characterise the religious tone of Takahashi’s foreword. The concept of sacrifice, particularly in terms of Christian sensibility, is often introduced in descriptions of the atomic dead. A Catholic nun, headmistress of a Nagasaki school, interpreted the deaths of her pupils in terms of Christian sacrifice:

[I myself believe] that those girls were a sacrifice. They were sacrificed for human sins; for the sake of others they had to die. They took other’s places. It was a time of redemption – and their deaths were for the sake of other Catholics and all of the Japanese people. (qtd. in Lifton, Death in Life 405)

Another Christian survivor, Hajime Yukimune, believes that the dead were sacrificed so that the world may know of the horror of atomic weaponry in the hope that such an offence would never again be committed. In this understanding of sacrifice, *hibakusha* “become Christ, having written their dying wishes in order that their tragic and painful experiences may save humanity” (47).

Hajime’s interpretation of the concept of sacrifice, however, differs significantly from Takahashi’s more simplistic definition of individuals who chose to sacrifice their lives in order to save others. Such an understanding of sacrifice is ahistoric, as those who entered the devastated cities after the bombings had no idea

that they were putting their own lives at risk from the residual radiation. Whilst the bravery and the compassion of those who went to assist the victims should not be underestimated, it is only with retrospect that their deaths can be acknowledged as acts of sacrifice in Takahashi's interpretation of the word. His judgement that those who did not help others were dehumanised by their failure to act fails to take into account the actualities of the aftermath. It was often impossible to provide help; survivors were often so badly injured themselves they were unable to help others, there was no transport to move the injured, medical treatment was in short supply and even when it was available, there was little or no understanding of how to treat the injured. A rumour that giving water to the injured would prove fatal spread quickly through the devastated city, and so many refused pleas for water from the victims, as described by an 18-year-old female survivor, identified as 34-4319: "[my father] asked desperately for water, but we were afraid that as rumour had it, if we gave him water he would die. I regret now that we could not give him any treatment" (English Translation Group 82).<sup>13</sup> Many victims were trapped beneath fallen buildings, and it was impossible for them to be rescued. In danger from the fires that spread rapidly throughout the destroyed cities, survivors had little choice but to flee, abandoning trapped relatives and friends. A 27-year-old female contributor to The Deaths of Hibakusha, identified as 37-0038, recalls the death of her husband in precisely this way: "My husband was seriously injured but I had to leave the fallen house as it was. When the fires drew nearer I had no choice but to run. It was a most cruel death which makes me cry whenever I think about it" (English Translation Group 68). Contextualised historically in this way, Takahashi's categories of human and dehumanised behaviour carry little currency. Indeed, in the introduction to another collection of *hibakusha* testimonies, Hibaku: Recollections of A-Bomb Survivors, Tao Gotaru presents a counter-argument that in fact it is the experience of surviving atrocity that humanises *hibakusha*: "In their accounts, I find evidence of a deep and gentle humanity cultivated by their experience of life's extremities" (Kubo, xv). Nevertheless, it is Takahashi's understanding of *hibakusha* identity as dehumanised

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<sup>13</sup> This denial of water to the suffering and dying appears repeatedly as a haunting regret in *hibakusha* testimony. Lifton suggests that this is due to the cultural significance of water in Japanese religion and folklore in which water is understood to have magical restorative powers, capable even of bringing life back to the dead. In this context, argues Lifton, the pleas for water became "pleas for life itself. The survivor's failure to acquiesce to the victim [...] could thus come to have the psychological significance for him of refusing the request of another for the privilege of life, while he himself clung so tenaciously to that privilege" (Death in Life 175).



through a selfish will to survive which introduces the testimonial accounts contained in The Deaths of Hibakusha.

Alongside the perceived loss of humanity in the *hibakusha* authors is a loss of autonomy. The Deaths of Hibakusha provides an even stricter set of narrative guidelines for the contributors than The Witness of Those Two Days. The respondents are presented with a six-point format around which to frame their testimonies:

What was your feeling in the death of the person/persons? Please describe it referring to the following expressions as appropriate.

- a. I think his/her death was too terrible.
- b. I wish I could have found him/her sooner.
- c. I am sorry that I could do nothing for him/her.
- d. I regret that I was the only one who survived (in my family).
- e. I wish he/she was still alive.
- f. Give me back my child/children, father, mother and the people lost. (English Translation Group xi)

These points are so specific that they form a generic testimonial template for each contributor. In fact, the guidelines can actually be considered as a form of testimony, offering a universal account (in that it is not anchored to any specific individual) of the hibakusha experience. Yet in providing a testimony-in-waiting, as it were, the possibility of distinct narrative voices is removed from the collection and the anonymous contributors lose the potential to express their experiences as unique to the individual. The representation of the atomic experience is thus anonymised and universalised throughout the collection. Following the approach introduced by Takahashi's foreword, the suggested template demonstrates a bias towards the expression of survivor guilt from the contributors. Implicit in the template is the suggestion that those who died did so as a result of the survivors failing to take appropriate action to save them. If the dying had been found sooner, or if something had been done for them then they too may have survived. The regret or shame in surviving referred to in point D is presented as being the inevitable consequence of the survivors' failure to help others and of their dehumanised behaviour.

Lifton suggests that “no survival experience [...] can occur without severe guilt” (*Death in Life* 516). He describes this guilt as centred around “the survivor’s unconscious sense of an organic social balance which makes him feel that his survival was purchased at the cost of another’s” (515). Survival becomes construed not as a matter of chance, but rather as a conscious act which led to the death of another in place of the survivor. In this way, the survivor may come to feel a misplaced sense of complicity in the deaths of the victims. The absence of a visible perpetrator in the case of the atomic bombings compounded the sense that it was the survivors who were somehow responsible for the deaths of the victims.

Certainly the expression of guilt is prevalent throughout the collection. A particular example is that of a female *hibaksusha*, identified with the number 34-054. 24 years old at the time of the bombing, she was 3.0 km away from the epicentre of the explosion, and her testimony reveals that she lost her mother, father and elder brother. Her account is carefully ordered into three sections describing the deaths of each member of her family. Searching among the ruins of the city, she found her elder brother badly injured, and he later died on August 7. Although she writes in prose form, her account of his death follows the first three points of the provided testimonial template almost exactly:

I can never forget for the rest of my life the cruelty of his death, indeed it was hell. Every time I think of my elder brother I am terribly distressed that I could not find him earlier. My brother could have survived somehow if I had taken him to the hospital. (English Translation Group 59)

In the account of her mother’s death she reiterates a wish that she could have found her earlier. Yet in both cases, it is unlikely that anything could have been done to save either member of her family. Indeed, she herself acknowledges towards the end of her account that “no-one could do anything in that desperate situation” (English Translation Group 59). This bald statement suggests a defensive posturing in her account, confronting the assumption of survivor guilt made by both Takahashi and the compilers of the volume.

Throughout the collections, there is an attempt to construct *hibakusha* identity as occupying a liminal position between life and death, as dehumanised and anonymous. Yet the testimonial accounts, and the work of Hara Tamiki, show that through the act of testifying *hibakusha* struggle against this imposed construction of self, revealing through their authorship an attempt to personalise the experiences of the anonymous dead as well as reinstating their own individual identity as human beings, rather than being recognised solely as *hibakusha*.

## Chapter 2

### Absence and Presence: The Role of Silence in Testimonial Writing

Perhaps Nazi camp survivors [and A-bomb survivors] are the only [...] group[s] of modern writers so uniformly and so severely restricted by the same material of which they would tell. It is as if the paper they face is their enemy as well as their ally, something to be feared as the bitter return to the site of their suffering as well as a recuperative means for collecting, organising, and passing on the lessons of that suffering. (Treat, Writing Ground Zero 29)

#### **2.1 Introduction: Silence and the Limits of Representation**

To begin, I will examine two responses to catastrophe. The first is taken from Holocaust survivor Miklos Nyiszli's testimony, Auschwitz, published in 1946. Nyiszli was selected to work alongside Dr Mengele as a camp doctor to assist in pseudo-scientific racial studies in Auschwitz. As such he occupied a more privileged position than other prisoners, and keenly felt a responsibility to try and remember all that he witnessed in order to "give an accurate account of what I had seen if ever, by some miraculous whim of fate, I should escape" (49). However, even whilst in the camp he realised the impossibility of the task that he had set himself, asserting that:

word descriptions are quite incapable of furnishing anyone with an accurate picture of what goes on here. So my efforts to photograph in my mind all I see and engrave it in my memory are, after all, completely useless. (66)

The second response was recorded by A-bomb survivor Kijimi Katsumi in his 1965 testimony, Eternal Regrets. Kijimi survived the atomic bombing of his home town of Hiroshima on August 6 1945. He recalls seeing the *Enola Gay*, the American B-29 which carried the atomic bomb flying overhead, and thinking to himself, "Oh look, there's another enemy plane coming"; his attempt to represent what followed was utterly confounded: "Thereafter there were no more words" (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 27)

The testimony of both Nyiszli and Kijimi bears witness to the challenge that that the experience of trauma poses to the possibilities of representation. Each focus

on the fallibility of language in the wake of extremity, a theme that occupies the majority of testimonial texts emergent from both the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. Whilst these introductory quotations may suggest a unity between the responses to catastrophe offered by Nyiszli and Kijimi, the historical specificities of the individual events they attempt to describe warns against a comparison which focuses solely on the similarities between their representational efforts. However, as Leigh Gilmore observes, it is by exploring “the relation between trauma and representation, and especially language,” that we can seek to define “trauma as a category” (6). It is through acknowledging this relationship in testimonial texts from both events that an understanding of Treat’s assertion of the link between Holocaust survivors and *hibakusha* can be reached.

“Something of a consensus has already developed,” argues Gilmore, “that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency” (6). In The Writing of the Disaster, Maurice Blanchot confronts that which Michael Bernard-Donald and Richard Glejzer describe as “the unsayable aspects of history” (40). For Blanchot, the incursion of the Holocaust into history questions the possibilities of language and the very process of writing. Indeed, in her prefatory remarks to the text, Blanchot’s translator, Ann Smock, argues for the interchangeability of the words “writing” and “disaster,” commenting that:

the writing of the disaster means not simply the process by whereby something called the disaster is written – communicated, attested to, or prophesied. It also means the writing done by disaster – by the disaster that ruins books and wrecks language. (Blanchot ix)

According to this formulation, the (failed) representation of the disaster actually becomes the disaster. In many examples of testimonial writing it is this disaster of failed representation, as well as the disaster of the historical event that occupies the author. The disaster, claims Blanchot, “is what escapes the possibility of experience – it is the limit of writing. This must be repeated – the disaster de-scribes” (7). It is the fact that the disaster “de-scribes” - destroys the possibility of representation - that denies the possibility of experience. The subtle distinction between the event and the

experience of the event is drawn through Blanchot's understanding of experience being predicated on intellectual assimilation and knowledgeable understanding of the event. As Ernst van Alphen explains:

The experience of an event or history is, however, dependent on the terms the symbolic order offers. It needs these terms if *living through* the event is to be transformed into an *experience of* the event. [...] The problem Holocaust survivors encounter is precisely that the lived events could not be experienced because language did not provide the terms with which to experience them. This unrepresentability defines those events as *traumatic*. (44)

The un-lived experience, manifested as a failure in representation is, then, for van Alphen that which characterises an event as traumatic. The event cannot be experienced if it cannot be reconstructed in language. This returns us to Gilmore's thesis, that it is the (non) interaction between language and the event that defines trauma. Cathy Caruth cements the relationship between language and trauma, describing trauma as "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" (Unclaimed Experience 4).

Yet if language fails in its capacity to represent, what is the nature of this cry? Blanchot is keen to point out that whilst the disaster "de-scribes", this "does not mean that the disaster, as the force of writing, is excluded from it, is beyond the pale of writing, or extratextual" (7). He describes the Holocaust as "*the absolute event in history – which is a date in history – that utter burn where all history took fire, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up*" (47). Here, Blanchot maintains his distinction between the Holocaust as an occurrence - a date in history - and as an experience, the possibility of which is compromised by the swallowing up of meaning. If the destruction of Meaning is that of the relationship between language and that which it seeks to describe, then the possibility of representation must lie in the "*fleeing silence of the countless cry*" (47).

Superficially, the absence of language suggests a failure of communication; there is, it seems, an inherent conflict between expression and silence. However, a reading of testimonial literature forces this assumptive understanding to be

challenged. The use of silence in testimonial texts indicates a more covert form of communication, for as Blanchot suggests, “to be silent is still to speak. Silence is impossible” (11). He points to the paradoxical nature of “the silence of the word silence,” recognising that the utterance of the word itself banishes its meaning, and suggests that the utterance of silence is in fact a “voiceless cry, which breaks with all utterances” (51). Blanchot’s interpretation of silence forms a basic premise for the reading of testimonial literature, as he recognises silence as a form of expression. Addressing the Holocaust directly, Blanchot recognises that language fails to reveal its meaning. “Work,” he writes, “in societies where, indeed, it is highly valued as the materialist process whereby the worker takes power, becomes the ultimate punishment [...] The meaning of work then is the destruction of work in and through work” (81). Under these conditions, language can offer little understanding. “We read books,” he continues, “on Auschwitz. The wish of all in the camps, the last wish: know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time never will you know” (82). Here, Blanchot recognises that written narrative can never furnish the reader with a full understanding of the event. Silence can function as a reminder of what we cannot know, and in not knowing cannot experience. The fact that the Holocaust cannot be experienced is made manifest through silence. Understanding silence as a *present* absence leads to an awareness of what has been lost and what cannot be represented, and so explained, in testimony. Terrence Des Pres characterises the silence in Wiesel’s writing as exactly this, “not [...] a vacuum or emptiness, but as *presence*- of memory, of the dead, of an evil so overwhelming and unspeakable that only silence, in its infinitude, can begin to represent it” (55). This, then, is the core of what Bernard-Donalds and Glejzer define as the central “paradox of Blanchot’s purpose,” the recognition of “the impossibility of speaking of the immediacy of an experience while acknowledging that speaking the experience is what constitutes it” (42). Speaking in this instance is not restricted to language, as Treat notes in his analysis of atomic bomb literature. He claims that is through “the silences, the oft-noted lacks and gaps in atomic bomb writing, may be precisely where the [testimonial] genre “speaks” to us the most.” (Writing Ground Zero 30).

As such, silence in testimony cannot be viewed as a void or an absence. Conversely, silence can be recognised as the genesis of a text. Elie Wiesel acknowledges that “it was by seeking, by probing silence, that I began to discover the

perils and power of the written word” (Why I Write 200). The perils, that words can only betray the experience, are balanced by the “power of the written word”. Yet an essential component of this power is the recognition of the role of silence within it. There is a difference between silence as an absence, and silence as a presence within the written narrative. Viewed in this way, silence comes to represent an active presence in testimonial writing, and the way in which language is not prioritised over silence comes to be an identifying feature of testimonial literature.

## **2.2 Absence as Presence in the Holocaust Narrative**

### **Telling the Tale**

In a review of Elie Wiesel’s work, Terrence Des Pres comments, “if I select one single aspect of his writing that gets to the heart of the matter, I would say that silence, and the tension between silence and the the need of the witness to speak, is the matrix of meaning on which Wiesel’s accomplishment lies” (50-51). Holocaust survivors frequently testify to a compulsion that forces them to tell the tale of their experiences. James E. Young has argued that “when survival and the need to bear witness become one, [the] desperate urge to testify in narrative cannot be underestimated” (17). This intimate relationship between telling the tale and survival is revealed by Primo Levi in the preface to If This is a Man, as he represents the urge to testify as equivalent to other basic human needs:

The need to tell our story to ‘the rest’, to make ‘the rest’ participate in it, had taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse, to the point of competing with our other elementary needs. (15)

In his analysis of Levi’s writing, Nicholas Patruno concludes that “it is only through a constant interface with his recollections that [Levi] sees any hope of surviving his survival” (9). However, as Levi makes clear, this association between testifying and surviving was not only realised following liberation, but was in fact present throughout his time in the camp. He states that “this was the sense, not forgotten either then or later: [...] that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness” (If This Is A Man 47). Repeatedly in If This is a Man, he refers to his desire to remember and testify. On one



occasion, he recalls awakening from a dream in which he was freely talking to family and friends of his experiences:

I am now awake and I remember that I have recounted it to Alberto and that he confided to me, to my amazement, that it is also his dream and the dream of many others, perhaps of everyone. (66)

The urge to tell the tale is thus revealed to be a fundamental need shared by many prisoners. Levi frequently returns to this compulsion to share his story, casting himself as an Ancient Mariner figure, haunted by his past. He uses a verse from Coleridge's poem to introduce The Drowned and the Saved with the image of the "ghastly tale" that burns within him. In The Periodic Table he writes:

It seemed to me that I would be purified if I told its [the Holocaust's] story, and I felt like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, who waylays on the street the wedding guests going to a feast, inflicting on them the story of his misfortune. I was writing concise and bloody poems, telling the story at breakneck speed, either by talking to people or by writing it down, so much so that gradually a later book was born: by writing I found peace for a while and felt myself become a man again, a person like everyone else, neither a martyr nor debased nor a saint: one of those people who form a family and look to the future rather than the past. (151)

For Levi, the urge to write is the urge to survive; to return through words to being a man. Through writing he seeks to reject the image of the survivor as a martyr, as debased, or as a saint, and assert himself as a "person like everyone else." His refuting of these images of the survivor which define him by his past experiences is congruent with his desire to be a man who looks "to the future rather than the past."

This desire to tell the tale becomes inextricably bound up with the idea of a duty towards those who died. Elie Wiesel expresses this sentiment most succinctly when he writes that:

I am duty bound to serve as their emissary, transmitting the history of their disappearance even if it disturbs, even if brings pain. Not to do so would be to betray them and thus myself. (Why I Write 202)

In "Why I Write", Wiesel constantly returns to the word "duty". He feels "duty bound to give meaning to my survival," and asserts that "for the survivor, writing is not a profession, but an occupation, a duty" (200). This feeling of responsibility to convey the truth of the event is fraught with the fear of betrayal. To refuse to write evinces, for Wiesel, the feeling that he has betrayed those who cannot testify. Yet, at the same time, the problem of representation is insurmountable, for as Wiesel writes "we do try to put the experience into words. But can we? Language is poor and inadequate. The moment it is told, the experience turns to betrayal" (Jewish Values 264). Wiesel is, then, confronted with a paradox, summed up by McAfee Brown as "to speak is to betray, not to speak is to betray. There is no way not to betray" (25). The source of this betrayal is twofold. Firstly, there is the fact that survivor testimony is somehow incomplete. Only those who did not survive could narrate the totality of the Holocaust, and to represent the Shoah as a story of survival is to deny the truth of the event. Levi acknowledges that those who survived were those such as himself, who were "an anomalous minority, we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch the bottom" and that as a result the history of the camps has been written by those who "never fathomed them to the bottom" (Drowned and the Saved 64). Yet, outside this quite specific argument that it is impossible for a survivor to testify to the truth of the Holocaust, there is the larger fact that language fails in the face of extremity. The compulsion to tell the tale is hampered by the absence of words which can describe these events. In the wake of the horrors of the twentieth century, Saul Friedländer perceives a progressive collapse in the descriptive power of language:

The inadequacy grows between language and certain events. That began well before Auschwitz, perhaps with the First World War, only to reach its culmination with Auschwitz. [...] Events moved faster than language. Since Auschwitz, the distance between them seems insurmountable." (93)

The magnitude of violence in the twentieth century threatens the efficacy of language, and compromises the possibility of descriptive testimony. It is in this compromise that the fear of betrayal looms large.

## **“Something will happen to it”: Silence and the Failure of Language**

It is an obvious observation that where violence is inflicted on man, it is also inflicted on language. (Levi, Drowned and the Saved 76)

Andrea Reiter suggests that the “compulsion to bear witness for murdered comrades and for life itself, even the wish to communicate one’s experiences to others, are not enough to explain the mechanism that led to the writing of a report” (Narrating the Holocaust 202). Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi argues that the imperative to speak is the culmination of several factors, and lists them as:

the desire for some sort of revenge; the need to bear witness [...]; the desire to commemorate the dead, the impulse to absolve oneself or one’s companions of aspersions of passivity or complicity; the sense of mission, to warn humanity of its capacity for genocide. (21)

By identifying the desire to bear witness as only one motive amongst many, Ezrahi appears to challenge the relationship between survival and testimony that Young understands as crucial to the interpretation of testimonial writing. Whilst she acknowledges that “the real victory to which these documents attested was the very fact of personal survival,” she reads the urge to testify as a consequence of survival, as opposed to Levi’s formulation of testimony as an aspect of survival (21). Reiter offers a further motivation behind testimony, arguing that the act of writing is itself an “attempt to come to terms with the experience intellectually” (Narrating the Holocaust 203). Intellectual understanding is, however, dependent on the ability to assimilate memory into a coherent representation of experience. Yet attempts at representation are jeopardised at the outset by the failure of language to describe these events. Elie Wiesel has declared Auschwitz to be the “ultimate event, the ultimate mystery,” in that it can never be known by those who were not there (Trivializing the Holocaust). Descriptive language simply cannot convey the enormity of the Holocaust. Anticipating Saul Friedländer, George Steiner argued that “what man has inflicted on man, in very recent time, has affected the writer’s primary material – the sum and potential of human behaviour – and it presses on the brain with a new darkness” (Language and Silence 4). Wiesel built upon this idea of a new darkness inherent in the writer’s task in a 1978 lecture, “The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration,” when he declared that “Treblinka means death, absolute death, death of

language and of hope, death of trust and of inspiration” (7). He continues by arguing that in the aftermath of the Holocaust, “language had been corrupted” (8), and it is this concept of corruption that forms the basis of Steiner’s contentious analysis of the German language in particular as becoming somehow deformed in the post-Holocaust world.

The German language was not innocent of the horrors of Nazism [...] Gradually words lost their meaning and acquired nightmarish definitions [...] Use a language to conceive, organise and justify Belsen; [...] Something will happen to it. (Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1967 121-124)

Steiner proposed this argument in an essay entitled “The Hollow Miracle”, and in a 1982 republication of the essay he added a footnote acknowledging the “hurt and anger” that his ideas caused (Language and Silence 117). However, he stood by his thesis, arguing that “the matter of the relations between language and political inhumanity is a crucial one” (117). In the essay, he argues that historical circumstance made the German language a fertile ground for genocidal rhetoric. He concedes that “a Hitler would have found reservoirs of venom and moral illiteracy in any language,” but maintains that “by virtue of recent history, they were nowhere else so ready and so near the very surface of common speech” (121). However, Steiner offers little to support this assertion; suggesting that recent history in Germany provided a fertile breeding ground for virulent antisemitic discourse in the country actually overlooks the fact that the experience of the majority of German Jews was assimilation rather than isolation, and that antisemitism was actually far more rampant in Eastern European countries such as Ukraine. Yet for Steiner, the acts of barbarity perpetrated during the Holocaust were conceived of, ordered by and recorded in the German language, and it is for this reason that the Holocaust as an event is forever bound to the German language. German has become, then, a perpetrator language, a language that can offer no illumination, no understanding; it can communicate, but can give “no sense of communion,” a language summed up in the phrase *hier ist kein warum* (117). Indeed, the phraseology of Nazi camp rhetoric demonstrates a dislocation between language and meaning within the German tongue. Wiesel recalls the signs that adorned the electrified barbed wire that enclosed Auschwitz reading “‘Warning. Danger of death’. Mockery: was there a single place

here where you were not in danger of death?” (Night 51). The words on the sign constitute more than a warning of electrocution for Wiesel; they come to stand as words which define his whole experience. However, Ruth Klüger’s testimony reveals a rejection of Steiner’s assertion of the German language as permanently damaged on the grounds that it is too simplistic. She acknowledges that aspects of German have been permanently damaged through the Nazi distortion of language, reflecting that “German proverbs nauseate me; I can’t hear any of them without seeing its cynical application in the death factory” (17). Levi offers an example of this “cynical application” with bizarrely cheerful couplet “Nach dem Abort, vor dem Essen/Hände waschen, nicht vergessen” inscribed on the wall of the washroom. He recognises that this is not simply an incentive for hygiene, but rather a reminder that washing is “important as a symbol of remaining vitality, and necessary as an instrument of moral survival” (If This is A Man 46). Yet at the same time, Klüger is insistent that the Nazism should not be regarded as the most influential legacy bequeathed to the German language. German, she argues, is also the language of Jewish intellectualism, and to ignore this ancestry is to deny these voices their rightful place in German history (257). Taken to its extreme, the erasure of the Jewish German voice is to participate in the Nazi aim to eradicate Jewish life and culture from Europe. Steiner’s account of the German language, then, whilst being a useful starting point for a discussion about the relationship between language and violence, can only offer a partial interpretation of the effect of atrocity on language and the possibilities of representation.

However, the dislocation between language and meaning that emerged in the camps is a common feature of many Holocaust testimonies. Language is rendered as silence as it fails to communicate any message; simply, language ceases to make sense. Words acquired new meaning under Nazi euphemisms: the showers, *Sonderbehandlung*, Treblinka’s *Himmelweg*. A brief incident in Filip Müller’s testimony, Auschwitz Inferno, bears witness to this breakdown in meaning. Müller was a young Slovakian Jew imprisoned in Auschwitz in 1942. Shortly after his arrival in the camp, Müller was selected for the *Sonderkommando*, a special work detail whose role was to remove the bodies from the gas chambers and strip the corpses of any valuables that the victims had attempted to conceal about themselves, a duty which included the removal of any gold dental fillings. They then transferred

the bodies to the crematoria for their final destruction. Müller's survival was particularly remarkable, as those selected for work in the *Sonderkommando* could generally expect to live for only a few months before they themselves were murdered, to deny the prospect of any future witnesses to the Nazi atrocities. In his testimony, Müller recounts an incident which demonstrates the way in which language ceased to have any relevant meaning in Auschwitz. The story that Müller tells is that of a new prisoner, a lawyer, who demands to speak to the *Kommandant* after having witnessing Vacek, a *kapo* or block leader, killing a fellow prisoner:

“Herr Kommandant, as a human being and a lawyer I wish to report that the block clerk” – pointing at Vacek – “has arbitrarily killed several innocent people [...] I would therefore request you to have this morning's events investigated and to see that the guilty are truly punished.” (5)

The lawyer is beaten to death by Vacek for his words. Whilst the terrible murder of this unnamed lawyer cannot be interpreted as anything but murder, the representation of his death in this particular text becomes a symbol for something greater: the collapse of justice and civilisation in the world of the camp. The lawyer's words belong to the civilised world, rather than the atavistic state in the camp. Words such as “human being”, “innocent” and “guilty” swing loose from their meanings in Auschwitz, and language is recoded to the extent that these words seem to have no relevance in *l'univers concentrationnaire*.

Structuralist theory has long argued for the arbitrariness of the relationship between words (the signifiers) and their meanings, or concepts (the signified). In such an approach, then, there is no inherent relationship between *g/u/i/l/t/y*, for example, as signifier and “guilty” as a concept. There is no reason to assume that the signifier *g/u/i/l/t/y* has a more privileged relationship with the signified “guilty” than the signifier *c/o/u/p/a/b/l/e*, for example. Yet to argue that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary is not to argue that it is therefore unstable. Through common usage in a language system the signifier becomes anchored to its arbitrarily ascribed signified. The practical effect of this, argues John E. Joseph, is that “although the linguistic sign is arbitrary, it is impossible for anyone to change it” (60). Yet whilst the relationship is resistant to change initiated by an individual, this

does not mean that it does not change over time in response to historical and social factors. In the context of Müller's testimony, it can be seen that the impact of the Holocaust on the language system is to break down the relationship between the signifier and the signified in the camps. The experience of the Holocaust (indeed, it could be argued, the experience of all forms of trauma), then functions to reinstate the arbitrariness of the signifier/signified relationship. The relationship that existed between *g/u/i/l/t/y* and "guilty" prior to the Holocaust is negated through the experience of the camps as the Nazi authorities rewrote the meaning of "guilty" as a concept. At its most basic level, the pre-Holocaust concept of "guilty" presupposed a crime or misdemeanour of some sort; the Nazi system of values (or perhaps more appropriately "anti-values") rewrote the concept of "guilty": one was determined to be guilty not only on the basis on acts committed, but on the basis of being – being Jewish, Gypsy, homosexual, for example, meant that one was "guilty." Therefore the signifier *g/u/i/l/t/y* which was anchored to the pre-Holocaust meaning of "guilty" can no longer function as a signifier for the concept of "guilty" as the meaning of the signified has been altered in accordance with a Nazi perspective.

Wiesel's choice to write Night in French is a further manifestation of the issue of tainted language. Colin Davis suggests that his decision to write in French was motivated by a desire to find a neutral language in which to recount his experiences of the Holocaust. French was the first language that Wiesel learned after liberation. The decision to write in French instead of his native language seems to be an attempt to consciously dissociate from the experiential self of the Holocaust, for as Davis suggests, French offered "a medium not directly associated with or compromised by previous experiences" (27). It functions to provide a distance between the event and its narration. By replacing experiential language with representational language, Wiesel works with a language that is untainted, and thus perhaps less doomed to failure. Nevertheless, Davis argues that Wiesel's "sometimes torturous French style seems to bear traces of the trauma of the Holocaust," in that it appears "contrived and awkward, deprived of fluency and harmony; his texts stutter rather than flow" (27). Wiesel himself comments briefly on his style in All Rivers Run to the Sea, acknowledging his difficulties in writing in a foreign language: "I write in French, but I learned the language from books and therefore I am not good at slang" (321). The suggestion that the vocabulary available to Wiesel the author differs from that of the

experiential Eliezer reinforces the understanding of the dualised self as discussed in chapter one. Barbara Engelking, however, suggests that the adoption of foreign languages by survivors to describe their experiences threatens the authenticity of their testimony. Somewhat subjectively, she argues that:

I am convinced that it is easier to relate wartime experiences in the language that was used at that time, in which the world was named. For this reason, I believe that accounts given by Polish survivors in Polish *are more valid*, nearer to the inner truth, than accounts given in other languages. (15)

This assertion is difficult to justify, as it fails to take into account the significance of the employment of a neutral language. To suggest that testimonies written in the native language of the survivor have a greater validity is to distort the meaning of authenticity. Arguing that authenticity is conferred primarily through the use of time and space specific language – through the employment of what could be termed the “language-scape” of the event – offers a very restrictive interpretation of what it means to record an experience authentically. Her argument is also hampered by the absence of a fixed definition of what it means to write “authentically.” For example, whereas for Engelking, Wiesel’s decision to write in French would diminish the authenticity of his account, it could be equally argued that his rejection of the Holocaust language-scape is actually an authentic part of his response to his experiences. His use of French could be viewed as symbolic of his survival and escape from the Holocaust, and thus an “authentic” part of his Holocaust experience. Yet Engelking continues to argue:

were they [survivors writing in a foreign language] able to communicate emotions and nuances of meaning, as well as elements of wartime life, in languages which had no words which could precisely convey these meanings? Every language determines an appropriate area of meaning and emotions; it determines ways of naming and communicating the world. (15)

Engelking’s analysis is further flawed in that it fails to take into account the nature of language and communication in the camp. In arguing that there is a possibility of a “precise” correlation between language and meaning, she neglects to acknowledge the destabilisation of language in the camps. Her view is also based on the idea that



there was a consistency of language in the camps which was continuous with language outside of the concentrationary universe. This assumption conflicts with survivors accounts of language in the camps.

Kitty Hart, for example, recalls the bewilderment she experienced on arrival in Auschwitz:

Muselmann? What on earth does that mean? I could not make it out. This place seemed to have its own vocabulary, a complete language of its own. But I realised that we shall get acquainted with it before long. Soon we shall know everything. (51)

Testifying to the singular language of the camps, Hart also constructs a relationship between knowledge and language. Through knowing the language, she will come to know “everything.” In suggesting that the camp can only be understood through its own language, Hart’s testimony contradicts Engelking’s assertion that it is the native language of survivors, specifically Polish survivors, that has a more privileged position in representing the camps. Hart continues to describe the language in the camps, recalling “They [the other prisoners] were of all nationalities, but we had no language difficulties, for one soon got acquainted with the camp slang which was common to all” (56). The native language of the survivors is, then, arguably not the language of the Holocaust experience. The language-scape of the Holocaust was not for any individual a specific national language but rather a combination of different elements of the native languages of all the prisoners. In fact, for Engelking’s view to ring true, the only “authentic” narrative would be one written solely in camp argot.

Testimony reveals however, that this notion of a stable camp argot is in fact false. Hart’s representation of a “camp slang which was common to all” sits uneasily with other survivor’s recollections of the camps. Levi in particular characterises Auschwitz as “perpetual Babel,” a place where language is never fixed and communication constantly marred by linguistic confusion (Drowned and the Saved 55). The majority of the camp language that he includes is, however, German. Odd exceptions such as *Selekcja*, a word he describes as a Polish Latin hybrid occur, but the language of Levi’s Auschwitz is primarily the language of the perpetrators. As

well as drawing words from existing languages, new words emerged such as *Muselmann*, and Levi concludes that:

If the Lager had lasted longer a new, harsh language would have been born; and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind, with the temperature below freezing, wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket and trousers, and in one's body nothing but weakness, hunger and knowledge of the end drawing nearer. (If This is A Man 129)

The existence of a distinctive camp vocabulary is well documented by survivors, but a closer reading of Levi's and Hart's testimonies reveals subtle variations in the language. For example, Hart unfailingly refers to the camp hospital as the *Rewir*, whereas Levi names it *Ka-Be*. The different experiences of Hart living in the women's camp and working in the *Kanadakommando* compared to Levi living in the mens camp and working in Buna is the most likely explanation for this discrepancy, yet even this small lexical distinction suggests that there was no uniform camp language.

Levi testifies to the fact that the development of a camp vocabulary did not necessarily ease communication in the camps in Moments of Reprieve. In the short tale entitled "The Juggler", he writes about an encounter between himself and a German prisoner, Eddy. Eddy slapped him, and from this blow Levi understood that Eddy was telling him, "watch out, you've really made a big mistake this time, you're endangering your life, maybe without realising it, and you're endangering mine as well" (31). Violence in the camps became a form of language that did not rely upon words and their distorted meanings. Levi recognises that a spoken exchange between Eddy and himself "would have been useless, (not understood if nothing else, because of language problems), out of tune, and much too roundabout" (31). Physical violence became a substitute for words in the language of the camp, and Levi records that:

A slap inflicted in the Camp had a very different significance from what it might have here among us in today's here and now. Precisely: it had a meaning; it was simply another way of expressing oneself. [...] Punches and slaps passed among us as daily language, and we soon learned to distinguish meaningful blows from the others inflicted

out of savagery, to create pain and humiliation, and which often resulted in death. A slap like Eddy's was akin to the friendly smack you give a dog, or the whack you administer to a donkey to convey or reinforce an order or prohibition. Nothing more in short than a non-verbal communication. Among the many miseries in the Camp, blows of this nature were by far the least painful. Which is equivalent to saying that our manner of living was not very different from that of donkeys and dogs. (31)

The violent language of the camp is as filled with tones and inflections as verbal communication. In referring to these blows as "the least painful", Levi is speaking solely in terms of physical bodily pain. The pain accorded by the dehumanising effect of the blows likened to those inflicted on animals cannot be underestimated. Elsewhere Levi writes that "all human species know how to speak, no non-human species knows how to speak" (Drowned and the Saved 69). To take away this differentiation, precisely, to take away the power of language and replace it with acts of violence is to reduce the victims to a sub-human, animalistic existence – to the status of donkeys and dogs. Language in the form of blows dehumanises the individual, and this active dehumanisation came to be reflected in the casual speech of the Kapos. Levi recounts the call given at mealtimes:

The kapo comes to us periodically and calls: '*Wer hat noch zu fressen?*' He does not say it from derision or to sneer, but because this way of eating on our feet, furiously, burning our mouths and throats, without time to breathe, really is '*fressen*', the way of eating of animals, and certainly not '*essen*', the human way of eating, seated in front of a table, religiously. '*Fressen*' is exactly the word, and is used currently among us. (If This is a Man 82)

As Levi argues, where violence is inflicted on humanity it is also inflicted in language; at the same time, it is when language is destabilised and its meaning is perverted that it becomes possible to inflict such violence on man. Wiesel makes explicit the link between dehumanisation and violence, explaining that:

Strange as it may sound, there was no hate involved in the relationship between Jew and German. We didn't hate the Germans, and the Germans didn't hate us. It was worse. You can only hate a human being. To them we were objects. Man doesn't hate objects. (Wiesel and Rubenstein 364)

Objectification of human beings was made possible the way in which language was used during the Holocaust. Indeed, Richard Rubenstein centralises the objectifying nature of Nazi language in his analysis of the Holocaust, stating that:

Part of the technology of mass slaughter involves a process of so laundering the language used to describe the process that it appears to be a technological and not an act which takes place between human beings. (Wiesel and Rubenstein 357)

Whilst contesting Engelking's view of a consistent experiential language within the camps, Levi's testimony also challenges Engelking's assumption of continuity of language from the camps to the post-war world. He writes:

Just as our hunger is not that of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say 'hunger', we say 'tiredness', 'fear', 'pain', we say 'winter' and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes. (If This is a Man 129)

Charlotte Delbo also picks up on the emptiness of post-Holocaust language, implicitly acknowledging this emptiness as the product of the failed relationship between the signifier and the signified, commenting that:

Because when I talk to you about Auschwitz, it is not from deep memory my words issue. They come from external memory, if I may put it that way, from intellectual memory, the memory connected with thinking processes. Deep memory preserves sensations, physical imprints. It is the memory of the senses. For it isn't words that are swollen with emotional charge. Otherwise, someone who has been tortured by thirst for weeks on end could never again say "I'm thirsty. How about a cup of tea." This word has also split in two. *Thirst* has turned back into a word for commonplace use. But if I dream of the thirst I suffered in Birkenau, I once again see the person I was, haggard, halfway crazed, near to collapse; I physically feel that real thirst and it is an atrocious nightmare. If, however, you'd like me to talk to you about it..." (Days and Memory 3-4)

For Delbo, the possibilities of language are irretrievably bound to the processes of memory. The distinction between external memory and deep memory is crucial to her understanding of the possibilities of representation. Lawrence Langer renames external memory "thinking memory," and suggests that the words that emerge from

this memory allow the listener to “imagine the worst.” The key word here is “imagine,” for whilst the words that emerge from external memory can describe what is stored in deep memory, they cannot reveal the meanings that the experience of the Holocaust maps onto them. Only deep memory, argues Langer, can represent the “*physical imprint*” of the experience.(Delbo, Auschwitz and After xiv) This, however, is the crux of the incommunicability of the Holocaust. As the memory of the senses, deep memory is personal, individual and cannot be communicated to others through language, as indicated by the silent ellipsis that follows Delbo’s offer to try to tell the reader of that “atrocious nightmare.” Delbo’s distinction between the words of external memory and the meanings found in deep memory evokes once again the failure of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In Delbo’s account, the Holocaust has created new signifieds, for which no signifier exists – thirst exists as a concept in the context of the Holocaust, but there is no signifier, no matter how arbitrary, that is capable of relating to it. Implicit in this passage is Delbo’s frustrated call for a new signifier that can express the concept of “thirst” as it exists in her deep memory. The experience of trauma brings into existence signifieds that can have no signifiers. It seems, then, that in a post-Holocaust language system, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is characterised not by arbitrariness but by absence.

The post-Holocaust death of the signifier/signified relationship contradicts theories such as Engelking’s which call for the acknowledgement of the continuity of language from the camps to the post-Holocaust world. Wiesel argues that:

[concentration camp language] negated all other languages and took its place. Rather than link it became wall. Could it be surmounted? Could the reader be brought to the other side? I knew the answer to be negative, and yet I also knew that ‘no’ had to become ‘yes’. (Why I Write 201)

The journey from “no” to “yes” must be traversed through the inclusion of silence. The necessity of silence, then, undermines Steiner’s assertion that the German language is forever tainted by its association with the Holocaust. As Wiesel acknowledges, the Holocaust challenges “all other languages.” The Holocaust emerges as an event which challenges the possibility of any language and therefore

posits the possibility that in the absence of language, silence can become a form of expressive communication.

## **Silence as Language**

What matters is to struggle against silence with words or through another form of silence. (Wiesel, Why I Write 206)

In direct response to this concept of failed language, Levi wrote that that “To say it is impossible to communicate is false: one always can” (Drowned and the Saved 69). The true fallacy actually lies in the assumption that communication is only possible through language. In the words of Steiner:

We should not assume that a verbal matrix is the only one in which the articulations and conduct of the mind are conceivable. There are modes of intellectual and sensuous reality founded not on language, but on other communicative energies. [...] There are actions of the spirit rooted in silence. (Language and Silence 12)

It is by stepping outside the “verbal matrix” that the communicative power of silence within testimonial writing can be recognised. To paraphrase Wiesel, silence constitutes part of the struggle for expression, rather than a hindrance to it. In reading Wiesel’s work, Robert McAfee Brown identifies three forms of articulate silence; the silence born of frustration, the silence of communicative power and the silence born of respect (30). The silence of frustration is a consequence of that which Brown denotes the “incommensurability” of the Holocaust, that is the fundamental inability to understand the event from the outside. This is essentially the silence of failed language, the frustration emerging from the perceived impossibility of representing the Holocaust in existing forms of language. “In the Jewish tradition,” argues Mary Gerhart, “the reluctance to speak an event into language can be so strong that it imposes a dramatic or ritual banning of naming.” Speaking specifically of Holocaust diaries, although making a point which expands to cover testimony as well, she continues that “this reluctance to speak proceeds not only from horror at the degradation of the human being but out of a disjunction of experience from credibility” (76). It is this disjunction, or incommensurability, that creates the spectre of silence that is perceived as haunting Holocaust narratives. Ruth Klüger, however,

questions the existence of this form of silence, since “any event you can turn into literature becomes, as it were, speakable” (141). Yet in arguing that the Holocaust must be “speakable”, Klüger is not denying the possibility of silence in Holocaust narratives. The specific event to which she refers is the gynaecological experiments carried out on women in the camps, experiments that were not conducted for even pseudoscientific reasons, but rather to ensure that the women had not hidden any valuables in their bodies. In her testimony, she acknowledges that “I find it difficult to write this down and notice that I have done so in a rather circuitous way. [...] Later, in college, I was oddly relieved to find similar scenes in that great satirical classic, Voltaire’s *Candide*” (141). The discovery that the representation of her experience had a literary precedent seems to comfort Klüger, as it places her experiences in the realm of the known and so the “speakable.” Significantly, however, Klüger notes that “it was not a traumatic experience; it was just humiliating” (141). The experience of trauma that has no literary precedent cannot be so easily represented, and Klüger makes an implicit distinction between the humiliating which is “speakable,” and the traumatic which belongs to the realm of silence.

Brown’s second category is that of expressive silence, a silence of “communicative power,” and it is this mode that Wiesel favours most prominently in his Holocaust writing. Wiesel asserts that:

sometimes, when no words are possible, silence can be an alternative language. It is possible to transform silence into a language, to have a language of silence. [...] We must always ask ourselves what is the best language to let suffering speak. Sometimes our answer may be silence. (Wiesel and Beal 35)

In this formulation, silence becomes not an absence but the presence of that which cannot be spoken. Brown argues that “It is the silence within his [Wiesel’s] speech, the silence between the words, that communicates to us. What is not said is as important as what is said. Perhaps more so” (31). Daniel Schwarz reacts to this by considering the very structure of *Night*:

Perhaps we should for a moment think of Wiesel’s text as a physical object and note its slimness, its titleless chapters, its breaks between

anecdotes. We wonder what could be added in those white spaces – whether his loss of faith, for example, is gradual? (54)

Schwarz suggests that the very brevity of Night encourages the reader to focus on that which is absent. In essence, the absence of an exhaustive narrative text calls for a greater presence of engagement from the reader.

In his novel A Beggar in Jerusalem, Wiesel specifically links language with destruction, writing “I don’t like words! They destroy what they aim to describe, they alter what they try to emphasise. By enveloping the truth, they end up taking its place” (135). For Wiesel, language conceals rather than reveals truth, in that language will always distort, destroy even, the relationship between representation and the real. If language is linked in this way with destruction, then for Wiesel silence provides a space which the real can inhabit.

But this reliance on silence as a form of communication can be dangerous. As Brown points out, “the distance between what the storyteller says through silence and what his listeners may hear may be too great” (32). If silence can be interpreted as imbued with meaning, then there is also the risk that it can be interpreted as emptiness.

In accepting that the failure of language is due to the radically different frames of reference between the survivor and non-survivor, where experience distorts the meaning of words, then surely the meaning of silence too is jeopardised by the distance between the survivor and non-experiential reader. The intention behind the silence of the witness may be as unrecognisable to the reader as the meaning conferred onto words such as “hungry” and “thirsty” by the experience of the Holocaust. The crisis of representation intensifies as the witness becomes doubly challenged by the failure of language and silence. The only response to this challenge, argues Brown, is “to break silence, to be a messenger. [...] One becomes a messenger, then, because one cannot *not* speak” (36-37). The witness cannot simply remain silent, cannot refuse to testify, but must rather create a testimonial space in which silence can be acknowledged, a narrative in which expression and silence are allowed an equal status. Although Brown’s argument is valid, it fails to offer a



solution to the original problem that whilst silence may be acknowledged, its meaning may remain unintelligible to the reader. Yet perhaps this unintelligibility is essential to the Holocaust narrative, for to replace it with understanding would be to betray the experience of the Holocaust. Paradoxically then, the Holocaust narrative is at once an act of representation and an admission that representation is not possible.

The third form of silence that Brown identifies is that which is born out of respect, “a silence that honours the dead too much to profane their memory by using words already doomed to fail” (30). This silence born from respect emerges from the sense of duty to the dead which dominates the desire to tell the tale. As discussed previously however, the fear of betraying the dead co-exists with the desire to tell their story and make them present. In this formulation, the presence of silence in the testimonial text accords the dead a place in the survivor narrative.

### **Silence and the Voices of the Dead**

Why I write? To wrench those victims from oblivion. To help the dead vanquish death. (Wiesel, Why I Write 206)

In writing the preface to Moments of Reprieve, a collection of short stories about his time in Auschwitz published in 1981, Levi looked back to his account of Auschwitz in If This is a Man and reflected on the individuals who populated his testimony:

A great number of human figures especially stood out against that tragic background: friends, people I'd travelled with, even adversaries – begging me one after another to help them survive and enjoy the ambiguous perennial existence of literary characters. This was no longer the anonymous, faceless, voiceless mass of the shipwrecked, but the few, the different, the ones in whom (if only for a moment) I had recognised the will and capacity to react, and hence a rudiment of virtue. (10)

This passage demonstrates Levi's commitment to rescuing the dead from oblivion by bearing witness to the experiences that they were unable to tell. The testimonial practice that Levi exhibits in If This is a Man represents an attempt to replace the silence of the deaths of the *sommersi* with a narrative account of their experiences.

Reasserting the individuality of the victims through narrating their personal experiences is an act of resistance against the process of dehumanisation. Thus, we are told the stories of the bestial and atavistic Elias who thrived in the camps; of Steinlauf who retained his dignity as a man through his insistence on cleanliness; of Null-Achtzehn, whose brief story attempts to counter the anonymity his number bestowed upon him; and of Alberto, Levi's companion throughout their time in the camp.

However, the selection of anecdotes included is not completely arbitrary. Those who Levi chooses to write about are included as examples to illuminate his own philosophical and sociological attempts to understand Auschwitz. For example, his account of Null Achtzehn, called only by his tattooed camp number rather than his name, as "no longer a man. [...] empty inside, nothing more than an involucre, like the slough of certain insects which one finds on the bank of swamps, held by a thread to the stones and shaken by the wind" immediately follows a passage of his own thoughts in which he describes Auschwitz as utterly hostile to human life, rendering individuals only as masters or slaves with no individuality (If This is a Man 48). Similarly, his account of Steinlauf, a "man of good will" (47) who washes every day to remind himself that he is a man, is interspersed with Levi's understanding of Auschwitz as a social experiment which seeks to dehumanise the individual. Steinlauf's story is a modern parable, explicating Levi's view that:

precisely because the Lager was a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts; that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive we must force ourselves to save at least the scaffolding, the form of civilisation. (47)

Indeed, the analogy with a parable is apt, as Levi himself considers that the stories he tells are the "stories of a new Bible" (72). By viewing his testimony in this way, Levi is connecting himself to the Jewish tradition of midrash, seeking to banish absence by encouraging a continuity within Jewish history. For Levi, the dead are not simply gone without trace, but rather become incorporated into a continuing Jewish heritage that cannot be destroyed. By acknowledging their absence, he makes the *sommersi* present.

Yet Levi is also cautious to acknowledge that he cannot speak for the dead, and that although by writing he can conjure a presence, words cannot defeat absence completely. In the preface to Moments of Reprieve he comments on the dubious ambiguity of the dead living on through the text. He confronts this paradoxical relationship between life, death and the text in The Periodic Table when he spends a chapter trying to flesh out a friend from university, Sandro Delmastro. Delmastro was caught and killed by the Fascists in April 1944 when fighting with a resistance group. Levi sadly concludes the chapter in the realisation that “Today I know it is a hopeless task to dress a man in words, words to make him live again on the printed page” (48). Despite this, for Levi it is crucial that these fragments of people’s lives be told, if the experience of the Holocaust is to be conveyed. For Levi, survivor testimony is somehow incomplete. Only those who did not survive could narrate the totality of the Holocaust. In order to convey any understanding to those who were not there, it is necessary to reveal the absence of those murdered, and to make that absence felt as an overwhelming presence in the text. In If This is a Man, we are introduced to a number of nameless individuals, whose stories are never told, most probably because Levi never knew them. Yet the silence of these barely introduced figures communicates their presence. He mentions a one man, a Pole named Rynek with whom he briefly shared a bed. We are given little information about him; he spoke impeccable French, was about thirty, “but like all of us, could be taken for seventeen or fifty” (71). Like all people, Rynek had a story, but:

He told me his story, and today I have forgotten it, but it was certainly a sorrowful, cruel and moving story; because so are all our stories, hundreds of thousands of stories, all different and all full of a tragic, disturbing necessity. (71-72)

The acknowledgement of the silence surrounding Rynek, and the hundreds of thousands of others is a powerful expression of their existence. Through the absence of their stories, Levi emphasises the significance of silence in testimonial writing. Maurice Blanchot regarded silence as being “linked to the cry, the voiceless cry,” the voice of those who cannot speak, the voices of the dead (51). Thus by accepting silence into the text, it is acknowledged that the testimony of the survivor experience

is, as felt by Wiesel and Levi amongst others, incomplete without the presence of those who were the true witnesses. In The Survivor, Terrence Des Pres notes writes:

Silence, in its primal aspect, is a consequence of terror, of a dissolution of self and world that, once known, can never be fully dispelled. But in retrospect it becomes something else. Silence constitutes the realm of the dead. It is the palpable substance of those millions murdered, the world no longer present, that intimate absence – of God, of man, of love – by which the survivor is haunted. In the survivor’s voice, the dead’s own scream is active. (36)

Through acknowledging the silence of the dead, and allowing their tangible absence to constitute a large proportion of his text, Levi’s testimony metaphorically comes to be a multi-authored piece of work, encompassing both the living and the dead. The silence in Holocaust testimonies is in part the silence of a deferred presence; it is the cry of the dead through the voice of the living.

This desire to give a voice to the dead also informs the structure of testimonial writing. Robert Eaglestone has noted that “many [Holocaust] testimonies end with specific acts of remembering individuals who were murdered” (126). Testimonies frequently return to the dead, allowing to them the final words of the text. As discussed in the previous chapter, Wiesel ends his testimony Night with an understanding of himself as one of the dead. Levi concludes his account of his days in as a prisoner with the hanging of a fellow prisoner for his part in the revolt in Auschwitz. The final chapter of his testimony, “The Story of Ten Days”, records the limbo-like state in which Levi existed between the evacuation of the camp and the arrival of the Russians. Although the text ends on a seemingly optimistic note as Levi writes that he hopes to meet one day with another man who shared those final days with him, this hopeful conclusion is overshadowed by the death of Sómoygi, a Hungarian Jew, during the night before liberation. The afterword to Levi’s testimony is concluded with the starkness of death: “of the Italian deportees, for example, only about 5 percent returned, and many of those lost families, friends, property, equilibrium, youth” (If This is a Man 398). As such, the end of the book, that is the end of the words, does not constitute the end of the testimony. The silence which signals the completion of the written text comes to constitute part of the testimony, for that silence is the representation of the stories that could not be told. Testimony,

then, can never be completed as the silence continues to relate the presence of the dead. Eaglestone suggests that the testimonial genre is characterised by what he terms a “lack of closure,” the narration of the Holocaust can never be completed (133). This is indicated by the frequency with which survivors revisit their past in further accounts of their memories. In Moments of Reprieve, Levi explains his compulsion to revisit Auschwitz in narrative form, twenty years after the publication of his first testimony:

I realised that my experience of Auschwitz was far from exhausted. I had described its fundamental features, which today have a historical pertinence, but a host of details continued to surface in my memory, and the idea of letting them fade away distressed me. [...] The reader may be surprised at this rediscovered narrative vein, thirty or forty years after the events. Well, it has been observed by psychologists that the survivors of traumatic events are divided into two well-defined groups: those who repress their past *en bloc*, and those whose memory of the offense still persists, as though carved in stone, prevailing over all previous or subsequent experiences. Now, not by choice but by nature, I belong to the second group. (9-11)

Levi’s explanation reveals the haunting presence of a dualised post-Auschwitz self, as discussed in chapter one. It echoes Delbo’s description of her Auschwitz self that lives alongside her everyday self, and colours her day-to-day existence. Levi refers to an outside authority, the nameless “psychologists,” to legitimise his own feelings of the double that manifests itself as the memory of the offence. It is this memory that fuels his responsibility to narrating the stories of the *sommersi*. In The Periodic Table, he comments that “the things that I had seen and suffered were burning inside of me: I felt closer to the dead than the living” (151). His affinity to the dead is revealed through his incorporation of their experiences and their stories into his own.

### **Speech and Silence in the Holocaust Text**

The failure of language and the attempt to create a communicative silence that incorporates the voices of the dead all represent aspects of silence in testimony. However, exploring Holocaust testimonies as narrative texts reveals that silence also functions more overtly in theme and speech. When Wiesel refers to the “death of language,” he is referring to the incapacity of words to be able to describe events. It was on arrival in Auschwitz that Levi came to understand that words alone are

insufficient, writing “then for the first time we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man” (If This is a Man 32).

Holocaust narratives confront the reader with people who cannot speak, or whose speech is repressed by circumstance or by a refusal on the part of the listener to acknowledge speech. Throughout Night, Wiesel traces the declining eloquence of his father who serves as a model for Wiesel’s belief that the Holocaust resulted in the death of language. At the beginning of Night, his father is a well respected figure in the established Jewish community in Sighet, often consulted for advice on public and personal affairs. Wiesel describes him as “a good story teller”, a cultured and sophisticated man (23). However, the experiences his father underwent in Auschwitz broke not only his spirit as his father became more and more childlike and dependent on his son, but also his power to communicate. As the tide of war was turning against the Germans in 1945, Wiesel learned that there was to be a transport leaving Auschwitz for an unknown destination. Facing the choiceless choice of either leaving with the transport or staying in the camp with an uncertain fate at the end of either decision, he rushed to consult his father:

“What shall we do?”

My father did not answer.

“What shall we do father?”

He was lost in thought. The choice was in our hands.

“Well, what shall we do father?”

He was silent.

“Let’s be evacuated with the others,” I said to him.

He did not answer. (94)

His father is silenced; how to reason such a decision, how to communicate thoughts when faced with such a choice? His father’s speech is broken, and in Auschwitz it is characterised by broken and fragmented language. Wiesel himself was not exempt from this inability to communicate. Early on in his testimony he recalls the suffocating silence that consumed him when he tried to warn his neighbours of the impending liquidation of the ghetto: “my throat was dry, the words choked in it, paralysing my lips. I could not say anymore” (26). It seems that there are simply no words to express events. This is not simply a crisis in the individual. Levi records the curious silence that descended when his transport first arrived at Auschwitz. Standing on the ramp, the prisoners were confronted with a violent reality they could not have imagined, and were left simply incapable of responding to events:

We were afraid to break that silence: everyone busied himself with his luggage, searched for someone else, called to someone else, but timidly, in a whisper [...] Everything was as silent as an aquarium, or as in certain dream sequences. (If This is a Man 25)

The use of the term aquarium renders an element of the exotic in the description of the silence. Everything is strange, surreal to the new prisoners, and they are unable to grasp any words to describe it.

Dori Laub argues that the act of testifying is dualistic in nature, in that it requires both a speaker and a listener. When the listener is absent, then the testimony is rendered mute, and Holocaust testimonies often describe witnesses who are effectively silenced by those who refuse to listen. Wiesel opens Night with one such character, Moché the Beadle. Moché was a foreign Jew in the town of Sighet, and as such was deported with all the other foreign Jews before the ghettos were even established in the village. Miraculously, he managed to escape and returned to Sighet to try and warn the Jews of their inevitable oncoming fate:

Through long days and nights, he went from one Jewish house to another, telling the story of Malka, the young girl who had taken three days to die, and of Tobias the tailor, who had begged to be killed before his sons...

Moché had changed. There was no longer any joy in his eyes. He no longer sang He no longer talked to me of God or the cabbala, but only of what he had seen. People refused not only to believe his stories, but even to listen to them. (17)

Moché's words become as silence when people refuse to hear his warnings. Eventually, Wiesel writes "even Moché the Beadle was silent. He was weary of speaking" (19). By having his words rendered metaphorically absent by ignoring them, Moché finally falls into a literal silence, his testimony silenced by the absence of willing listeners. Schwarz suggests that through the figure of Moché, Wiesel steps outside the narrative in order to address the reader and focus attention on their moral responsibility to the text:

Wiesel is using him [Moché] as metonymy for himself in his present role as narrator who is, as he writes, calling on us to listen to his words

as he tells his relentless tale of his own miraculous escape from the Nazi terror. Implicitly, he is urging us that it is our ethical responsibility not to turn away from the witnessing voice. (50)

Wiesel returns to this image of the voice repressed through the absence of a receptive listener in the figure of Madame Schächter. Her appearance in the testimony as a premonitory figure adds to the mysticism that pervades the testimony. During the transport to Auschwitz, Madame Schächter grew hysterical, screaming a warning that she could see fire. Terrified, the occupants of the cattle car forced their way to the window to see for themselves. There was no fire, and in anger at the panic she had caused they turned on her, silencing her with blows and tying her up. Like Moché she falls into silence, only for her terrible warning to come true on their arrival at Auschwitz when they saw for the first time the flames of the crematorium.

### **Textual Silence**

As silence becomes prominent thematically in the silencing of speech, it also breaks out visually on the written page. Wiesel writes that in Auschwitz, “silence grew oppressive” (Night 49). The configuration of silence as oppressive constitutes a reading of silence as presence rather than absence, and this presence is reflected in the structure of the text. The text is constructed in an awkward, stuttering fashion. Brief chapters are complemented by the brevity of individual statements. Sentences are made up of short barking isolated phrases such as: “The military march. The gate. The camp. I ran to Block 36” (87); “I repeated to myself: Don’t stop. Don’t think. Run” (97). This sparseness of style seems to suggest the presence of unspoken words behind those expressed. There is no time to stop, no time to think; also it seems there is no time to speak, for it seems that even though Wiesel returned repeatedly to his Holocaust experiences in subsequent autobiographical and fictional narratives, there is never enough time or space to fully represent his experiences. Silence also breaks out in the text more explicitly in the form of frequent ellipses and pauses. Towards the end Wiesel’s father’s speech becomes broken: “I can’t go on....Have mercy on me....I’ll wait here until we can get to the baths....You can come and find me” (116). These pauses in direct speech are common, but there are also such moments in the straight narrative, for example, on the occasion of an Allied bombing raid on Buna, Wiesel writes: “The raid lasted over an hour. If it could only have lasted ten times



more hours!...Then silence fell once more” (72). The unnatural silence in the camp is made more vivid to the reader through the unexpected break in the narrative. Levi adopts this same technique in If This is a Man, recalling: “...And for the first time since I entered the camp the reveille catches me in a deep sleep and its ringing is a return from nothingness” (56). Whilst the harsh interruption of the reveille is reflected in the structural disjunction between the silent ellipsis and the comparative din of linguistic expression, this sentence is also representative of the rupture Auschwitz generated in Levi’s life. The opening caesura intimates a fracturing between two lives, a life outside the camp being reduced to “nothingness” as Levi becomes assimilated into an existence in Auschwitz.

Wiesel interprets these silences in the text from a theological perspective, linking the silences in Holocaust testimony to Jewish traditions of sacred writing:

The space between any two words is vaster than the distance between heaven and earth. To bridge it you must close your eyes and leap. A Hasidic tradition tells us that that in the Torah the white spaces, too, are God-given. Ultimately, to write is an act of faith. (All Rivers 321)

This theologically inflected understanding of textual caesura invites the reader of testimony to explore the significance of silence in testimony. Jewish tradition associates the sacred with the unspeakable, evidenced through the written representation of God as YHWH. White spaces in the text reflect then not an absence, but an unspeakable presence in the Torah and also within Holocaust testimony. This connection with the sacred has been noted by survivors; just as Levi has speculated that the stories of the Holocaust constitute the “stories of a new Bible” (If This is a Man 72) so Wiesel has called for a “new Talmud” in the wake of the Holocaust (Jewish Values 285). Ernst Van Alphen argues that if “the extreme horror of the historical reality causes language to fall short [...] the Holocaust assumes metaphysical dimensions: it becomes the absolute symbol of Evil, and hence it is as unrepresentable as Yahweh” (43). However, van Alphen characterises this approach as “undesirable and even dangerous because it ultimately makes it impossible to see the Holocaust as a moment, albeit apocalyptic, in *human history*” (43). For van Alphen, constructing the Holocaust as a metaphysical phenomenon threatens to

excise it from history altogether, as the Event cannot be recognised as the consequence of human actions, as part of “human history.”

Drawing on theories of memory and trauma, Mieke Bal offers a different interpretation of the “white spaces” in the Holocaust testimony. Bal argues that “in narratological terms, repression results in ellipsis - the omission of important elements in the narrative [...] repression interrupts the flow of narratives that shapes memory” (Bal, Crewe and Spitzer ix). Whilst Bal employs the term “ellipsis” more generally to mean any omission in the narrative, rather than only textual pauses, the suggestion that ellipses are a consequence of the repression of traumatic memories offers a useful approach to Kitty Hart’s testimony I am Alive. I am Alive is the first of Hart’s Holocaust testimonies and was written, according to the dedication, to tell the story of her experiences to her children. The story of Hart’s survival is almost incredible: her family fled from Bielsko in Silesia in 1939 to Lublin, hoping for safer conditions in central Poland. As the situation began to deteriorate in Lublin with the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws and ghettoisation in 1940, her family attempted to flee over the German-Russian border, but were forced back to the Lublin ghetto. Recognising the danger they were in as the ghetto round-ups increased, the family chanced an escape from the ghetto by removing the armbands that identified them as Jews, and boldly walking out of the ghetto gates. They briefly sought refuge in small village to the south named Zabia Wola, but were all too aware of the precariousness of their situation. Her father managed to obtain false ID papers for them, and they returned to the comparative safety of Lublin under assumed identities. On arriving there, the family decided to separate in order to remain safe. Hart remained with her mother, and together they found places on a transport of Poles being taken to work in Germany. They worked for IG Farben for some time but in 1942 their true identity was discovered and they were arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Auschwitz. In 1944, Hart and her mother were transported to Gross Rosen, and then onto a small labour camp called Reichenbach in south east Germany. In February 1945, the order was given to evacuate the camp and she and her mother were forced into a long and dangerous death march. The approaching end of the war brought chaos as the prisoners were marched from place to place as their guards sought to evade the Allied advance. Liberation finally came in April of that year, and Hart and her mother worked for the American troops who liberated them for some

time as interpreters. It was in 1946 that they finally discovered that they were the only survivors from their family.

Yet Hart's story of a series of almost miraculous escapes is told in a carefully measured and restrained style. The introduction to her testimony, written by Lord Russell of Liverpool, speaks of a "complete lack of emotion in her fascinating account of those terrible years," and attributes this sparse style to Hart's repression of emotions, since "a saturation point is reached when all feelings of love and hate are killed and all that is left is a kind of indifference" (9). It is possible to detect this repression in her use of ellipses in the text. Recalling her time in Auschwitz, Hart writes:

Only sheer faith and willpower could keep one alive. Death seemed an easy way out. All that was needed was a slight touch of the electrified fence which held us prisoner and finish.... Every day girls were found dead near the fence. (66)

In this description, Hart uses the ellipsis to move from an action performed by the living – the touching of the fence – to the image of corpses lain on the floor. The ellipsis represents a repression of the unspeakable, the moment of transition from life to death. Yet whilst the passage does not – cannot – represent this moment, the enforced pause created by the ellipsis focuses the reader's attention on what is meant by the oddly neutral word "finish." She returns to this use of ellipsis as repression when describing her work in the *Kanadakommando* in Auschwitz. She was working there in 1944, and recalls the preparations that were made for the arrival of the Hungarian Jews: "another party of girls was brought out from Lager BII – there would be so much more to be sorted" (101). The dash seems to signal an inability to confront what the arrival of more labourers signified. The imminent murder of thousands of Jews in what would later be understood as one of the most intense periods of liquidation in Auschwitz is represented obliquely with a reference to the additional labour that would be forced upon the *Kanadakommando*. Whilst this does not seem to be repression exactly, it is an acknowledgement that some things seemingly cannot be described directly.

Hart's use of dashes also draws attention to the actual process of writing, highlighting, probably unwittingly, the conflict between narrative techniques and the story that the narrative seeks to reveal. In an attempt to describe the area where the *Kanadakommando* worked, Hart exposes the inadequacy of simile in her writing:

At the bottom on the left hand side, by the last huts, was a huge heap - it really looked like a mountain – as high at least as a three storey building. [...] These were the belongings of those already dead. (85)

The dashes function to separate the mountain simile from the rest of the descriptive text in this passage, suggesting that this narrative technique is somehow out of place in her testimony. A later comment also functions to reveal the redundancy of simile, when she writes “it seemed as if blood was coming out, as indeed it was” (87). Alvin H. Rosenfeld asserts that the failure of metaphor and simile is one of the “abiding laws” of Holocaust writing. He argues:

There are no metaphors for Auschwitz just as Auschwitz is not a metaphor for anything else. Why is that the case? Because the flames were real flames, the ashes only ashes, the smoke always and only smoke. [...] the burnings do not lend themselves to metaphor, simile, or symbol – to likeness or association with anything else. They can only ‘be’ or ‘mean’ what in fact they were: the death of the Jews. (19)

However, Rosenfeld's prohibition on the use of metaphor in Holocaust narratives misinterprets the way in which metaphor can function within these accounts. Rosenfeld justifies his argument on the basis that metaphor can only fail in a narrative which deals with the horrors of the Holocaust. Yet, I would argue, it is precisely this failure of metaphor which confirms their value in these texts. It is through the recognition of the failed metaphor and a realisation that metaphors are inadequate for the task of describing the Holocaust that the reader moves towards an understanding of the unrepresentable nature of the Holocaust and so closer to an understanding of the reality of the Holocaust. However, this is not to suggest that the use of metaphor in Holocaust narratives is always characterised by failure. In a discussion of the writing of Tadeusz Borowski, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi argues that metaphor succeeds only when “images of comparison [...] are [...] similes borrowed from the same realm of experience” (55). Although Hart uses metaphor and simile sparingly throughout her account, there are occasions when it seems to work effectively. Hart's

successful metaphors work precisely because she writes from within her experience, and so seems to seal the narrator into the world she represents in her narrative. Her description of the SS guards in the final days of the death march as “lost sheep” serves to dehumanise the guards in the same way that Nazi rhetoric sought to dehumanise the Jews by likening them to animals (142). The juxtaposition of these dehumanised guards with the prisoners who were “singing and laughing,” joyous in the knowledge of their imminent liberation adds to the power of the simile (142).

The pause is a stumbling point, a point at which the reader can hear silence as a tangible presence. Silence in the performative text takes on a dual reality; it is both a relation of the real silence of the Holocaust, and it is part of the text as a real and physical entity, a material trace of the Holocaust. Maurice Blanchot wrote that “the disaster happens after the event” (51); the possibility of experiencing the disaster lies in its physical trace. Thus, the physicality of the text becomes participatory in the Holocaust, and indistinguishable from it. The fragmented construction of the text allows the chaos of the Holocaust to enter into its contemporary physical trace, and thus the text becomes not an interpretative representation of the past, but rather a presentation of itself as the disaster.

In exploring these different forms that silence takes in Holocaust testimony, it can be seen that silence operates as a present absence that bears witness to the un-lived experience, to the failure of language and unspeakability of the event, to the connection of the Holocaust to Jewish history, and to the voices of the *sommersi*. To return to Treat who links the incommunicability to the Holocaust to that of the atomic bombings, silence is a primary theme in the writings of *hibakusha*. However, the composition of the silence in these writings differs to that in Holocaust testimonies. The event, the representation of the event, language, and silence interact in different ways in *genbaku bungaku* (atomic bomb writing) in a way which I have defined in an opposing manner as “presence as absence.”

## 2.3 Presence as Absence: Writing the Japanese Experience

### Silencing the Atomic Voice

The bond between *hibakusha* and testimonial practice is expressed through the appellation *kataribe* or storyteller. In common with Holocaust survivors such as Primo Levi who keenly felt the need to tell their tale, many A-bomb survivors testify to the same. “I feel an urgent need to pass on to others what happened,” writes Masaki Sachiko, “I want to stand before each and every person on the face of the earth and tell of the madness and horror of war” (146). Yet, as is the case with Holocaust testimonies, this compulsion to tell the tale is compromised by the inability to find words to describe the experience. Masaki was fourteen at the time of the bombing, and along with many other schoolchildren of her age had been mobilised as part of the war effort to work in a Nagasaki torpedo factory. She was in the factory when the bomb fell and whilst she was fortunate not to be badly injured herself, she witnessed much suffering as she struggled back to her home that day. In the aftermath, she fell victim to A-bomb disease which disabled her for a year, and continued to plague her throughout her life, culminating in the need for an operation for cancer as an adult. “I always find myself in a quandary when I try to talk about my experiences as a victim of the atomic bomb,” she writes. “I want to tell what it was like but I cannot find the words. How can I possibly make others understand? I tend to give up halfway” (146). As John Whittier Treat suggests, it is at this point of inexpressibility that Holocaust survivors and *hibakusha* find unity. Whilst the difficulties of finding a way to represent the trauma of the atomic bomb, such as the failure of language, are often immeasurable for *hibakusha*, these are not the only barriers to expression that they face. Specific cultural, social and historical factors lend this thwarted compulsion to tell the tale has a further dimension. Silence functions as a measure of authenticity for the *hibakusha*, in the commonly held belief that those who genuinely experienced horror would not speak of it. This belief is most explicitly stated by a second generation survivor, whose father never spoke to him about his experiences of “that day”, as *hibakusha* came to term the day the atomic bomb was dropped. The son saw his father’s silence as evidence of the truth of the trauma he endured, saying “Those who really suffered cannot talk about it [...] for if you knew the real experience of the nuclear annihilation, you would not even

wish to recall it” (qtd. in Yoneyama 88). According to this perspective, silence becomes evidence for the truth of experience. The silencing of the experience is actively encouraged by the potential listener.

This silencing of the victim is also encountered in Holocaust narratives. For example, Ruth Klüger recalls her aunt telling her after the war not to speak of her experiences, exhorting her to “erase from your memory everything that happened in Europe. You have to make a new beginning. You have to forget what they did to you. Wipe it off like chalk from a blackboard” (219). Dori Laub argues that such enforced silence does not authenticate the truth of the story, but rather annihilates the story itself:

The absence of an empathetic 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 recognise their realness, annihilates the story. (Felman and Laub 68)

The possibility of testimony is destroyed by the refusal to hear it. “For the testimonial process to take place,” Laub continues, “there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other* – in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude” (70). Denying the possibility of dialogue by imposing silence makes testimony impossible. Whilst both Holocaust survivors and *hibakusha* testify to being told to remain silent about their experiences, the nature of this injunction is subtly different. For the Holocaust survivor, there is little to suggest that revealing their experiences would compromise the authenticity of their account. For the *hibakusha*, this is a primary motivation for the concealment of traumatic memories. Criticism of *hibakusha* who speak out about their experiences of the A-bomb is widespread, and has become a commercial and industrial concern. Yoneyama points to the antagonism the *hibakusha* faced from post-war urban redevelopers who objected to the city of Hiroshima’s image being forever tainted by its terrible past, a particular example being the “Peace Tower”. Planned to be the world’s largest skyscraper, it was proposed to be a centre of entertainment and commerce that would rejuvenate Hiroshima’s prosperity. The plans included a monument to the atomic bomb in the form of a “light of peace” within the development. Objections to the inappropriate nature of the building were greeted with

the response: “we certainly do not mean to deny the Atomic Bomb Dome. But isn’t it about time to pursue not only the misery but also the pleasures of peace?” (qtd. in Yoneyama 43). The motivation behind *hibakusha* testimony is treated suspiciously, and Yoneyama concludes that the redevelopers suspect that the survivors:

keep on speaking about the past not so much because they genuinely believe that their storytellings can somehow deter the future use of nuclear weapons, but because they wish to further partisan political interests. These redevelopers believe that those who “really know the bomb” would not be able to talk it so openly. (89)

*Hibakusha* face, then, an openly hostile reception to their memories which encourages them to remain silent about their experiences. Further to this, many *hibakusha* feared discrimination as a result of having lived through the bomb. Employers were often concerned that A-Bomb related illness might impair the ability of their workers; ignorance, particularly in the early years, about the nature of A-Bomb disease led to the rumour that it was contagious, and so many avoided contact with *hibakusha*. Fears that *hibakusha* were left infertile by their experiences, or that they may pass on genetic deformities or disorders to their children as a result of their exposure to radiation, meant that many survivors faced harsh social prejudice when seeking marriage partners. The Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett, one of the first Allied journalists to go to Hiroshima after the bombing, recalls the words of Ms Hasegawa in 1971. Born in the year of the atomic bombing, she spoke to him of the still prevailing social discrimination against *hibakusha*, saying “People who come from outside to work in Hiroshima have a slogan ‘Don’t marry a Hiroshima girl’ because they fear for the after effects” (qtd. in Burchett 63). The combination of these attitudes led to many *hibakusha* concealing their experiences, even from family members, as in the case of Shizue Koga’s sister who concealed her past from her children, as discussed in chapter one.

### **Censorship and Expression: Ōta Yōko’s “City of Corpses”**

During the post-war Occupation period, the silencing of *hibakusha* was not merely encouraged, but legally enforced. On September 19 1945, the General Headquarters of the Allied Occupation put in place a Press Code which sought to



cancel any material considered to be seditious, including a blanket ban on any unauthorized discourse on the atomic bomb. Kyo Maclear has aptly commented that the “post-war censorship codes operated to mute the voices of atomic victims” and it did this very effectively (43). Not only political writings fell under the remit of the Press Code, but also music, photographs, films and children’s books. The Code also muted the suffering of the *hibakusha* on a much more individual level, as John W. Dower explains:

It is at the local level that U.S. censorship was most inhumane. With but rare exceptions, survivors of the bomb could not grieve publicly, could not share their experiences through the written word, could not be offered public counsel and support. (127)

Retribution for breaking the code was swift. Shiego Hayashi, a photographer, had all of his photographs of the immediate aftermath of the bombing seized by the General Headquarters in December 1945 (Yamane 11). He was fortunate to escape further punishment, for as Maclear observes, “on more than one occasion, the publication ban was used as a basis for harassing and threatening artists into compliance” (42). Shōda Shinoe, a little known poet, responded to her experiences of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima with a privately published collection of one hundred *waka* (a generic term covering a variety of unrhymed poetic styles). Although published in October 1948, the dates on the edition were changed to read December 1948, when the Press Code restrictions were beginning to wind down. This modification of the publication date was necessary, claims Treat, because “Occupation officials [...] may have decided to arrest Shōda – and according to the rumours of the day, put her to death – for violating Press Code provisions” (Writing Ground Zero 192). The Press Code was widely considered to be overly harsh, leading Kurihara Sadako, a leading critic of Ōta Yōko’s work, to caustically comment that “at that time it was forbidden to speak or write even of the fact that there was censorship system in existence. It was not permitted even to leave traces indicating that the censors had deleted anything” (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 90). Setsuko Thurlow, a feminist scholar, remains highly critical of the Press Code and argues that it meant that the *hibakusha* “had to suffer alone, in silence and with a sense of abandonment” (227).

Yet for all this the Press Code was inconsistent, particularly towards the end of the Occupation period in 1952. The publication of objective scientific data was permitted, but literary works were subjected to differing rulings. Whilst they were officially prohibited, some pieces evaded the attention of censors. The most significant of these is Tamiki's Summer Flowers, which was published in 1947 and avoided censorship, it has been suggested, because it was published in a literary journal of such limited circulation that it simply went unnoticed by the Occupation authorities (Treat Writing Ground Zero 90).

Ōta Yōko was the first professional author to publish work concerning the A-bomb, in a piece called "*Kaitei no yō na hikari – genshi bakudan no kūshū ni atte*" ("A Light as if from the Depths – The Atomic Air Bomb Air Attack"). She later echoed the title of this piece in City of Corpses when she tried to describe the moment that the A-bomb dropped, writing: "I was sound asleep inside the mosquito net [when the A-bomb dropped]. [...] I dreamed I was enveloped by a blue flash, like lightening at the bottom of the sea" (Ōta 182). This brief article was published in the *Asahi* newspaper on August 30 1945, prior to the imposition of the Press Code. The style of this article, in its admiration for the dignity of suffering, maintains a very different tone to her testimony City of Corpses, written immediately afterwards. She wrote:

The reality I saw in the riverbed in the sixth through eighth [of August] was hell on earth...however, people lived in the noblest spirit for those three days. [...] I believe that the end of the war displayed the dignified beauty of the victims (qtd. in Tachibana 30).

Prior to the bombing Ōta, like most Japanese, had maintained a pro-war stance, and Treat suggests that this article stands as her final avocation of this perspective. Certainly the sense that images of beauty could be located within the experience of the A-bomb is absent from any of her later writings. Treat attributes this initial anomalous response to the "delusion of a person still traumatised by unprecedented events" (Writing Ground Zero 202). These "delusions" would soon lift when she came to write City of Corpses.

The ease with which this piece was published in the pre-Press Code period contrasted strongly with the opposition Ōta faced when she came to publish her testimony just a couple of months later. Her manuscript first attracted the attention of the censors when she sent it to her editor. She was visited by a non-Japanese speaking American intelligence officer who had not even read her manuscript, but nevertheless proceeded to question her extensively. He asked her to confirm who had read her manuscript, the political leanings of her editor, and to supply him with a list of her friends and their particular political ideologies. She was also asked whether she had been back to Hiroshima since the day of the attack (she had), and whether her manuscript exposed any atomic bomb “secrets”. The official concluded his interview with the order, “I want you to forget your memories of the atomic bomb. America won’t use the atomic bomb again, so I want you to forget the events in Hiroshima” (Minear 141). Unsurprisingly, Ōta replied that she could not accede to this order, but nevertheless, the first edition of her testimony was published in November 1948, albeit with significant deletions. Richard H. Minear suggests that Ōta’s account of this interview may not be entirely reliable as it was written some eight years after the event, but even taking this into account, the censored first edition stands as testament to the stringent nature of the Press Code. The second chapter of her testimony, “Expressionless Faces”, which lists the numbers of dead and injured using statistics she claims to have drawn from an unnamed newspaper article, as well as the responses of eminent Japanese physicians, was deleted entirely from the first edition. City of Corpses was not published in its entirety until May 1950.

### **“Wholly caught up in the city of corpses”: The Testimony of Ōta Yōko**

Ōta embarked on writing her testimony almost immediately on fleeing Hiroshima. She first moved to Hiroshima from a small village just west of the city in 1916 when she was 13 in order to attend school. She eventually married and remained living in Hiroshima, working as a school teacher. However, this, her first marriage, was troubled, and when it ended she moved to Tokyo with her mother. By late 1944, the intense firebombing of the capital led Ōta to send her mother to the comparative safety of Hiroshima, and Ōta joined her there in January 1945. They were living there together with Ōta’s sister and her infant daughter on August 6 when

the bomb was dropped. In the aftermath, they sought refuge in Kushima, and it was here, whilst living above a sake shop, that Ōta wrote City of Corpses.

In common with Wiesel, Levi and many other Holocaust survivors, Ōta felt the need to tell the tale of the atomic bomb. Even as she was walking through the ruined streets of the Hakushima district of Hiroshima in the immediate aftermath, Ōta was aware of what she perceived as her responsibility to tell the world what had happened. As Ōta and her sister moved through the streets near the Teishin hospital, they found their way blocked by rubble and the corpses of victims. Her sister turned away from the sight, and criticised Ōta for the impropriety of her gaze, who responded: “I’m looking with two sets of eyes – the eyes of a human being and the eyes of writer” (Ōta 205). This reply demonstrates that Ōta very rapidly became aware of a dualised sense of self, as discussed in chapter one, developing out of traumatic experience. Seemingly immediately she is able to distinguish between an experiential “human being” self, and an observing authorial self, and she realises the inextricable bond between the two. She continues, “someday I’ll have to [write about these experiences]. That’s the responsibility of a writer who’s seen it” (205). Yet for Ōta this imperative to speak takes on an added practical urgency that is absent from the writings of Levi and Wiesel. Indeed, Treat suggests that this “testimonial urgency” comes to inform her post-war fiction as well (Writing Ground Zero 200). Whilst the full implications of the after-effects of the atomic bomb were not properly understood for many years, the *hibakusha* rapidly realised that surviving the initial blast was not a guarantee of recovery. As time progressed more and more people, including those who entered the cities after the days of the bombing, began to succumb fatally to the after-effects of radiation, the so-called “A-bomb disease”. Ōta was particularly fearful of falling victim to this, and her testimony is consequently overshadowed with an awareness of her potentially imminent death. In the preface to her testimony, written in 1950, she explains how these fears came to inform her literary style:

Death was breathing down my neck. If I was to die, I wanted first to fulfil my responsibility of getting the story written down.

Under those circumstances, I had no time to organise City of Corpses in good literary form. [...] I had neither the time nor the emotional reserves necessary to portray that reality clearly and skilfully in the format of superior fiction.

I hurried with the writing, one thought in mind: to get it written, using the strength I had and a form that came easily to me, before I died. (147)

It is interesting that Ōta considers fiction to be a superior form of representation to testimony. It is perhaps her status as a prominent writer before the war that gave her a greater appreciation of literary style, and so a greater struggle when she attempted to translate her experiences of the A-bomb into written narrative. Looking back over her career as a writer of both testimony and fiction, Ōta was left frustrated, commenting that:

I feel ashamed whenever I plan a work making use of traditional Japanese literary techniques. I feel so ashamed that I shudder. I live in a nation that has experienced the unprecedented. I am unable to cling to the ordinary sorts of literature that we had before. (qtd. in Treat, Writing Ground Zero 202)

Ōta's recognition of the failure of traditional Japanese literary techniques in the wake of the atomic bomb contests the casual assumptions of some post-war critics of testimonial literature. Ian Buruma, in comparing the (im)possibilities of narrating the trauma of the Holocaust and the atomic bomb, suggests that "the jargon of Japanese imperialism was racist and overblown but it did not carry the stench of the death camps" (50). The obvious implication made by Buruma is that the Japanese language did not sustain the same amount of damage that the German language did in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Buruma perhaps draws his conclusion from a simplistic understanding of the relationship between acts of barbarity and the language in which they were conceived as interpreted by Steiner. According to Buruma's formulation, as the Japanese language was not contaminated by perpetrator usage, the survivors can use their native language to express their experiences as victims with greater ease than Holocaust survivors in Europe whose language was tainted by its association with the perpetration of genocide.

As discussed in chapter one, Kurihara Sadako takes an opposite perspective and argues that the cultural experience of resistance born in World War II bequeathed a new literary tradition upon European writers, which Holocaust survivors were able to draw upon when narrating their experiences. For Kurihara, the existence in Europe

of a twentieth century literary tradition that attempts to deal with the complexities of the representation of atrocity, a tradition that goes back to the First World War, eases the burden of incommunicability. Certainly, Ōta's comments on the failure of existing Japanese literary forms to confront atrocity seem to accord with Kurihara's opinion. Yet, this does not necessarily legitimise Kurihara's claim. Holocaust survivors also recognise the failure of literary traditions to equip them with the narrative tools with which to approach the Holocaust. Wiesel explained his testimonial crisis in writing that: "I knew the role of the survivor was to testify. Only I did not know how. I lacked experience, *I lacked a framework*. I mistrusted the tools, the procedures" (qtd. in Schwarz 53).

Ultimately, in arguing for greater narrative challenges for either *hibakusha* or Holocaust survivors, both Buruma and Kurihara are arguing for a perspective that overlooks individual responses to atrocity, and generalises the representational difficulties that beset survivors from each event who attempted to bear witness to their experiences. Whilst the particular problems of contaminated language and the absence of an adequate literary model cannot – and should not – be ignored, questions are inevitably raised by the ease with which Buruma and Kurihara generalise testimonial response. Is it really the case that *hibakusha* faced fewer problems with finding words to describe their experiences? Did a different literary heritage which lent itself to the representation of atrocity significantly benefit Holocaust survivors who sought to testify to their experiences in narrative form? The overwhelmingly negative response to each of these questions found in the testimonies of survivors warns against these generalised analyses which function to reduce the complexities of representation to a competitive level.

Ōta's struggle with literary form is evidenced through the fragmented structure of City of Corpses, which incorporates her personal response, characterised by her anger towards both the bomb and the Japanese military authorities, whom she blames for the destruction, with extracts from newspaper articles and statistical data. The inclusion of these sources stems from her recognition of the difficulty of trying "to communicate in writing the indescribable fright and terror, the gruesome misery, the numbers of victims and dead, the horrifying conditions of atomic bomb sickness"

(Ōta 148). Directly contradicting Buruma's contention that *hibakusha* did not confront inadequacy within existing language, Ōta writes in her prologue:

The new methods of description and expression necessary to write cannot be found in the repertoire of an established writer. [...] It would probably have been a simple matter if one were able to express the bitterness of that experience in terms of that ready-made concept 'hell,' whose existence I do not acknowledge. I was absolutely unable to depict the truth without first creating a new terminology. (148)

To expand on this theme, she offers examples: of a girl whose breast had been ripped out by the explosion she writes, "try as one might to depict that in writing, it cannot be done" (149). Of another young woman, horrifically injured in the explosion, Ōta says simply: "To people who know nothing of the nature of a uranium bomb, facts like these must seem like lies" (149). As she finds her skills of description jeopardised in the face of individual instances of suffering such as these, so does she falter in trying to communicate the more impersonal scale of the catastrophe, and at this point turns to a newspaper extract. In an understated explanation for her decision to include journalistic articles, Ōta writes:

Next, from newspaper clippings in my possession, I should like to set down for posterity a statistical of the casualties the atomic bomb inflicted. I don't know why it is, but without doing so I can't get myself into the mood to start writing of the events of that summer morning in Hiroshima. (169)

Following this newspaper clipping, she includes extracts from the scientific report of Professor Fujiwara, and a medical report by Dr Tsuzuki. Words seem to fail Ōta, and rather than remain silent, she chooses to include the words of others to supplement her own account. This reliance on factual data and scientific data when words fail is actually part of a wider trend, and comes to form an identifying characteristic of atomic bomb testimony.

Testimonial accounts are characterised by frequent references to the heat of the bomb, the size of the bomb, the survivors distance from ground zero. As the Holocaust narrative falls into an expressive silence at moments that defy description, so in the A-bomb narrative we see a dependence upon objective data as evidence of descriptive language failing the author. Yamaoka Michiko was aged fifteen when the

bomb was dropped on her home town of Hiroshima. She states early in her testimony that:

My house was one point three kilometers from the hypocenter. My place of work was five hundred meters from the hypocenter. I walked toward the hypocenter in an area where all the houses and buildings had been deliberately demolished for firebreaks [...] They say temperatures of seven thousand degrees centigrade hit me. (384)

Yamaoka replaces a description of her experience with factual information about the temperature of the blast that hit her, information that is not her own but borrowed from an anonymous source. The geography of the city is retrospectively acknowledged; she walks towards the blast hypocentre, as the topology of Hiroshima prior to the bomb is made redundant in the face of the catastrophe. Descriptions of Hiroshima as a city made up of streets and districts are rejected in favour of portraying it solely in relation to the location of ground zero. The precise detail revealed in this description can be better recognised when compared with the halting ambiguity in Yamaoka's attempt to re-envision the moment the bomb fell: "There was no sound. I felt something strong. It was terribly intense. I felt colours" (384). The restraint displayed in this commentary is inextricably linked to Yamaoka's geographical positioning, and as discussed in chapter one, Treat is of the opinion that the closer the individual was to the epicentre of the explosion, the greater the difficulty that survivor has in narrating their experiences, an opinion borne out by the evidence from The Witness of Those Two Days. The inclusion of factual data here heralds the deficiency in language to describe experience. This restriction in expression is further exemplified by Yamaoka as she attempts to portray the violent images that she witnessed:

There were people, barely breathing, trying to push their intestines back in. People with their legs wrenched off. Without heads. Or with faces burned and swollen out of shape. The scene I saw was a living hell. (385)

The increasingly fragmented sentences she uses are eventually silenced as Yamaoka falls into using familiar terms – the image of hell – to portray the indescribable. On the other hand, Ōta identifies her own inability, or refusal, to invoke the image of hell in her narrative as key to her struggle with language. Ōta comments that:



I have not seen hell, nor do I acknowledge the existence of the Buddhist hell. Losing sight of the exaggeration involved, people often spoke of the experience of the atomic bomb as ‘hell’ or ‘scenes of hell.’ It would probably have been a simple matter if one were able to express the bitterness of experience in terms of that ready made concept ‘hell’ whose existence I do not acknowledge. (148)

Ōta emphasises her rejection of the existence of the Buddhist hell, and her comments carry a tone of condemnation for those survivors who slipped into a “simple” comparison of the destruction to hell. This makes her inclusion of the image of hell in City of Corpses all the more surprising. Writing of the chaos that reigned in the city of Hiroshima in the aftermath compared to the comparative tranquillity of the surrounding countryside to which many survivors fled, she remarks, “The living hell that was Hiroshima and the peaceful countryside were distinctly different worlds” (237). In employing the image of hell, she is betraying her method of testimonial practice by “exaggerating” the scene she describes. Her choice of the word “exaggeration” is curious at first glance. However, Ōta is not trying to diminish the horrors of the bomb, but rather she is expressing concern that in utilising a “ready made concept”, a concept moreover that is subject to the interpretation of each individual who uses or hears it, the witness is shying away from the describing the reality of the event. She is also wary of designating any one scene as like hell because such a description would conjure up images of unsurpassed horror to the reader. Yet for Ōta, the horrors she witnessed cannot be ranked in this way, and she writes frustratedly “I don’t like to use the word ‘hell’ because that would use up my vocabulary of horror; but there was no other way to describe this scene” (205). However, her rejection of the image of hell places Ōta in a difficult position. She acknowledges that as a description it cannot do justice to the bomb, but at the same time she is unable to suggest an alternative. The corollary of her strident rejection of hell imagery is the recognition of the unrepresentability of the A-bomb.

*Hibakusha* frequently open their testimonial narratives with a record of their distance from the bomb, and this information often stands in place of a description of their experience. In another account, Yoshimura Katsuyoshi begins with:

In August 1945 I was in the first grade of primary school. My house was about 1.8km from the hypocenter, at the approach to the Tsurami bridge. The bridge spans the Kyobashi River, a tributary of the Ota River that skirts Hijiyama Park. Along the embankment was a road five or six meters wide which our house faced. From the road the house looked as though it had only one storey, but from below it could be seen to have two floors. (38)

Yoshimura continues in this descriptive vein for some time. As with Yamaoka's account, the extent of this description can only be acknowledged when compared to the brief sentences which describe the moment of the explosion itself:

The house collapsed around us, and we were buried under the debris. The ceiling and the furniture from the second floor fell around us. It seemed like a long time, but was probably only ten or fifteen minutes before things stopped falling and everything grew quiet. We were enveloped in darkness. (39)

The representation of the experience of the bomb itself is detached and emotionless, and minimal when placed in comparison with the lengthy factual description of Yoshimura's position at the time of the attack. The emphasis placed on positioning in so many *hibakusha* testimonies is in part due to historical context. The majority of early testimonies were written by survivors applying for medical treatment and financial assistance, and the *genbaku nihō* (the collective name for the "two atom bomb laws" passed in 1957 and 1968 which dealt, somewhat belatedly, with *hibakusha* welfare) dictated that in order to qualify, *hibakusha* needed to clearly state their proximity to the epicentre. The effect of the atomic bomb on the individual had to be presented as calculable in scientific measurements, and as a consequence, personal testimonies became littered with factual data. These early testimonies became the model for many later testimonies, and so the factual style of narration became firmly established. As Yoneyama points out, the effect of this scientific styling was that "survivors became alienated from their pasts, as whatever evidence they supplied for their own experiences was surpassed by externalised and objectified criteria" (94). In this lengthy description of quantifiable facts, of the describable, is the implicit message that the personal experience of the atomic bomb, of the indescribable, cannot be narrated. Personal experience becomes silenced, or at best, minimised in the face of factual narration. This is not to suggest that atomic bomb testimonies do not contain many disturbing passages of horror both witnessed and

experienced. However, this reliance on factual data in descriptions of moments of extremis indicates a sense of detachment on the part of the survivor; in replacing their own personal narrative with anonymous factual discourse, the survivor silences their own experience by distancing themselves from it.

Treat, however, suggests that Ōta's call for a new language is misplaced. "The old one suffices," he argues. "The real problem," he suggests:

is not the relationship of the writer divorced from the means of delineating a new reality to that elusive means, but rather that of a writer fully initiated in that reality to a readership which cannot be, or, in consideration of the consequences which might ensue, should not be. (Writing Ground Zero 203)

This more subtle appreciation of the failure of language in the face of atrocity reflects the concerns of Holocaust writers such as Delbo and Levi who acknowledge that whilst atrocity may not destroy language, it destroys the continuity of meaning in language. Survivors draw on a different frame of reference to non-survivors, and whilst the words may exist to describe the atrocity they are rendered empty by the experience of extremity. For Ōta, the use of language that would be understood by a non-survivor, that could recreate the experience of the bomb on the page, would herald a betrayal of the reality of the event. Lifton comments that she developed "a survivor's sense of 'sacred historical truth'," that dominated her attempts to write about the A-bomb (Death in Life 425). In an interview with him, she explained "I just want to write the truth – to describe it as it was without exaggeration" (qtd. in Lifton Death in Life 425). This desire to tell the truth as she saw it is emphasised in her prologue to City of Corpses. Ōta writes:

My pen did not take in the whole city. I wrote only of my very limited experience of the riverbed.[...] I wrote also of the sights I saw on our flight to the country. The whole city was buried in a calamity more sad and severe than the scenes I saw on the riverbed and in the streets; that fact I should like my readers to be aware of. (148)

Ōta's resistance to the temptation to describe events she had not witnessed is testament to her desire to write only what she knew to be the truth of the bombing, albeit limited in scope. In order to maintain her fealty to historical truth, she dismisses

the possibility of drawing on informal reportage to supplement her account, preferring instead to rely only on that which she personally witnessed, and officially recorded factual data. Statistical facts in City of Corpses, then, in the form of confirmed death tolls and scientific reports stand as a form of representation that cannot be jeopardised by either the taint of exaggeration or inadequacy of language. For Ōta, they are as direct a representation of the “sacred historical truth” as is achievable.

Ōta has, however, been criticised for a sense of arrogance which pervades her writing. On meeting her, Lifton recalls that “surrounding her sense of being a leader *hibakusha* writer was a fragile aura of pride, anxiety, vanity and suspiciousness” (Death in Life 422). He characterises her as defensive and somewhat aggressive during interview, surprised that he had interviewed other A-bomb writers, remarking that “I am the only A-bomb writer. Who else could you find?” (qtd. in Lifton, Death in Life 423). Reiko Tachibana refers to her “emotional tendency to measure external events in terms of their effect on her personally” (59). Certainly Ōta centralises her own suffering in her testimony, often describing the agonies of other victims in order to emphasise the horror of her own experiences. In her prologue to City of Corpses she writes:

It was [...] the first time that thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands died in one instant, and I was the first to walk weeping among corpses lying about, so many that there was hardly a place to set one’s feet. I was also the first to see the gruesomeness of the atomic bomb sickness, a vast and profound force that destroys the human body even while the body is alive. Under these conditions anything and everything I was forced to see was new under the sun; being forced to witness it was itself tragic. (149)

This passage does suggest an element of self-aggrandisement, in her assertion that she was the first to bear witness to the destruction, and that the tragedy of her witnessing was comparable to the tragedy of the death of thousands. Tachibana points specifically to the concluding chapter of Ōta’s testimony, in which she states:

All the tears, I feel, have purified my writer’s soul; put water through a filter, and in due time only pure water will emerge. In fact, I am angrier at the mindlessness of Japan’s imperialism, a mindlessness that

almost destroyed my life as a writer, than am at the destruction of Hiroshima. (Ōta 270-271)

Tachibana interprets this as Ōta asserting that “her individual ability to flourish as a writer should be more important than all the lives lost in Hiroshima” (59). However, this reading fails to take into account the context of her remark. In the text, Ōta follows this comment with an explanation:

It is not a personal anger; it is entwined with my lament for my country. Seeing the mortal defeat pass into history, I grieve. Japan seems to be sloughing off much of its traditional character. Japan was crushed in the war, but that does not mean that Japan also came up short in all other aspects of life. The idea that Japan failed across the board is a psychological side effect, something that defeat brings in its train. (271)

Contextualising Ōta’s statement demonstrates that her anger at the way in which the bomb almost destroyed her potential as a writer is actually part of her grieving for the consequences it had for Japan as a nation. She is swift to explain that “it is not a personal anger,” but rather part of her understanding of how Japanese culture, of which she considers herself a part, was impaired by the experience of the bomb. It is true in this statement that Ōta is not focussing on the dead of Hiroshima, but neither is she simply reacting to the effect of the bomb on her career as Tachibana somewhat simplistically suggests. Rather, at the conclusion of her testimony, she is considering the consequences of the bomb on the future of Japan, concerned that the understanding of the catastrophic defeat as a result of Japanese imperialism may translate into a denigration of Japan’s pre-war accomplishments, and a view that Japan as a nation, a culture and a people had utterly failed. This attempt to rescue Japan from the popular perception of failure is in line with her strong pre-war nationalism. Whilst her pre-war nationalism was characterised by militarism, she recanted this position in the post-bomb era and her nationalism manifested itself in a desire to rebuild Japan. “Japan and the Japanese belong to the Japanese,” she declares passionately, “they cannot belong to anyone else. Is that the reason there is room for both feelings, the sad and the happy?” (271). The sadness she refers to is the violence of the defeat; the happiness the prospect of peace and democracy in the post-war Japanese nation.

Others have contested this view of Ōta as an arrogant writer. Responding to Lifton's generally negative characterisation of her, Richard Minear accepts that "one senses that Lifton the person was more sympathetic than his psychological categories permitted him to be" (134). Nevertheless, he still defends Ōta from Lifton's description, citing the circumstances under which they met as hardly conducive to congeniality. Lifton interviewed Ōta in 1962, one year before she died of heart failure at the age of sixty. She was still haunted by the suicide of fellow A-bomb writer Hara Tamiki in 1951, connecting his death directly with his experiences of the bomb. She resented the isolation that she believed his death had caused her, writing in 1952:

Had Hara Tamiki lived and written as he could [...] then my soul would soon find rest. You don't know how hard it is, thinking that I must write all by myself. One person can't write it all. It is a disgrace for Japanese writers that I am left to write it alone. (qtd. in Minear 132)

It seems likely that this feeling of angry isolation fuelled her hostile declaration to Lifton that she was "the only atomic bomb writer." Yet by the time Lifton interviewed her in 1962, she had ceased to write about Hiroshima, the difficulties that had beset all of her attempts to write about it finally overcoming her. Minear also suggests that Lifton himself may have unwittingly antagonised Ōta. He was a young man, a national of the country that dropped the bomb who appeared to her at least as utterly ill-equipped to interview her. He had not read any of her works, and being unable to speak Japanese fluently was forced to conduct his interviews through an interpreter. "Under these conditions," concludes Minear, "it is hardly surprising that she was reluctant to see Lifton at all or that the picture Lifton painted was less than complimentary" (134).

These attempts to discredit Ōta as a cantankerous and arrogant individual should have little place in any analysis of her literary representation of the atomic bomb. It is, however, indicative of the low esteem in which atomic bomb writers were held. Indeed, Minear confirms that the very appellation "atomic bomb writer" was applied disparagingly, and represented the reluctance and distaste with which A-bomb literature was received in the immediate post-war years (123-124). Tachibana observes that until the 1960s, literary representations of the atomic bomb experience

were rejected by the *bundan*, the Japanese literary circles, on the grounds that such brutal and direct representations of atrocity contravened accepted and established Japanese stylistic traditions. “*Hibakusha* authors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki who wrote about the bombing,” writes Tachibana, “thus suffered from a double discrimination, first as *hibakusha* and second as practitioners of A-bomb writing” (33). As a result, much of the testimonial literature has emerged from those who were “insulated from the preferences of literary circles” (33). Many brief testimonies were collected for certain projects, such as those found in The Witness of Those Two Days volumes. Other wrote their accounts in order to seek compensation for their sufferings, and school children were often set the task of recording their experiences as homework projects, such as those collected in Children of Hiroshima. Others *hibakusha* kept diaries, and later published them as their testimony. Tachibana characterises these non-professional writings as:

graphic and vivid pictures of the bombed cities in straightforward types of narration.[...] these memoirs do not attempt to present detailed or elaborate descriptions, or to provide interpretations of the event [...] If larger questions of society or history are evoked, it is because of the extreme nature of the experiences themselves, rather than because any conscious artistry of structure or style is apparent. (33-34)

Whilst these testimonies may be considered to be amateur in style, they offer valuable perspectives of the bombing that are unencumbered by criticism from the literary establishment. One such important diary is Dr. Hachiya Michihiko’s Hiroshima Diary, made famous in the West by Werner Wells’ translation. His diary offers an insight into day-to-day experience of survival and exposes the chaos and confusion that dominated the rumour ridden city of Hiroshima in the aftermath of the atomic bomb.

### **The Diary Contract and the Illusion of Immediacy: Hachiya Michihiko’s Hiroshima Diary**

Dr Hachiya Michihiko was Director of the Communications Hospital in Hiroshima when the bomb was dropped on August 6 1945. In common with most citizens of Hiroshima he was at home, some 1700m from the hypocentre, when the

bomb was dropped at quarter past eight in the morning. He and his wife were injured in the blast, and made their way to the damaged Communications Hospital (unwittingly moving closer to the epicentre of the explosion) seeking aid. Hachiya found himself in the difficult and frustrating position of being both patient and doctor in the days and weeks following the attack. Despite the severity of his injuries, Hachiya was able to record his experiences in his diary on a daily basis, from the day of the attack to September 9 1945.

Reading the diary as a form of testimony introduces new challenges. The wartime diary of the Japanese liberal journalist Kiyosawa Kiyoshi details his personal and professional thoughts and activities during the war, and has been described by Eugene Soviak as “inadvertent autobiography” (Kiyosawa xi). This definition of diary subtly highlights the distinction between diary and other forms of life-writing, the notion of inadvertency raising issues for both writing and reading the diary as a form of testimony.

Soviak’s identification of the diary as a form of autobiography returns us to the discussion of what constitutes autobiographical writing, and whether the diary form fulfils the conditions of autobiography. As discussed in chapter one, Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography through the means of his autobiographical contract, the assertion of unity of identity between author, narrator and protagonist. By abandoning Lejeune’s perception of authorial responsibility to ascertain autobiographical authenticity, the testimonial works of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel reject this contract. The diary as a form of life writing, however, does not so much reject as make redundant Lejeune’s contract. The diarist puts in place no guarantee of identity between author, narrator and protagonist, because they have no responsibility to a reader, no need to ascertain their authenticity. Felicity A. Nussbaum defines a diary as “a confession to the self with only the self as auditor and without the public authority”; in such circumstances, there is no need to establish the parameters of trust that Lejeune calls for (135). The reader of personal diaries is unanticipated, perhaps even intrusive, and in accordance with this “non-relationship” between author and reader, Rachel Cottam proposes a new contract:



The diary “contract” would perhaps be one, then, that legitimises the illicit nature of the reader: *I subscribe not to be writing for you*. The result is a reading that is acknowledged by writer and reader as implicitly furtive. (269)

Whilst Lejeune’s autobiographical contract encourages a cosy relationship between author and reader based on mutual trust and belief in authenticity, Cottam’s diary contract sets up a hostility between diarist and reader. The presence of the reader is only reluctantly acknowledged. Donald Keene suggests that “the best diaries have an immediacy that may make us feel closer to the writer than any other kind of literature” (Modern Japanese Diaries viii). The hostility evident in Cottam’s diary contract, however, calls into question the nature of this closeness between the diarist and the reader. Indeed, the flaw in Keene’s understanding of diary is that this perceived closeness is ultimately illusory. Alexandra Zapruder warns against any close engagement with the writer, arguing that the sense of immediacy and intimacy offered by the text is false. She comments:

Although many diaries can give the illusion that the reader is in the presence of the writer - because they are written in the first person, and are often intimate in tone and spontaneous in form – it is unfortunately not so. Whether personal or not, private or public, spontaneous or crafted, the content of the diary does not allow us to come to know the writer [...] A collection of pages written over a few months or years – no matter how intensely personal, confidential or immediate – can be little more than a pale shadow, a wretched fragment from which to capture the immeasurable complexity, likes, dislikes, dreams, wishes, desires, contradictions, and stories that compose a whole, complete person. (8)

In her condemnation of the illusion of immediacy, Zapruder argues that narrative will always fail to capture the entirety of an individual, thus rendering any sense of closeness between a diarist and a reader impossible. For Zapruder, the self cannot be manifested textually, the self cannot be known through narrative. The potential of a relationship between diarist and reader will, then, always be thwarted; to return to the diary contract, the diarist will never be writing for the reader.

This perception of the immediacy offered by the diary form is not restricted to a perceived intimacy between diarist and reader. Whilst the immediacy between reader and writer may be questionable, as Zapruder argues, the contemporary nature

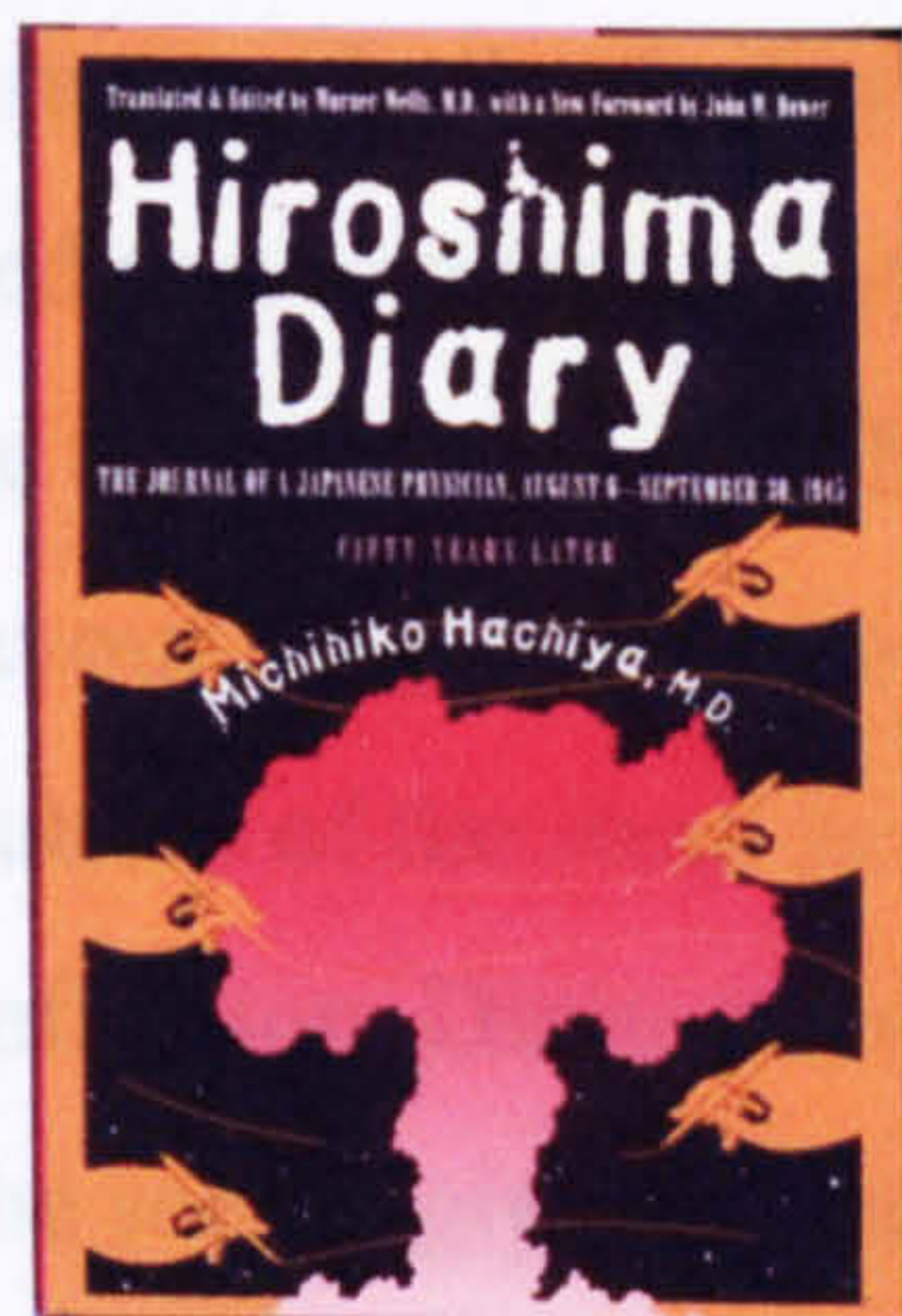
of diary has led many critics to suggest that diaries privilege the reader with a greater closeness to the history of the events within the diary. David Roskies, writing specifically of Holocaust accounts but making a point which can be applied more widely to diaries that document historical events, makes a distinction between “survival literature” and “real Holocaust literature”. The former he categorises as eye-witness accounts written after the Holocaust which recollect events, the latter as accounts such as diaries that are actually written during the event. The “realness” of these texts emerges from the fact that they are linked in time and place to the event they describe (211). Linda Anderson concurs with the claim that a diary gives the reader access to an enhanced “realness” in the description of events on the grounds that it registers a “freshness and authenticity of impression which might be lost in subsequent retelling” (Autobiography 35).

Both Roskies and Anderson recognise that the significance of the diary lies in the minimal time lapse between the event and its narration. Andrea Reiter, in her discussion of testimonies, acknowledges the problems that can be caused through an extended time between event and narration:

any analysis must take account of the time that elapsed between the experiencing and the recording of events [...] The greater the distance between the two, the more did survivors base themselves on explanatory models not directly connected with the experience, and the more they overlay their experience with models derived from literature or history. (Narrating the Holocaust 199-200)

The fundamental difference between the diary and the latterly written testimony is the duration of time between event and narration. The longer this period, the greater the chance of the report being contaminated by external factors denoted by Reiter as the influence of literature and history. There is, then, an assumed purity inherent in diary which has led Berel Lang to conclude that “the diary comes as close as representation can to performing the events it cites rather than to describing them; it is an act in, if not fully of, the history it relates” (Holocaust Representation 22). The diary is not a memory of, and commentary on, history, but rather participatory in history. The diary comes to be viewed as part of history in itself; in the words of Lang, it is not simply “historical narrative”, but part “of the movement of history itself” (21). Significantly, the illustration on the front cover of Hachiya’s Hiroshima Diary pays homage to this

view of diary as emerging directly from history, as it displays writing emerging from the centre of the nuclear mushroom cloud:



Crucially for Lang, the diary offers a “direct representation (an enactment) of the contingency of historical time – insofar as the diarist writes in ignorance of what the next moment, let alone any longer period, holds for the event he describes, or more pointedly, for himself” (21). Paradoxically, it is this very quality so valued by Lang that offers the reader such privileged access to the historical moment that has actually hampered the development of the academic study of diary. Donald Stauffer forcefully stated that “diary has scant claim to consideration,” regarding it to be “not the record of a life but the journal of an existence, made up of a monotonous series of short and similar entries [making] no pretense to artistic structure” (qtd. in Nussbaum 128). Stauffer makes an interesting distinction between life and existence in his critique of diary. Existence is simply a series of consecutive experiences, rendered monotonous by the inability of the diarist to recognise certain moments that become significant on reflection. A life, by contrast, he considers only possible to be recognised from a temporal distance, when on reflection, certain moments can have fuller meanings attributed to them. A journal of an existence provides the building blocks from which the story of a life can be constructed. Adriana Cavarero identifies this distinction with greater clarity, arguing that:

The meaning that saves each life from being a mere sequence of events does not consist in a determined figure; but rather consists precisely in leaving behind a figure, or something from which the unity of a design can be discerned in the telling of the story. Like the design, the story comes after the events and actions from which it results. (2)

Cavarero introduces this thesis with an anecdote borrowed from Karen Blixen's Out of Africa. She tells the tale of a man who lived near a pond. Awakening one night, he realised that it was leaking, and ran out in the dark of the night to attempt to stop up the leak. He eventually succeeded and returned to bed. It was not until the morning when he emerged from his home the next morning that he saw the footprints he had made the night before had traced out the pattern of a stork in the dust. In the same way that the dust revealed the pattern of the stork only after the event, so the story of a life only gains coherence on reflection. Diary, however, represents the absence of the stork. It is the narration of the seemingly random patterns in the dust, simply a "sequence of events" with no "unity of design". It is this "failing" that grants the reader a greater proximity to the historical moment.

It is, however, a mistake to assume that the lack of a coherent story in diary deprives it of meaning. As Nussbaum points out:

Diary, simultaneously preserving and evaluating, makes meaning inherent in the choice of words, the sequence of phrases and the assignment of dialogue to self or other. [...] Diary and journal are representations of reality rather than failed versions of something more coherent and unified. (136-137)

Nussbaum recognises that despite its contemporaneity, diary narrative is still selective, and the diarist, perhaps unwittingly, attributes meanings to events through the very way in which they are represented. The lack of coherent story, she rightly points out, is not to be perceived as a failure of diary, but rather a triumph. It is through the omission of a unified design at the time of writing that diary maintains its position as the closest representation of reality.

The image of the belated stork may be seen as a source for Sviak's description of diary as "inadvertent autobiography". The reader of a diary may detect a pattern or story developing as the diary progresses, a pattern that has been inadvertently put in place by the diarist. A diary can become the story of a life only when read in its entirety. Yet the term "inadvertent" also functions to highlight the tension between the public and the private that is inherent in the diary format.

Hachiya Michihiko initially recorded his experiences of the atomic bomb in daily diary entries whilst he was bed-ridden in hospital. This was a personal diary, never intended for publication. However, his friends quickly realised the historical importance of his diary and encouraged him to publish it, and his diary was consequently serialised in a small Japanese medical journal entitled *Teishin Igaku*, which was circulated among the employees of the Japanese Communications Ministry. This serialisation had only a limited readership and was mostly restricted to Hachiya's professional colleagues, and those with a similar level of medical expertise to himself. It was not until 1951 that an American doctor, Dr Werner Wells, learned of Hachiya's diary, and was determined to translate his record into English and publish it in its entirety.

Wells' position as self-appointed editor of Hachiya's diary is in itself curious. By his own admission he can read Japanese only in a "tedious and laborious fashion, with complete dependence on dictionaries and grammars," a handicap which forced him to employ a Japanese-American doctor, Dr. Neal Tsukifuji, actually to carry out the translation (Hachiya xx). Wells' role as he perceived it was to revise and edit Tsukifuji's translation in order to "preserve the balance, simplicity, and quality of values Dr Hachiya achieved in his own tongue" (xxi). Exactly how he managed to revise the translation in accordance with these aims despite his scant knowledge of Japanese, he never explains. The extent to which Hiroshima Diary as a text has been subjected to revision is difficult to measure. Wells' revisions to the diary remain mysterious, although he does make one very clear addition to the text. He concludes his foreword to the diary with a catalogue of the names and roles of the most prominent people who figure in the diary. In its resemblance to a cast list, this seems to present the individuals concerned as characters in a play, thereby jeopardising their identities as real individuals who suffered the atomic bombing. Secondly, by clarifying and ordering the people in the diary in this way, rather than allowing Hachiya to introduce them in his own words, Wells is putting into place a false coherency in the text, and in doing so is denying the very quality that Nussbaum sees as central to the diary form. However, Wells is not alone in disturbing the potential immediacy of Hachiya's contemporary voice. According to Treat, Hachiya himself rewrote his diary for publication, although it is not known which aspects in particular he may have altered, or indeed what his motivation for doing so was (Writing Ground

Zero 52). Hachiya's diary in particular, then, challenges the notion of immediacy in diary.

Wells' publication of Hiroshima Diary marked a second stage in the transition of Hachiya's diary from the private to the public sphere. Wells' objective was to introduce the English-speaking world, particularly his fellow Americans, to the human experience of the atomic bombings. John W. Dower, the author of the foreword to the 1995 edition of the diary, describes the publication of Hiroshima Diary as a "salutary event". He continues, "his simple account tells us, as no one but the Japanese who experienced the bomb can, about the human consequences of nuclear weapons" (Hachiya vii). Whilst this may be a valid point, it does compromise the personal nature of Hachiya's diary. In this formulation, the diary becomes not a record of the personal experiences of one victim, but is rather expanded to become representative of the Japanese experience. The importance of Hiroshima Diary as an individual's experiences is subsumed in favour of presenting the account as a universal experience of the atomic trauma. In making the diary public, the personal is sacrificed.

In taking this approach, Dower is investing in that which Leigh Gilmore terms "the autobiographical paradox." This paradox dictates that "the unusual or unrepresentative life becom[es] representative" (Gilmore 19). Gilmore argues that the origin of this paradox lies in the tradition of autobiography which encourages a "close relation between representing yourself and participating in a representative structure in which one may stand for many" (19). The very act of writing the self, she suggests, transforms the experiences of the self from the individual to the universal. This notion of representativeness is rendered further paradoxical when the representation of the self collides with the representation of trauma. "How," asks Gilmore:

can the exploration of trauma and the burden it imposes on memory be representative? How can the experience of one survivor of trauma stand for many? How can one tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, when facts, truth and memory combine in the representation of trauma to undermine rather than strengthen representativeness? (19)

This sense of representativeness is imposed upon the diary by its readers. When the diary is a personal document the need for representativeness is absent; it is when it crosses over into the public sphere that the reader assumes an individual's experiences to be universal.

### **Writing the Pika: Manifestations of Silence in Hiroshima Diary**

Hachiya situates silence at the very heart of his diary by his silencing of the atomic explosion. His record of the attack and his representation of his experiences is represented in a description that focuses on a series of visual images that demonstrate a shocking transition from early morning peace and tranquillity to sudden chaos. His diary opens with the following:

The hour was early; the morning still, warm, and beautiful. Shimmering leaves, reflecting sunlight from a cloudless sky, made a pleasant contrast with shadows in my garden as I gazed absently through wide-flung doors opening to the south. [...] Suddenly, a strong flash of light startled me – and then another. So well does one recall little things that I remember vividly how a stone lantern in the garden became brilliantly lit and I debated whether this light was caused by a magnesium flare or sparks from a passing trolley.

Garden shadows disappeared. The view where a moment before all had been so bright and sunny was now dark and hazy. Through swirling dust I could barely discern a wooden column that had supported one corner of my house. It was leaning crazily and the roof sagged dangerously. (1)

The delicacy of the images, from the “shimmering leaves” to the “swirling dust”, seems simultaneously to belie and evoke the chaos of the moment, and suggests an attempt by Hachiya to forge an aesthetics of chaos. Donald Keene characterises Japanese literature as focussing on smaller details in order to subtly reveal the larger picture, a style that seems very much evident in this passage, particularly in the image of the stone lantern illuminated by the atomic flash, or *pika*. Keene relates a classic anecdote, which serves as a model for Japanese literary style, in which a general wearing polished armour was awaiting an elite audience. He was informed that someone who was not sufficiently privileged to see him in his armour was approaching, and to prevent this breach in etiquette, he threw a wrap of thin silk around himself. Japanese writers, particularly poets, aim for the effect of the polished

armour shining through the thin silk (Japanese Literature 9). The subtlety of Hachiya's representation of the atomic flash through the image of the illuminated stone lantern can be best appreciated when compared to the attempts of other *hibakusha* to describe the searing reality of the *pika*. Yoshimura Katsuyoshi was seven years old at the time of the bombing, and remembers in her testimony "being blinded by a brilliant flash" (39). Nonaka Fumiko, a young woman living in Hiroshima, describes it as "a piercing flash that bit into my face. I felt my body shrivel with a hiss like that of a dried cuttlefish when you grill it" (89)<sup>1</sup>. The experience of the *pika* is represented violently in the words of these two *hibakusha*, particularly in Nonaka's account. By contrast, Hachiya's image of the stone lantern mutes this violence, but nevertheless makes the reader aware of its presence. In Hachiya's aesthetic account, the illuminated stone lantern functions as the thin wrap of silk in Keene's anecdote.

The vivid and evocative visuals that dominate this opening passage are accentuated by the silence which accompanies them. In literal terms, it is true that Hachiya's experience of the A-bomb was silent, as those close to the epicentre were unable to distinguish the two phases of the explosion – the intense flash, or *pika* and then the overwhelming boom, or *don*. Recollecting the moment of the explosion in his diary three days later, Hachiya wrote:

Now, I could state positively that I had heard nothing like an explosion when we were bombed the other morning, nor did I remember any sound during my walk to the hospital as houses collapsed around me. It was as though I walked through a gloomy, silent motion picture.  
(37)

His reference to film here heightens the visual nature of his experience, and compounds this visuality with a sense of unreality permeating through his memories. Lifton explains that those in the central city area experienced only the flash, and the knowledge of the boom was supplied later by those who came in from outside of the immediate centre (Death in Life 88). Hachiya refers to the atomic explosion as the *pika* throughout his diary, tenaciously adhering to the term that describes best his

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<sup>1</sup> Nonaka's use of the culinary metaphor to explain her experience is significant. As will be discussed in chapter three, women *hibakusha* frequently employ metaphors directly relating to a specifically traditional female experience, in this case cooking, to illustrate their experiences.



personal experience, even when the conjoined term *pikadon* became ubiquitous. He first notes the use of the word *pikadon* on the 9<sup>th</sup> August, and returns to discuss this newly coined word on 11<sup>th</sup> August:

*Pikadon* was accepted as a new word in our vocabulary, although some, like old Mrs Saeki, who had been in the city at the time of the bombing, continued to simply say *pika*. Those who had been outside the city insisted on saying *pikadon*. (48)

The emergence of this new word can be interpreted as a response to the realisation that existing vocabulary was inadequate to the task of describing the A-bomb, and as a solution to the silence that would otherwise characterise attempts to describe the event. Curiously, however, Hachiya does not associate himself with those who refer it to the explosion as the *pika*, even though he unfailingly continues to do so. The near universal replacement of Hachiya's preferred word *pika* with *pikadon* does in itself come to silence. Hachiya's particular experience of the A-bomb, as his understanding of his own experience and resultant word for the explosion are glossed over with a universalised term that ignores the specificities of individual experience. Hachiya's continuation to label the atomic explosion as a silent phenomenon acts as a frame to the silence that results when *hibakusha* attempt to describe the indescribable. The failure of words to describe the event is reflected in the silence of the word *pika*.

Hachiya's account of the immediate aftermath of the explosion is dominated by a silence that he characterises as "uncanny" (5). As he struggled through the streets with his wife towards the hospital, he encountered "shadowy forms of people, some of whom looked like walking ghosts" (4). The prevailing silence contributes to the blurring between the living and the dead as he lists the macabre procession of injured that he passes on his journey. He writes fleetingly of seeing a naked woman carrying her naked baby through the streets, a naked man, and an old woman lying on the ground. Many of those in the immediate blast radius, including Hachiya, found that their clothes were ripped off by the force of the explosion. Yet whilst he tries to maintain the individuality of these victims in his diary, he notes that it is silence that unifies the experiences of them all: "indeed, one thing was common to everyone I saw – complete silence" (4). This uncanny silence stands as a symbol throughout his diary for the loss of individuality that resulted from the trauma of the bombing. Just

over a week after the explosion, his diary reveals that his thoughts returned to this silence that dominated the stricken city. He writes:

What a weak, fragile thing man is before the forces of destruction. After the *pika*, the entire population had been reduced to a common level of physical and mental weakness. Those who were able walked silently towards the suburbs and the distant hills, their spirits broken, their initiative gone. When asked whence they had come, they pointed to the city and said, "that way"; and when asked where they were going, pointed away for the city and said, "this way." They were so broken and confused that they moved and behaved like automatons. (54-55)

The inanimate nature of these "automatons" reinforces the sense of uncanny silence that so disturbed Hachiya in the immediate aftermath. Continuing, he recounts the "amazement" of "the outsiders" when they encountered the survivors emerging from the ruins of the city. "The outsiders", he affirms, "could not grasp the fact that they were witnessing the exodus of a people who walked in the land of dreams" (55). This reference to non-*hibakusha* as "outsiders" is an early indicator of the way in which victims of the atomic bomb would come to be perceived as different, and "other" because of their experiences. Significantly though, in this passage, by referring to the non-victims as "outsiders", Hachiya is inverting this relationship and representing the "outsiders" as the other.

Hachiya continues his account of walking through the destroyed streets by describing his arrival at the Communications Hospital. As director of the hospital, Hachiya was privileged to receive treatment from colleagues already there immediately on his arrival, and he recalls his admission to the hospital:

Miss Kado [his private nurse] set about examining my wounds without speaking a word. I asked for a shirt and pajamas. They got them for me, but still no one spoke. Why was everyone so quiet? (5)

The question with which he ends this passage is typical of his style in this opening entry to his diary. He questions his situation repeatedly: "Where were my drawers and undershirt?" (1), "Where was my wife?" (2), "Could I go on?" (4), "What had happened?" (7). In the absence of any response, these questions serve to heighten the presence of silence in this immediate aftermath.

Whilst Hachiya writes of the actual silence that dominates his memories of the event, he is also forced to confront the silence that emerges from the difficulty of attempting to describe his experiences in his diary narrative. He rarely, however, refers directly to any difficulties, the most notable exception being in any entry on the 28<sup>th</sup> August, when he recounts meeting with a close friend, Mr Yamashita. Yamashita was renowned before the war as possessing “well-developed literary tastes and was known for his artistry and skill in the writing of *waka*, thirty-one syllable poems” (131). Hachiya confides in his friend that he is trying to keep a diary of his experiences, and asks for his advice in the matter. “You know what difficulty I have as a writer,” he confesses, “I have the same trouble this time. Perhaps more, because I am out of practice and so many things distract me. Sometimes I get my notes up to date, but before I know it I find myself again several days behind” (132). Interestingly, Hachiya sees his difficulties in writing about the *pika* as logistical, rather than artistic. He finds himself distracted from his writing, rather than unable to write. This self-confessed attitude marks a stark contrast to Holocaust survivor-authors, and indeed other *hibakusha*-authors, who frequently return to the problem of trying to represent trauma. Yamashita’s response accords more with the typical pattern of the survivor rendered inarticulate by experience. Hachiya records him as saying:

I kept a diary until the day of the *pika*.[...] but since then I have done nothing. Yashushi, my son, was killed; my house was destroyed; so I endure life in despair and confusion. (132)

In common with Hachiya, Yamashita also refers to the atomic bombing as the *pika*, representing the event as a silent phenomenon. For Yamashita, however, this silence extends to corrupt his eloquence in representing his life in narrative. Following the bombing, Yamashita finds himself unable to write anymore, a condition which leads to the sense of confusion which seems to dominate his post-bomb existence. To return to Cavarero, it is by narrating a life that sense can be made of it; in the absence of narration, confusion must prevail.

Despite rarely explicitly revealing any difficulties in translating the lived experience of the *pika* into narrative form, Hachiya’s straining attempts to find a

comparative event, and so to find a literary model on which to base his narrative, suggest an underlying conflict between experience and representation. On the 8<sup>th</sup> August, only two days after the bombing, he seeks a comparison in ancient history with which to represent his experiences:

Those glowing ruins and the blazing pyres set me to wondering if Pompeii had not looked like this during its last days. But I think there were not so many dead in Pompeii as there were in Hiroshima. (32)

The comparison to the cataclysmic volcanic eruption of 79AD is ultimately rejected however, as Hachiya finds it deficient in terms of scale. He unconsciously returns to this search for comparative events in his sleep, as he relates in his diary entry for 24<sup>th</sup> August:

I slept poorly and had a frightful dream. It seems I was in Tokyo after the great earthquake and around me were decomposing bodies heaped in piles, all of whom were looking right at me. (114)

In this dream, Hachiya seems unable to assimilate the decomposing bodies that he saw with his own experiences, and seeks a reference point in the great Tokyo earthquake. The attempt to describe the atomic bombing through referencing catastrophic natural disasters in the diary is a common response to the scale of the disaster, for as Dower observes, “the destructiveness of the bomb was so awesome that many Japanese initially regarded them – much like the calamitous losing war itself – almost as if they were a natural disaster” (119). Attempts to describe an event without precedent result in Hachiya’s ultimately fruitless search for metaphors in his diary, and evidence his personal difficulties in directly representing the atomic bombing. The impossibility of metaphor is a problem faced by both survivors of the atomic bomb and the Holocaust. In his analysis of the work of Elie Wiesel, Robert McAfee Brown explains the difficulties in representing an event that can have no recourse to comparison:

Descriptions are made by means of comparison. Analogies are embedded in all attempts to communicate: *this* event of which we do not know, is like *that* one of which we at least know a little. But what if there is nothing with which to make a comparison, no analogy that will hold? (24)

McAfee Brown interprets this absence of analogies as evidence of the uniqueness of the Holocaust; however, as can be witnessed through the writings of Hachiya, *hibakusha* face a similar void when attempting to portray their experiences through the means of comparative representation. Appreciating this point of commonality in Holocaust and A-bomb narratives does not diminish an understanding of each as singular historical events, but rather produces an awareness that survivors from each event face similar problems in their attempt to narrate unprecedented and extreme moments in history.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> August, Hachiya had his first glimpse of the ruined city since the day of the explosion, and lying in his hospital bed realised the inadequacy of language to describe what he saw:

Devastation may be a better word, but really, I know of no word or words to describe the view from my twisted iron bed in the fire-gutted ward of the Communications Hospital. (31)

His inability to describe what he could see from his window is ironically emphasised by the detail with which he depicts his local environment. The image of the damaged bed in the ravaged ward has to stand in for the greater mass devastation that Hachiya cannot find the words to describe.

Particularly as he recovered and became more aware of his surroundings, Hachiya witnessed great suffering amongst his fellow *hibakusha*. Hachiya's style of representing the atrocity is characterised by a continual return to clinical and technical analysis and description. As seen in Ōta's testimony, the reliance on impersonal, scientific data is a common feature of atomic bomb testimonies. This contrasts with Holocaust survivors who often display a tendency to lapse into textual silence when confronted with memories of inexpressible horror, demonstrated through a declaration of their inability to describe events, or through ellipses and pauses in the narrative itself. In Hiroshima Diary, Hachiya often confronts horror not with silence but with carefully written, clinical discussions of that which he witnessed. He responds to horror as a physician when, for example, an unnamed visitor phrases a testimony to what he has witnessed as a question:

Doctor, do you think a man could see with a protruded eyeball? [...] I saw a man whose eye had been torn out by an injury, and there he stood with the eye resting in the palm of his hand. What made my blood run cold was that it looked like the eye was staring at me. Doctor, the pupil looked right at me. Do you think the eye could see me? (101)

Hachiya is left almost speechless in the face of this tale. “Not knowing what to answer,” he writes, “I replied ‘Could you see your face reflected from the pupil?’” (101). His reply suggests an attempt to conceal his horrified fascination within an ostensibly medical inquiry. It is all he can manage to say, but his words are redundant, offering no real answer to the visitor who simply says “No, [...] I didn’t look that close” (101).

From a carefully detached perspective, Hachiya repeatedly details his medical findings with meticulous precision, and tries to view his fellow survivors solely as patients. Many diary entries contain extended clinical analysis of both himself and those in his care. Whilst these extracts are not as obvious a manifestation of silence as the textual pauses and ellipses in the Holocaust narratives of Levi and Wiesel, they do indicate a similar interruption in the text. Whilst Hachiya’s style may be attributed to his professional methods of recording events as a doctor, clinical discourse functions in this text to displace silence, similarly to the way in which many other survivors lapse into an account of factual data when confronted with the inexpressible.

As well as including material sourced from his clinical notebooks in his diary, Hachiya also includes an account of his experiences that he wrote for a journalist a month after the atomic bomb was dropped. Contemporary accounts such as this are somewhat rare, as the Occupation forces put in place a censorship code on their arrival to prevent any unauthorised material about the atom bomb and its effects being published. This account is notable, as it offers a quite different record of his experiences to that which he narrates in his diary. In the newspaper account, he writes that his immediate thoughts after the explosion were “I thought that I would die, and decided that if I were to die, I wanted to be in my hospital” (179). His diary account of this time is much less stark, and represents a far more confused state of mind:

It finally dawned us [Hachiya and his wife] that we could not stay there in the street, so we turned our steps toward the hospital. Our home was gone; we were wounded and needed treatment; and after all it was my duty to be with my staff. This latter was an irrational thought – what good could I be to anyone, hurt as I was. (3)

This irrationality of thought is eliminated from his newspaper account, as his fearful wonder at the aforementioned uncanny silence that prevailed. The feeling that he was about to die is also absent from his diary account; in the latter, more temporally immediate account as wounded only, albeit severely. According to his newspaper account, his first words on entering the hospital were “Anybody killed?” (171); in his diary it is a seemingly more mundane request for pyjamas (3). The reason for this discrepancy can only be speculated upon; it could be a desire to cast himself in a more noble light for the newspaper report, an omission from his diary account, or an error of memory as he cast his mind back to the events of a month previous. A significant departure from his diary account can be found later in the newspaper report, when he claims “from that day to the present I have been living in a well-ventilated hospital” (171). This description bears scant resemblance to the crumbling building that he repeatedly refers to in the first few diary entries. This revision of his view of his condition likely stems from his first expedition out of the hospital on the 11<sup>th</sup> August. With a colleague he ventured into the city to seek emergency medical supplies that it was rumoured had arrived at the Sanitary Office, about a mile from the hospital. Whilst journeying there, they discovered that many injured people had taken refuge in the basement of Fukuya, formerly a large and prestigious department store. The conditions that they witnessed were horrific and Hachiya was left unable to describe them, writing only that “one peep into the basement was enough. It was so dark and forbidding [...] people who had once gone there to trade were now patients inside. I could still hear their moans and groans” (51). As he was leaving the area he met an old friend, Mrs Yanagihara, who was staying at Fukuya. “The misery in her expression and the sadness of her voice,” he writes, “embarrassed me and left me fumbling to find a word of encouragement” (53). It was at this point that he came to the painful realisation that “our hospital was a paradise by comparison. Small? Yes, but there was light and good ventilation” (51). His newspaper account of the conditions at the hospital echoes directly this first understanding of his good fortune in staying at the hospital.

The discrepancies between the two accounts are reminiscent of those occurring between Wiesel's Holocaust testimony Night and his autobiography All Rivers Run to the Sea. When experience is revisited in memory, new facets are revealed, and certain aspects afforded greater or less significance according to the emphasis they receive. As Treat points out, "in the case of testimony [...] from a formal perspective, there are properly speaking, no facts at all, but instead only narrative elements that appear (or are made to appear) as such because the reader accepts them without the resistance of doubt" (Writing Ground Zero 52). According to this formulation, the "accuracy" of any one account cannot be prioritised over another, as the "facts" in each are only that which the author has deemed to present as facts. Once again, Treat's understanding of the place of factuality on testimony brings to the forefront questions of what constitutes verifiable authenticity in life-writing. In addition to the newspaper report and his original diary entry dealing with his experiences, Hachiya repeats his story to two concerned friends in his diary. From these accounts, we learn that he was awake at the time of the bombing because he had been on air-raid duty the night before until 4.00am, and had found himself unable to sleep on his return home. Notably, neither of these two repetitions of his experience say anything of his journey to the hospital, and his encounters with other ghost-like survivors.

Combined with the narration of Hachiya's own experiences are the stories of many other survivors who shared their stories with him. Similarly to Levi's If This is a Man, Hachiya's Hiroshima Diary can be read as a multi-authored testimony. Amongst others, he includes the stories of his colleagues such as Dr. Akiyama, Dr Hanaoka, Dr Tabuchi, friends such as Captain Fujihara and patients such as Mrs Saeko. In contrast to Levi, however, Hachiya does not share the stories of the dead but of the living. Moreover, Hachiya does not consider his narration of these testimonies as part of a fulfilment of a duty to the dead, or an attempt to represent an absence at the heart of catastrophe. Rather, he is exhausted by an onslaught of visitors who feel compelled to tell him of their experiences:

All day I listened to visitors telling me about the destruction of Hiroshima and the scenes of horror they had witnessed. I had seen my



friends wounded, their families separated, their homes destroyed. [...] By degrees my capacity to comprehend the magnitude of their sorrow, to share with them the pain, frustration, and horror became so dulled that I found myself accepting whatever was told with equanimity and a detachment I would never have believed possible. In two days I had become at home in this environment of chaos and despair. (24)

For Hachiya, these repeated stories produce a dehumanising effect. He loses his capacity for empathy and sympathy, and becomes emotionally detached from his fellow sufferers. He writes, “I felt lonely, but it was an animal loneliness. I became part of the darkness of the night” (24). Whereas Levi’s accounts of others represent an attempt to retrieve the humanity, to rescue both himself and others from silence, Hachiya’s representation of the stories of others bear witness to a dehumanisation. He condemns a multitude of stories to silence, and becomes consumed by the darkness that Levi seeks to banish.

By August 21, Hachiya confesses that the stories that had previously had the power to numb him with their horror now generated only feelings of tedium within him:

Visitors increased daily and all had something to tell of what they had seen, heard or thought. By now, I was bored listening to stories they insisted on telling from morning until night, but my boredom did not worry my visitors. [...] In each instance [they] tried to convince me that their [experience] had been unique. Some did have unusual stories to tell. (100)

He does attempt to retell many of these unusual stories, but there is a prevailing sense of exhaustion in this task. He recounts meeting with a friend, Mr Kobata, who had been out in the ruined city searching for his lost brother. When they met, Mr Kobata immediately began to tell him of scenes he had witnessed on the streets, and Hachiya repeats one of these stories in his diary. However, he concludes his account of his meeting with Mr Kobata with a single brief sentence before going on to discuss the rumours that were rife in post-bomb Hiroshima. “Mr Kobata,” he writes, “had many such stories to tell” (69). The fact that Hachiya does not repeat them all serves as a reminder that words can never recount all of the innumerable sufferings caused by the atomic bombing. It also tacitly endorses Ōta’s assertion that personal testimony is incomplete, and cannot bear witness to the event as a whole.

Hachiya also addresses the motivation behind the repeated testimony. He recounts a visit by a friend, Mr Katsutani, who in common with all of Hachiya's other visitors had many tales to tell, recalling that "he repeated himself two or three times as if to convince himself that what he said was true and then continued" (15). Here, Katsutani seems to be acting out Blanchot's understanding of the relationship between the event and the experiencing of the event. In seeking to represent the event through language, Katsutani is attempting to move from living through the event to experiencing the event. He entrenches the truth of his experience by repeating it in speech, verifying it through language. He emphatically declares "I *really* walked along the railroad tracks to get here" (15). In confirming his knowledge of his actions, he is asserting his experience of the event.

When searching for manifestations of silence in the diary, it seems possible to detect messages concealed behind the given narrative. Words and feelings never explicitly stated appear as shadows over certain passages. In his foreword to the diary, Dower identifies such a passage in the entry for the 13<sup>th</sup> September. Following the Japanese surrender, rumours began to spread about the barbarity of the imminently arriving American forces. He writes:

Rumour reached us today that the allied forces were to land in Japan. As a result, many people in Hiroshima became alarmed. The same alarm gripped our hospital and caused some patients to flee. When I made rounds in the afternoon, the wards were almost deserted. [...] In general, the women were more frightened than the men because someone had spread the rumour they might come to harm. (182)

Throughout his diary, Hachiya, in common with Ōta, displays little or no hostility towards the Allied forces, saving his bitterness and hatred for the Japanese military leaders. In response to the rumours about the approaching Allies, he records in his diary that he felt "we had nothing to worry about because westerners were a cultured people, not given to pilfering and marauding" (183). Indeed, he seems to take pride in his refusal to believe in the more alarming rumours that circulated with great frequency and alacrity. On the 16<sup>th</sup> September, he writes of annoying his friend Dr Akiyama by sceptically raising his eyebrows as Akiyama dramatically begged him to join him in fleeing the city and warned him that "your wife is in danger, and if we

ever are to escape, now is the time! After the Allied Forces land, we'll all be lost" (194). However, Hachiya was unable to remain completely unaffected by the rumours, and in the passage identified by Dower on the 13<sup>th</sup> September he admits that:

Despite my objectivity regarding the hospital and patients, I became an ordinary husband when I thought of my wife. My one desire was to get her out of Hiroshima as soon as possible, preferably to her home where our son was. [...] But what about the healthy young girls in the hospital? Would they go unharmed? I had to confess there were doubts in my mind. The more I thought, the more I worried, and I ended by smoking a lot of cigarettes. (183)

In this rare moment of agitation, Dower sees a tacit admission of guilt over the way that the Japanese treated those living in their occupied territories. The atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese, particularly in China, and also against Korean nationals are occasionally alluded to by Hachiya, and it is this that leads Dower to conclude that his fears are fuelled by his awareness of the behaviour of Japanese troops.

Another passage in the text similarly encourages the reader to detect implicit commentary on events. On the 14<sup>th</sup> September, Hachiya writes that he discovered a new term – “the mines of the towns” (188). People, he was told, were venturing out into the damaged city, foraging in the rubble for items of value. Disgusted at first by this behaviour, eventually he decided that he too should search for anything salvageable in the ruins of the town. Digging through the collapsed buildings, he came across piles of bamboo bullets and spears. “This is what happens to a nation that loses a war,” he writes, “substitutes for brass, wooden bullets, bamboo spears. Soldiers had been trained to use the bamboo spears in one heroic attempt to kill an enemy” (189). The image of the bamboo spears seems to rouse a sense of bitterness in him towards the military who sought to use such pathetic means against the anticipated Allied invasion of the mainland. Yet also, the image of the bamboo spears and the reference to the heroism of the defence soldiers implies a sense of national pride in the determinism of Japan to beat back the enemy in every possible way. This reading of the spears renders his disillusioned abandonment of his mining expedition even more poignant. “Suffice it to say,” he writes, “I found nothing worth keeping” (189).

The attempt to rescue a sense of Japanese pride also resonates in an account given by Hachiya on the 11<sup>th</sup> August. Indeed, in this entry he writes explicitly of the joy with which those in the hospital heard a rumour, a rumour that they were desperate to receive as fact, that the Japanese had dropped a similar “mysterious weapon” on American cities. “If San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles had been hit like Hiroshima,” he writes, “what chaos there must be in those cities! At last Japan was retaliating! The whole atmosphere in the ward changed, and for the first time since Hiroshima was bombed, everyone became cheerful and bright” (49). This passage is the sole example in the diary as a whole which expressly shows a pride in Japanese military power. Lifton recognises in this passage a specific way of dealing with the bomb through “‘identification with the aggressor’ – that is, of dealing with the power one fears by becoming like it or part of it” (Death in Life 89). By constructing the Japanese as aggressors in this rumour, there is an attempt to rewrite their victim status, and recast themselves as victorious. There is a further comment in Hachiya’s diary entry for this day behind which can be detected a similar attempt to rewrite Japanese honour into the atomic bomb narrative. By the 11<sup>th</sup> August, the hospital building was in an advanced state of deterioration, and plaster was falling from the damaged ceiling on to the patients below. Jokingly, Hachiya says to his colleague Mr Mizoguchi that “it would be much pleasanter to suffocate under a shower of cherry blossoms than under plaster from this ceiling” (47). Whilst he maintains in his diary that this was said in jest, the historical context of the image of the cherry blossom adds a further dimension to his comment. The cherry blossom is a traditional Japanese symbol of death, and was adopted as the motif for the *kamikaze* (translated as “divine wind”) squadrons, who wreaked destruction on enemy forces through suicide missions. It was primarily young, unmarried men who were selected for these missions, and to die serving Japan as a *kamikaze* pilot was considered, particularly prior to the surrender, to be both heroic and honourable. Hachiya’s seemingly casual employment of the image of the cherry blossom here recalls this sense of Japanese honour, even in the face of a catastrophic defeat.

Silence in the atomic bomb testimony is thus a combination of presence and a present absence. The utilisation of factual, scientific and, in the case of Hachiya, clinical discourse masks the silence that emerges from the unrepresentability of the

atomic bombing. Silence is also manifested as a present absence in these texts, in the form of Ōta's struggle with failed language and use of communicative silence, and Hachiya's description of the atmosphere of silence that prevailed in the immediate aftermath, his omitted retellings of the stories of others, and the hidden expression within his text. The historical circumstances of censorship and hostility towards the *kataribe* also contributed to the silencing of the atomic voice. When words fail, silence, in all its aspects, reveals itself as the only solution.

## Chapter 3

### Women's Testimony

#### **3.1 Introduction: "Masculine Genealogy" and Women's Life Writing**

The place of women's writing in the tradition of autobiography has long been compromised by masculinist assumptions regarding the nature and purpose of autobiographical discourse. Indeed, Linda Anderson asserts that autobiography is the product of a "masculine genealogy" that denies the prospect of a female autobiographical voice (Women and Autobiography 12). She argues that traditional interpretations and definitions of autobiography, such as those propounded by Gusdorf and Pascal, perpetuate a myth that autobiography is an exclusively male genre and leave little room for a consideration of women's autobiographical narratives. Just as the emergence of a testimonial genre challenges traditional interpretations of autobiography as discussed in chapter one, so too does the practice of women's life-writing call for a re-examination of what constitutes autobiography.

Identifying differences between men's and women's autobiographical writing has traditionally depended upon the assumption that there is an autobiographical canon which has established a set stylistic and thematic pattern that defines autobiography as a genre. Perceived adherence to, or deviation from, this pattern can then be identified in terms of gender and biological sex, creating different traditions of men's and women's autobiography, a process which Donna Stanton translated into a formulaic approach: "Male=X, ergo Female=non-X + W" (11). Yet, as Stanton acknowledges, this formula actually functions to obscure rather than to illuminate difference. Firstly, the formula rests on a false supposition that the existence of a large body of autobiographical works throughout history has given rise to a stable definition of autobiography as a genre. Without a stable 'X', the notion of a 'non-X' is rendered meaningless, and this approach to identifying difference between men's and women's autobiographical narratives is thus flawed from the outset. Secondly, the very attempt to define a female practice of writing in this formulaic manner actually contradicts the possibility of identifying a form of writing that is uniquely female. Hélène Cixous argues that "It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be

theorised, enclosed, coded” (253). The process of defining through comparison is an act which takes place within the boundaries of the “phallogentric system” that Cixous suggests dominates Western culture (253). For Cixous, this system is predicated upon a series of hierarchical oppositional binaries, all of which can be reduced to a fundamental binary relationship, that of Man/Woman. In such a discourse, argues Cixous, it is the male aspect of the binary that is valorised, whilst the female aspect is marginalised as passive and submissive. This is precisely the relationship that is at work in the X/non-X binary that Stanton posits as the traditional approach to determining sexual difference in autobiographical practice. Male autobiographical practice is acknowledged as the positive value in the autobiography binary, whilst female autobiographical practice achieves recognition solely through the fact that is not male – non-X. The paradox is, then, that the attempt to define a distinctive female autobiographical voice is orchestrated through a phallogentric system which privileges the male whilst marginalising the female.

Yet, Cixous asserts that the existence of this paradox does not deny the possibility of writing as a woman. Indeed, she remarks that “it is through ignorance that most readers, critics and writers of both sexes hesitate to admit or deny outright the possibility or the pertinence of a distinction between feminine and masculine writing” (253). Where and how, then, in the case of autobiographical writing should the point of sexual difference be located? Stanton identifies the most popularly cited difference between men’s and women’s autobiographical writing as being primarily stylistic in nature, in that: “men’s narratives [are] linear, chronological and coherent, whereas women’s [are] discontinuous, digressive and fragmented” (11). Yet, as Stanton acknowledges, this distinction oversimplifies the nature of autobiographical writing. The shift in critical attention from the *bios* aspect of autobiography to the *autos*, as discussed in chapter one has led to the view that the self as represented in autobiography is not singular and coherent, but rather fragmented and split. This interpretation of the self as a divided subject is frequently manifested in an approach to autobiographical, particularly testimonial, writing which favours a fragmented style. “Discontinuity and fragmentation,” argues Stanton, “constitute particularly fitting means for inscribing the split subject,” and thus these stylistic characteristics should be more accurately considered to be the product of genre rather than gender (11). In the specific context of the testimonial trauma narratives discussed in this

thesis, these characteristics loosen even further from their gendered moorings. Whilst a basic chronological framework is employed by many survivor-authors, temporal digression and discontinuity frequently feature in these accounts. The representation of a coherent self is also often dismissed in favour of a representation which more accurately reflects the fracturing of an individual as a consequence of the experience of trauma, as discussed in chapter one. The attempt to represent trauma, the “unrepresentable,” is, then, arguably as influential in terms of style as theories of gendered writing.

This is not to suggest that the idea that women’s life-writing is a distinct subset of the autobiographical genre does not have currency. Indeed, Adriana Cavarero argues that in fact autobiographical practice is an inherently feminine form of articulation through which women come to recognise their selves and their place in the world. Citing the existence of a social order which allows men to identify themselves as “I” in a public sphere, to recognise, and have recognised, their own individuality, she argues that women are consigned to a private sphere which does not allow for the possibility of individual self-recognition. By engaging in the “feminine custom of self-narration” (59), a woman has the opportunity to recognise herself as a unique individual, or as Cavarero terms it, a “narratable self” (41). Crucially, this process of self-narration is a mutual process by which women come to identify both themselves and others in a reciprocal exchange of life-stories. For women, argues Cavarero, “the questions ‘who are you?’ and ‘who am I?’, in the absence of a plural scene of interaction [i.e. the public sphere] where the *who* can exhibit itself in broad daylight, *immediately* find their answer in the classic rule of story telling” (58). In positing the theory that women are natural storytellers, Cavarero is presenting two aspects of difference between male and female autobiographical practice. Firstly, self-narration is an act which both creates and constitutes female identity, in that the self is only fully realised and recognised through self-narration and that this process of self-narration is a central component of female identity. The second aspect is the emphasis on the reciprocity of the process of women’s self-narration. The realisation of the narratable self is the product of the exchange of life-stories, rather than the independent articulation of the personal life-story which characterises the autobiographical practice of men.



The failure of the autobiography binary to establish meaningful points of sexual difference between male and female authored autobiography is symptomatic of the flexibility of autobiography as a genre which, in the absence of a stable definition of 'X,' prohibits a simple classification of the 'non-X.' Indeed, as this form of comparative approach is revealed to be theoretically flawed in accordance with Cixous' thinking, identifying aspects of autobiographical practice which are unique to women's life-writing necessitates a reinterpretation of the meaning of *autos*, *bios*, and *graph* in the specific context of women's writing.

Women have long been excluded from the autobiographical canon by critics such as Gusdorf and Pascal primarily on the basis of *bios*. Indeed, Sidonie Smith points out that the early female admissions to the autobiographical canon were granted entry primarily on the basis of their 'exceptional' or unusual lives, noting that whilst critics "note[d] the importance of autobiography in gaining information about the woman's *bios*" there was little interest in searching the texts for "the larger and more complex issues of woman's *auté*, woman's *graphia* and woman's reading" (Poetics 7). Critical interest lay in the experience of the author, rather than her gender, rendering her the object, rather than the subject of narration. Frequently, the everyday lives of 'ordinary' women have not been deemed worthy of narration; few women are considered to have reached the heights of "outstanding achievement" that Pascal deems to be a prerequisite of the autobiographical privilege (10). It is in this emphasis on the exceptional and outstanding *bios* that Gilmore locates the "autobiographical paradox," as considered in chapter two, whereby the extraordinary life comes to be representative of an entire age and its people. Gilmore argues that:

There is a long tradition in autobiography of representing the self as utterly unique and, on precisely this basis, able to stand for others through acts of self-inspection and self-revelation. [...] In fact, having an unusual life better suits one to stand in for others in this tradition. The general, the president, the philosopher, and the saint are all better equipped than you and I to represent a life. Read and learn about me, they suggest, and you will learn more about history and, perhaps, yourself and what you are capable of. (19)

Gilmore describes autobiography as occupying a social, even educative, role. By excluding those who are not in a position to contribute to and comment on public life,

this tradition denies nearly all women (and indeed a large proportion of men) the privilege of self-representation.

If there is a point at which a division between a male and female tradition of autobiography can be detected it is here at this point of emphasis on representativeness and the status of the autobiographer. Whilst the qualification of “outstanding achievement” may be central to autobiography according to its masculine genealogy, the importance of this precondition is apparently diminished in women’s autobiographical text. Jacky Bratton argues that:

The masculinist assumption is that men choose to publish their life stories when and because they have a unique importance to the public life of their day. The most pervasive characteristic of *female* autobiography, on the other hand, is argued to be self-definition in relation to significant others; so that rather than a sense of individual autonomy, a sense of identification, interdependence and community is key in the development of women’s identity and therefore also central in the stories of themselves. (101-102)

Bratton is arguing that the interpretation of women’s life writing calls for a fundamental shift in critical perspective from the *bios* to the *autos*; the same shift that permits a fruitful exploration of the testimonial genre. As discussed in chapter one, studies of Holocaust testimonies have encouraged a relocation of critical attention from the story of the *bios* which takes place in the public sphere to the personal and private experiences of the *autos*. If it is the case that this shift is central to women’s writing, then it could be argued that women have a privileged relationship to testimonial writing. This reinforces Caverero’s argument that women are natural storytellers. As the representation of the *autos* is central to women’s autobiographical practice, it is therefore necessary to examine the way in which the *autos* is defined within female authored life narratives

Judith Kean Gardiner shares Bratton’s view that, “throughout women’s lives, the self is defined through social relationships” (182). This view, commonly held by early critics of female autobiography such as Estelle Jelinek, reveals that the female self, as represented in autobiographical texts, is recognised in terms of socially constructed gender roles, rather than biological sex. The female self is, then, constituted through an acknowledgement of her role as mother, daughter, sister and

wife. Yet this definition of the female *autos* is dependent upon the stability and continuity of these social relationships, and is thus compromised in testimonial literature which typically deals with the destruction of social and familial relationships.

In her testimony, Landscapes of Memory, Ruth Klüger recalls the devastating loss she experienced when her older half brother, Schorschi, failed to return to Vienna after a holiday spent with his father in Prague. His father had been granted full custody of Schorschi, following a ruling by the Czech courts which objected to the upbringing of a Czech child in German-occupied Vienna. As a child, Klüger knew little of the judicial reasons behind the sudden absence of her brother, and understood only that he was lost to her. She writes that: “Schorschi was my first great loss, and every subsequent loss has seemed like a replay of that first. I had not only lost a beloved family member but also a role: little sister” (21). Klüger’s sense of loss was not only that of a sister losing a brother, but that of losing her ability to recognise herself. She understood her own identity in relation to those around her; with the loss of one of the defining components of her identity – her role as little sister – she lost a sense of herself as an individual.

This experience of familial loss and the impact that Klüger reveals it to have on the construction of identity is central to a consideration of the way in which the female self is constructed in trauma narratives. It suggests, in fact, a point of potential differentiation between women’s autobiographical narratives and women’s testimonial narratives. In the autobiographical narrative, the female self is constructed through social relationships; testimonial accounts of atrocity, on the other hand, such as those which narrate the experience of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings, are conspicuous by their representation of these social relationships as having been violently destroyed. Charlotte Delbo poignantly bears witness to this in the concluding line to one of her poems in None of Us Shall Return: “Here mothers are no longer mothers to their children” (12). In the context of the experience of atrocity which denies the possibility of gendered social relationships, how is the female self to be constructed in the absence of these social relationships? Jennifer Taylor suggests that the text itself becomes the point of reference for the construction of the female self:

Klüger has lost everything – family, language, status, father, mother, identity – and in trying to piece together a viable post-Shoah identity, she finds that she must; make friends’ with the past [...] Thus, the text becomes a mapping out of her identity as a writer, as a scholar and as a literary voice (84).

Klüger’s narrative allows her to realise her own identity, not only as a writer and a scholar, but as a woman. The female author of testimony constructs her identity through her relationship with the text, and by extension, her relationship with the reader. In a review of Klüger’s *Landscapes of Memory*, Elena Lappin notes that the narrative “is written like an open dialogue with the reader. Klüger doesn’t just write an account of her life, she wonders about how it may be perceived from different perspectives by those who didn’t share her experiences, and even by those who did”. This dialogue with the reader is, suggests Susan Rubin Suleiman, an essential component of autobiographical writing and reading. In reading autobiography, argues Suleiman, “we project ourselves into what we read,” and doing so, enter into a relationship with the author (48). In the absence of social and familial relationships, it is perhaps through these relationships with the reader and the text itself that the female *auto* is defined in testimonial literature.

Marlene Heinemann argues that the practice of identifying the female *autos* through her relationships with others impacts significantly upon the nature of women’s *graphie*. Writing specifically in the context of Holocaust narratives, Heinemann suggest that men’s testimony is characterised by a “self-dramatising” style which situates the experiences of the male *autos* at the forefront of the narrative. In contrast, women’s testimonies are characterised by a “self-effacing” style which reveals “a tendency to hide or diminish the importance of the self” (103). Whilst Heinemann’s argument offers a somewhat generalised perspective on the difference between male and female authored texts, it is certainly the case that many male authored narratives marginalise the experiences of significant women in their lives, such as wives or mothers. When in *Maus* Art Spiegelman questions his father Vladek about what happened to his mother, Anja, during the Holocaust, he replies somewhat impatiently “I can tell you...she went through the same what me: TERRIBLE!” (158). Whilst not disputing the fact that they both endured ‘terrible’ circumstances,

Vladek's reply does mask the specificities of Anja's experiences. However, when reading Holocaust testimonies, it should be taken into account that the marginalisation of women's experiences is not necessarily the product of a masculine "self-dramatising" style. The separation of women and men on arrival at the camps often meant that men were unaware of what happened to the women, and this separation also meant that women were quite simply not a part of men's Holocaust experiences. The narrative process of "self-dramatising" in men's Holocaust testimonies can, then, be more accurately located in the way in which men present themselves. Vladek's account of his experiences can be read as "self-dramatising" in accordance with the way in which he presents his own survival as being the consequence of his own actions. Rightly or wrongly, Vladek believes that he had a degree of control over his own fate through his ability to organise food and clothing for himself, and learn useful trades and skills. In contrast to this form of self-representation, Heinemann suggests that women's narratives are 'self-effacing' in that they do not focus on their own actions. Instead, an emphasis is placed on collective experience, where the importance of the self is sublimated in favour of the importance of the group. Pam Morris suggests that "the most persistent, positive feature of women's writing is its recognition of the bonds of friendship, loyalty and love between women" (61). Certainly in women's Holocaust narratives, the representation of 'camp families,' or small mutually protective groups of women, is common. Rachel Silberman, for example, interned with her mother and sister at Stutthof in 1944, recalls:

We helped each other. I must say in the bad times, people didn't care, whether it was me or another girl. There was another mother and three daughters, and we were close together and if anything happened to anybody, we would all help each other. (qtd. in Gurewitsch 82)

Whilst Heinemann reads such accounts as this as evidence of the "self-effacing" style of women's narratives, I would argue that in fact they demonstrate a form of self-dramatisation. The focus is still very much on the way in which action and behaviour affects chances of survival. The difference lies in the fact that women's narratives reveal a focus on the actions of the group rather than the individual. As opposed to being recognised as a distinct narrative form specific to women's writing, self-effacement should actually be considered as a form of self-dramatisation.

The gendered categorisation of “self-dramatising” and “self-effacing” narrative styles also fails to account for distinctions between men’s and women’s *graphie* in the context of A-bomb testimonies. The marginalisation of the female experience is apparent in male-authored testimonies, not through the omission of women’s experiences, but rather through their representation as archetypal symbols of unprecedented suffering. The image of the unknown burned mother clasping her dead child to her breast in the streets of a ruined city recurs frequently in men’s narratives as a metaphor for innocent victimhood and the evil of war. This trope of maternal suffering obscures the specificities of women’s experiences.

Women’s A-bomb narratives reveal little of the “self-effacing” style that Heinemann suggests characterises women’s Holocaust testimonies. There is no comparable focus on a shared female community of suffering; indeed, the dominating concern is the isolation of women in aftermath of the atomic bombings. Women A-bomb authors often emphasise their own individual struggles in their narratives, and so appear to conform more to Heinemann’s definition of a “self-dramatising” style. Evidently, this stylistic distinction between women’s Holocaust testimonies and women’s A-bomb testimonies needs to be interpreted in accordance with the historical circumstances unique to each event. The experience of incarceration and genocide is very different to that of experiencing physical, economical and psychological hardships in the aftermath of atrocity. The attempt to identify stylistic and thematic characteristics specific to women’s representation of trauma must be situated, then, within their relevant historical contexts.

### **3.2 “Different Horrors, Same Hell:” Women’s Experiences in History (Goldenberg 150)**

An exploration of the differences between testimonial accounts by men and women must be rooted in an understanding of the way in the experience of trauma was related to biological sex and gendered roles in society. Historical and testimonial evidence reveals that women suffered differently to men in the cases of both the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. The nature of this difference, however, is dependent upon the historical specificities of each event. The Nazis targeted male and female victims differently in accordance with genocidal aims, and women suffered

differently to men during the event, primarily on the basis of their biological sex. In comparison, the immediate trauma of the atomic bombs targeted men and women indiscriminately. The mobilisation of civilian labour during the war meant that both men and women were often working side by side in factories and offices, and so the peacetime gendered divisions of space which commonly sited men in the workplace and women in the home were no longer in place. Many women who under peacetime conditions would have been at home in the rural villages surrounding Hiroshima had been drafted to work in the city to replace the men who had gone to war. In terms of their spatial proximity to the bomb there was little difference between men's and women's experiences. It is, then, primarily in the aftermath of the bomb that differences between men's and women's experiences emerged.

In 1980, Joan Ringelheim, an early pioneer of women's Holocaust studies, received a letter from Cynthia Ozick, challenging the validity of her research into women's experiences during the Holocaust. Ozick wrote:

I think you are asking the wrong question. Not simply the wrong question in the sense of not having found the right one; I think you are asking a *morally* wrong question that leaves us still further down the road of eradicating the Jews from history. [...] You insist that it didn't happen to 'just Jews.' It happened to the women, and it is only a detail that the women were Jewish. It is not a detail. [...] The Holocaust happened to victims who were not seen as men, women, or children, but as *Jews*. (qtd. in Ringelheim Thoughts about Women and the Holocaust 144)

Ozick's concern is that by focussing on the female victims of the Holocaust as women rather than Jews, the true nature of the genocide will be overlooked and incorporated into a historical narrative belonging to women. She fears that such an approach will trivialise the Holocaust by reducing it to an abhorrent example of sexism. Ringelheim countered Ozick's challenge by arguing that identifying the victims solely as Jews actually gives rise to a false impression that all Jews shared the same experiences. As Ringelheim points out, "if in the gas chambers [...] all Jews seemed to be alike, the path to this end was not always the same" (Thoughts about Women and the Holocaust 144). Ozick is overlooking the fact that precisely because the motivation behind the Holocaust was genocidal in nature, women were

necessarily treated differently to men. In the prologue to their book Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust, Carol Rittner and John Roth point out that:

Sexism, which divides roles according to biological functions, can exist without racism, but whenever claims are made that one race is superior to any or all others, discrimination directed at women is unlikely to be far behind. Because women are the ones who bear children, they are put uniquely at risk as members of a group targeted as racially inferior. (2)

There is little doubt that women fared differently to men during the Holocaust, and that fewer women survived than men; Ringelheim confirms that only 40% of camp survivors in the displaced persons camps in 1946 were women (Women and the Holocaust 394). To make sense of statistics such as this, it is necessary to explore ways in which female victims were targeted both as women and as Jews. Whilst this approach does not, as Ozick supposes, deny the Jewish identity of the female victims, it does depose Jewish identity as the sole descriptive of Holocaust victims, and so creates a space in which the experiences of non-Jewish victims, male and female, can be recognised.

The primary aim of the Holocaust, as stated by Heinrich Himmler, was to make Jews and other undesirable groups, such as Gypsies, “disappear from the face of the earth” (qtd. in Ringelheim, Women and the Holocaust 392). As potential mothers of future generations, women were therefore particularly targeted by the Nazi regime. The act of genocide criminalised the female body, and contributed to a lower survival rate amongst women than amongst men. The records of the *Einsatzgruppen* killings in Eastern Europe, although incomplete, reveal that more women were murdered than men. Ringelheim has uncovered the fact that 72% of those killed by mobile killing units between September and November 1941 were women, a percentage that Ringelheim suggests can be considered typical across the entire period during which the *Einsatzgruppen* were active (Women and the Holocaust 394-395).

The first women’s internment camp, Ravensbrück, was founded in 1939. A smaller camp was built nearby in 1941 to house male prisoners. Notably, few of the 106,000 women who passed through the camp were Jewish; the majority of prisoners



were Gypsies (particularly Austrian Gypsies), Jehovah's Witnesses and asocials or criminals. As the momentum of the genocidal campaign gathered force, the population of the camp swelled dramatically from 11,000 in 1942 to 70,000 in 1944. This sudden expansion of the prisoner population led to high levels of overcrowding and squalor, and death rates from disease and starvation rocketed. A gas chamber was built in Ravensbrück in early 1945 which was in operation until shortly before the liberation of the camp in April of the same year. Records suggest that approximately 2,300-2,400 women were murdered in the gas chamber (qtd. in Greif 238).

Cynthia Haft argues that "the camp system granted complete equality between the sexes" (235). Her use of the word 'equality' is potentially misleading in this context, suggesting as it does that men and women shared the same experiences. Actually, women's experiences were often very different to men's, although, as Rittner and Roth point out, this fact should not lead to an assumption that one gender suffered more than the other (3). Men and women were usually separated on arrival at the camps, and had little contact with each other during the period of their imprisonment. Following this separation on the basis of gender, prisoners were subjected to a selection process which determined who would be murdered immediately and who would be sent to the barracks. Judith Tydor Baumel argues that women were at a greater risk during this selection process than men. Young women who were pregnant, or who arrived with children aged up to their early teens, were usually selected for immediate extermination. In contrast, young healthy men of a similar age group often stood the best chance of survival, as they were identified as a valuable labour source. The elderly of both sexes were sent directly to their deaths. However, Baumel suggests that middle-aged women were often at greater risk than men of the same age group as they were wrongly identified as older than their years, due to the traditional costume of long black dresses and shawls typically adopted by women from Orthodox communities (20). This is, though, a somewhat subjective view as it could be equally argued that bearded Orthodox men who wore traditional black garb could also be perceived as being older than their years.

Inside the camps, women suffered horrors that were either specific to their sex, or at least intensified by their identity as women. For example, whilst both men and women had their hair shaved and were subjected to nudity in front of their fellow

prisoners and the SS guards during delousing treatments and selections, women's testimonies frequently represent these events as being far more traumatic than men's narratives suggest. Indeed, Baumel suggests that the experiences of enforced nudity and hair removal were:

the most psychologically traumatic [events] of their entire wartime experiences: the first time many of them had ever stood naked before a member of the opposite sex; [...] the degradation of having their body hair removed by a male barber; the shock of losing their hair, symbol of their femininity. (22)

Both men and women were subjected to experiments into enforced sterilisation, and Jewish and gypsy women were targeted for experimentation of this sort at Ravensbrück and Auschwitz. The experiments usually proved to be fatal for the victims. Arguably the experience of, or fear of, sterility was again more traumatic for women than for men. As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the fear that they would be unable to bear children in the future damaged women's hopes for survival, as even if they lived through the camps they would be unable to take up their socially defined female roles as women.

Many women feared being subjected to sexual abuse on pain of death at the hands of the SS guards. Indeed, Marlene Heinemann argues that:

the unique contribution of women's Holocaust literature is to examine the insidious choice between rape and death [...] the choice between humiliation and death is universal in Holocaust literature by men and women, but the choice of sexual humiliation seems much more available to women. (1991)

Heinemann offers little justification as to why accounts of sexual abuse rather than, for example, amenorrhea or pregnancy should represent a uniquely female contribution to Holocaust literature. The fear of sexual abuse was also present for men, although it was much less widespread. In practice, it has been argued, sexual abuse was not that common an experience for Jewish female prisoners, firstly because the SS guards were indoctrinated into the pseudo-philosophy of racial hygiene, and secondly because SS men could be punished if found guilty of having sexual relations with Jewish female prisoners. The threat was far more real for non-

Jewish female prisoners, and the experiences of female prisoners who were raped in the camps should not be marginalised (Karay 289-291).

Additionally, it appears that living conditions in women's camps were considerably more squalid than those in the men's camp. As discussed above, the conditions in the Ravensbrück camp were particularly poor. A further example of this is the women's camp in Auschwitz, which opened in 1942, and received its first transport consisting of 999 women from Slovakia in March. In all, 131,000 women prisoners were registered at Auschwitz, 82,000 of whom were Jewish. Camp Commandant Rudolf Höss commented in his memoirs that:

for the women everything was a thousand times harder, much more depressing and injurious because the living conditions in the women's camps were incomparably worse. The women were allocated smaller living space, the hygienic and sanitary conditions were greatly inferior...and when women reached the 'point of no return' the end was not long in coming. (qtd. in Karay 307)

Whilst gender-specific research has highlighted the danger of assuming a universal Holocaust experience shared by men and women, care must be taken that this assumption is not repeated by representing the experiences of all women to be the same. The experiences of each individual woman differed according to many variables, including her religious identity, nationality, age, class, general health, marital and maternal status, the place she was imprisoned, and the time at which she was deported or imprisoned. The study of women's narratives is, then, essential not only to understand the way in which women's experiences differed to those of men, but also to uncover the ways in which each woman's experiences differed to those of other women.

The controversy that accompanied the development of women's Holocaust studies has not been matched in the field of atomic bomb research. This is due, quite simply, to the fact that little attention has been paid to the specific experiences of *hibakusha* women. The little that has been performed tends to be primarily listings of statistical data regarding the effect of the bomb on menstruation, pregnancy, fertility and the health of children born of *hibakusha* mothers, as presented most fully in Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic

Bombings compiled by the Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The lack of gender specific research contributes to the impression that men's and women's experiences of the atomic bomb were the same. However, women's testimony reveals that women actually suffered in ways that were specific both to their biological sex and to their gendered roles in society as mothers and wives.

Conclusive statistics regarding the number of women killed outright in the atomic attacks are not available; indeed, the overall number of victims killed in the explosion has never been satisfactorily agreed. Yet even if such statistics were available, it would reveal little about a specifically female experience of the atomic bombings. The significance of sexual difference only becomes apparent in the aftermath of the attack.

Regarding physical injuries resulting from the actual explosion, women suffered similar injuries to men in terms of wounds, and burns that left disfiguring scars or keloids. Yet just as Heinemann argues that enforced nudity and the shaving of hair exacted a greater psychological trauma on women than men during the Holocaust, so it could be argued that permanent scarring was more traumatic for women than men. Both men's and women's testimonies bear witness to an enduring sense of shame because of their disfigurement, and a fear that they will be forever stigmatised because of their visually obvious exposure to the bomb. However, for women these concerns are intensified as the disfigurement compromises the relationship between physical beauty and femininity, and so the keloids serve to undermine their understanding of their female identity. In his book Death in Life, Lifton recounts an interview with a female survivor who was left badly scarred after the bombing, in which she told him:

Rather than the joy of having survived, my regret over having become this way was much more profound...And however much I was encouraged by others, I could not help believing that for a woman to lose her beauty is equivalent to death. All I could do was live in a corner [...] I wanted to escape from the world...and if possible, I wished to die. (187)

For this unnamed female survivor, there is a significant difference between surviving, and surviving as a woman.

As did the immediate physical injuries caused by the explosion impact differently on men and women, so did the longer lasting effects of the radiation released by the bomb. The greater the proximity of the survivor to the epicentre of the explosion, the more strongly these effects were manifested in the body. Women often found their menstrual cycles were disrupted, which led to fears that their fertility had been affected by their experiences. These fears were heightened by the significant number of miscarriages and still-births amongst pregnant women who had been exposed to radiation. Women feared that their fertility had been permanently affected, and rumours spread quickly that children born of *hibakusha* mothers would be horribly deformed. Such rumours made it difficult for women to fulfil their gendered social roles in society, as many men refused to marry a woman who had been exposed to the bomb. It was difficult for women to survive financially outside of marriage, and many were reduced to long-term poverty.

Those women left widowed with children faced particular hardship in the post-war years, and this is a theme that is returned to frequently in women's testimonies. Men who lost their wives often simply took their children back to their own mother's who brought them up as their own. Women, however, rarely had this opportunity as they left their own families when they married and became part of their husband's family, often living together with the husband's parents in an extended family group. This arrangement often created a rivalry and even hostility between the wife and the mother-in-law, particularly with regards to the upbringing of children. "In Japanese tradition," explains Lifton, "the mother-in-law in some ways has greater claim upon the children than the wife since they represent the husband's family bloodline" (Death in Life 191-192). Widowed *hibakusha* women who returned home with their children after the bombing not infrequently found that traditional rivalry was intensified, and that the mother-in-law would demand a sole claim on the children, perceiving the *hibakusha* mother to be unfit to care for her children. The only alternative to this arrangement for many women was to attempt to set up home alone with their children, acting as sole breadwinner and carer, a situation which was

not easy in post-war Japan, particularly as *hibakusha* were heavily discriminated against by employers (Lifton, Death in Life 179-182).

The arrival of the Allied Forces in Japan was a cause for great concern among the populace. Since the outbreak of war, the Japanese authorities had regularly issued anti-American propaganda, and during the time that had elapsed since the A-bomb had been dropped, rumours of the cruelty and barbarity of the American soldiers had proliferated. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Hachiya reveals in Hiroshima Diary that the predominant concern was that women would be sexually abused by the soldiers. Hachiya is initially dismissive of these concerns, firstly because he believes that “westerners were a cultured people,” and secondly because he believes that the female victims were so badly injured that they would be unattractive to the soldiers (183). Later, however, he does admit his concerns that the women who had not been badly injured or scarred might be at risk: “how about the healthy young girls in the hospital? Would they go unharmed? I had to confess there were doubts in my mind” (183). Hachiya’s understanding of sexual abuse is revealed here to be flawed, as he repeats the popular misconception that rape is the product of lust, rather than a violent expression of dominance and power. Ultimately, these concerns about sexual abuse proved to be largely unfounded, and whilst the fear of sexual abuse is common in women’s narrative, there is little testimonial evidence to suggest that any attacks of this nature took place. Whilst women may not have become the victims of sexual abuse, however, they were subjected to punishment from their fellow Japanese if they developed willing and consensual relations with the occupying troops. Hachiya recounts overhearing a young Japanese man telling a friend that he had thrown a girl into the sea after seeing her walking with an American soldier. Reflecting on this, Hachiya writes:

The attitude this young man expressed was typical of many who had been taught to hate the enemy. He still had a feeling of hostility. I could not exactly condone his treatment of the girl, but I thought to myself that had I been in his position and my girl had acted as this one had, I might have reacted the same way. The best solution, I thought, was for girls to get out of the city so neither they nor the soldiers would be tempted. (207)

The fate of the young woman in the passage, and whether she survived being flung into the sea, is unknown, and indeed does not seem to particularly concern Hachiya. His tone is one of regret that this happened, but acceptance that it could not be any other way. Aggression towards the enemy is in this case misdirected towards the woman in a way which demonstrates the vulnerability of women in post-war Japan. Hachiya implies that the anger felt by the young man is not rooted in the sight of these young woman walking with an American soldier, but rather in the pain of defeat. In this instance, the fact that the woman is as much a victim of the war as her attacker is forgotten, and she is constructed as the enemy rather than the American soldier. Tellingly, Hachiya sees the solution to problems such as this to be not the ousting of the occupying forces, but rather the exiling of women from the city.

Whilst a direct comparison of the experiences of female victims of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings is evidently not possible on the grounds of historical difference, there are nevertheless certain aspects of their narratives which do bear resemblance, most notably fears about the way in which female identity and femininity are compromised (particularly in terms of infertility and physical disfigurement), and the fear of sexual abuse. It is tempting to read into these points of similarity the suggestion that there is a specifically female form of suffering that is trans-historical and unites all female victims of atrocity and trauma. Whilst such a generalised approach to gendered experiences of trauma should be resisted, it is the case that women in conditions of extremity do share gender-specific points of vulnerability. It is only through exploring the testimonial accounts of women survivors that a greater understanding of the female experience of atrocity can be reached.

### **3.3 Writing the Female Experience of the Holocaust**

#### **“Recipes for gefilte fish are no recipe for coping with the Holocaust”: Women’s Concerns in the Testimony of Ruth Klüger (Klüger 24)**

Every women autobiographer is a daughter who writes and establishes her identity through her autobiographical narrative. Many twentieth century autobiographical texts by women contain an intertext, an embedded narrative, which is a biography of the writer/daughter’s mother. (Malin 1)

In keeping with Malin's perspective, Klüger's testimonial narrative Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered (2003) should be read as not only a personal account of her own experiences, but also a biography of her mother, Alma, and the fraught nature of their changing mother-daughter relationship. There are few accounts of the Holocaust that depict the mother-daughter relationship with such piercing clarity, or indeed, with such a critical eye. So unusual is Klüger's approach that Andrea Reiter has claimed that "the fusion of camp experience and criticism of the mother must be seen as the new element in Klüger's text, and suggests that it might indicate the advent of a new canon of Holocaust literature" (Ich wollte es wäre ein Roman 333). Whether Landscapes of Memory can be heralded as the beginning of a new canon is debatable; although rare, the depiction of parent-child relationship is not exceptional (Elie Wiesel's Night and Livia E. Bitton Jackson's Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust, for example, both describe such a relationship, although not in the same fiercely interrogative manner that Klüger adopts), and in some ways Klüger's narrative can be considered to be very conventional in that it presents an ordered linear chronology, and offers both remembrance and reflection as part of the narrative. Nevertheless, Klüger does offer a new and distinctive voice to the existing Holocaust body of Holocaust testimony, due in the most part to the way in which she centralises an analysis of her mother's life and in doing so engages with an understanding of her own identity.

Not only does the relationship with her mother dominate the text thematically, it also plays a role in the genesis of the English version of her testimony. Klüger first recorded her Holocaust experiences in a testimony written in German, entitled weiter leben: Eine Jugend. Anna K Kuhn describes weiter leben as being very much "ein deutsches Buch," in that "it was not only written in Germany, in German, but is also dedicated to Klüger's German friends [...] and intended for a German audience" (128). Klüger's decision to write initially in German is in itself a significant act. As discussed in the previous chapter, a survivor's choice of language in testimony can be interpreted as part of the act of bearing witness. Wiesel, for example, chose to write Night in French as the language was relatively uncontaminated by the barbarism of the Holocaust. Whilst Klüger states forcefully that "German proverbs nauseate me,"



and considers the German language as employed in the camps to be repellent in its corruption of meaning, she does not reach the Steinerian conclusion that the German language as a whole has been damaged by the events of the Holocaust. “German, strange as it may sound,” Klüger argues, “is a Jewish language. Consider that until the Holocaust, most of the world’s prominent secular Jews spoke and wrote it: Kafka, Freud, Einstein, Marx, Heine, Theodor Herzl (!), and Hannah Arendt, to name the first that come to mind” (257-258). For Klüger, the problem of contaminated language is locked into time and place. The German language of the camps is nauseating; likewise the language of her Viennese childhood, a place where the very “cobblestones [...] scream with hate,” holds the power to disturb her (258). “I understand this language,” she writes of her native tongue, “but I don’t like it. I speak it but I wouldn’t have chosen it” (63). The German language that she draws on is, then, the language of Kafka, of Freud rather than the language of Himmler or Streicher. Indeed, her choice to write in German is an act of defiant reclamation, rescuing the German language of Jewish intellectualism and achievement from its brutal application in the death camps.

However, Klüger’s decision to write in German was primarily motivated by the desire to save her mother from reading her daughter’s damning representation of their relationship. As both Klüger and her mother had built their lives in America after the war, Klüger explains “I thought if I wrote in German, my mother wouldn’t see it, as she had no contact with things German, and even considered my career [she is a Professor of German] an embarrassment” (264). Klüger had good reason to be cautious; her testimony was criticised by an American book reviewer as being the product of a “bitter lifelong vendetta” against her mother (Dickstein 26). Yet these hopes were dashed when the cousin of her mother’s bridge partner sent her a copy of weiter leben, and “even though she was an impatient and infrequent reader, my mother found easily all the passages that were critical of her and was badly hurt” (Klüger 264). Reading both resentment and bitterness towards her in her daughter’s account of their survival, Klüger’s mother was distraught about the way in which she was portrayed, and the opinions that her friends and neighbours would form of her as a consequence. “There was no point arguing that the neighbours didn’t read German books,” writes a frustrated Klüger (264). Her deference to her mother’s feelings, however, explains the nine year gap between the publication of weiter leben and

Landscapes of Memory. “I promised myself not to publish it in English until after her death. Let it appear in French, in Czech, even in Japanese, but not in English. I owed her that much,” states Klüger, suggesting a greater allegiance to her mother than her narrative reveals (264). Her decision to write in German is, then, a reflection of Klüger’s testimonial duty to the living, in contrast to other survivors such as Wiesel and Levi who reveal in their narratives a duty towards the dead.

Klüger describes her English account as “neither a translation, nor a new book: it’s another version, a parallel book, if you will, for my children and my American students” (264). She began to write it as her mother was dying, completing and publishing it only after her mother’s death at the age of 97 in 2000. Kuhn suggests that in Landscapes of Memory, Klüger “mitigates and revises her criticisms” of her mother, and it is significant to note that she dedicates the book to her mother (129). Landscapes of Memory concludes with an image of Klüger’s mother and her grandchild together, “a smile of total affinity on both their faces,” this uninterrupted female line offering the possibility of redemption from the sufferings of the past (269).

Born in Vienna in 1931, Klüger was deported to Theresienstadt with her mother and paternal grandmother in September 1942, where they remained until 1944 when she and her mother were deported to Auschwitz. Her grandmother had already perished in the ‘model ghetto’ of Theresienstadt. They remained in Auschwitz until the summer of 1944, when they were deported together to Christianstadt. In February 1945, Klüger, her mother and four other prisoners escaped together from the camp and travelled through rural Germany eventually finding safety with the American army in April 1945, a month before the end of the war in Europe. Lore Dickstein suggests that “it seems evident, at least to this reader, that she would not have survived had it not been for her mother’s pluck and resourcefulness” (26).

Klüger negotiates the representation of her mother and the nature of their changing relationship through the emergence of two distinct narrative personas; the experiential Klüger who is the child protagonist in the memories she describes, and the adult narratorial Klüger who reflects on her memories of her experiences during the war. The distinction between a potential authorial persona and the narratorial

persona is harder to identify in this text. Indeed, Reiter argues that Klüger explicitly disavows “a distance between herself the author, and the narrator in the text” (Ich wollte es wäre ein Roman 326). Carmel Finnan suggests that Klüger’s impulse to write her testimony was rooted in “the need to reconcile [her] present sel[f] with [that] of the past” (278). Whilst the relationship between the experiential past self and the narratorial present self does change as the narrative progresses, there is a tension between the two personas that is never satisfactorily resolved in the text.

As with Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, the use of different names is central to Klüger’s representation of her divided self. She explains that as a child she had always been called by her middle name, Susi, rather than Ruth. Klüger describes her family as “emancipated but not assimilated,” in that whilst they did not keep a kosher house or practice their faith devoutly, they did acknowledge Jewish High Holy days with fasting and visits to the synagogue (39). However, even as a child, Klüger became increasingly aware of the persecution meted out to her in 1930s Vienna on the basis of her Jewish identity, and “became Jewish by defence” (39). Unaware of the biblical heritage of her middle name, Susannah, Klüger insisted that she be called by her first name, Ruth. She recalls, “why do I have a first name if I can’t use it? I thought, and under the circumstances, only a Jewish name would do” (40). This change in name comes to represent a rupturing in Klüger’s identity between her pre-Holocaust self (Susi) and the self that experienced the Holocaust (Ruth). The only member of the family to continue calling her Susi was her grandmother, who later died in Theresienstadt. Klüger recalls the misconception held by her family in the early stages of the war that “nobody would hurt an old woman. Or a child, like her youngest granddaughter, Susi” (40). For Klüger then, Theresienstadt was not only the place her grandmother died, but also the place where Susi died.

Nevertheless, in the frequent interjections from Klüger the narrator, Klüger exhibits a far closer identification with Susi than with Ruth. She recalls an incident where her great-aunt confiscated her collection of streetcar tickets, on the grounds that it was unhygienic. Klüger’s narratorial voice interjects parenthetically to commiserate empathetically with Susi, asserting: “(But it was mine, damn it. What right did she have to take it? I can still feel my eight year old indignation.)” (9). Klüger the narrator shares with Susi an antipathy towards her mother, described as “a

spoiled child of wealth” (40). Indeed, most of the passages which can be considered to be unmitigated criticism of her mother appear early in the text where Klüger the narrator shares the petty grievances of Susi towards maternal authority. The relationship between both Susi and Klüger the narrator and her – or perhaps more accurately, their – mother is represented as highly competitive: “There was nothing that she hadn’t done better than I, and my only recourse was to doubt her word” (57). In the early stages of the narrative, both Klüger and Susi share a mutual distrust of Alma, and Klüger reflects that “in our case, the symptoms of this flourishing mother-daughter neurosis were textbook perfect” (56).

Yet as the narrative progresses and Ruth takes over the role of protagonist, Klüger the narrator gradually begins to challenge the critical attitude that Ruth adopts towards her mother. This is revealed most significantly in a passage in which Klüger recounts her mother’s suggestion that they commit suicide together when they arrived at Birkenau. She writes:

My mother explained to me that the electric barbed wire outside was lethal and proposed that she and I should get up and walk into that wire. I thought I hadn’t heard correctly [...] I was twelve years old, and the thought of dying, now, without delay, in contortions, by running into electrically charged metal on the advice of my own mother, whom God had created to protect me, was simply beyond my comprehension. The idea of it! I couldn’t grasp it. I fled into the comfort of believing that she couldn’t have meant it. Persuaded myself that she was only out to frighten me. Resented that she was up to bad tricks. Hadn’t she often scared me for nothing? (111)

Unable to contextualise her mother’s suggestion within the desperate circumstances they were experiencing, Ruth is able to interpret the suicide proposal only through her understanding of their dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship. Finnan suggests that throughout the narrative, “Klüger’s representations of the maternal function overturn the historical position of persecutor and victim [to the extent that] her mother assumes the role of persecutor” (281). The identification of her mother as the potential perpetrator of harm towards her offers Ruth a form of “comfort.” She is able to detach herself from the obvious and explicit danger around her, and focus instead on a perceived threat from her mother. To Ruth, the image of her mother as a threatening authoritative figure is familiar from their many clashes in her early

childhood, and thus Ruth's criticism of her mother in this instance actually represents an attempt to normalise the situation in which she finds herself. Her critical attitude towards her mother and their relationship can be interpreted as a coping strategy adopted to deal with the experience of trauma.

This passage describing Ruth's interpretation of her mother's suggestion is followed immediately by Klüger the narrator's reflections on the incident. She writes:

I knew my mother no better than most children know their parents, which isn't very well. Perhaps a certain, wild destructive pleasure was at the root of her proposal. But more probably she was quite serious and quite desperate. As I think back, I ask myself if I have ever forgiven her that worst evening of my life. Of course I have: but who can count the sparks in the ashes? [...] Only when I had children of my own did I realise that one might well decide to kill them in Auschwitz rather than wait. I now believe that I would have had the same thought and perhaps carried it out more efficiently. (112)

Klüger's interpretation of her mother's actions is revealed to be quite different to Ruth's understanding of her mother's suicide proposal. Klüger the narrator is able both to reflect on her mother's state of mind, and to forgive her. As a mother herself by this point, Klüger is able to identify with her mother's point of view in a way that was impossible for Ruth. Yet despite this reconciliation with her mother, Ruth's voice is still apparent in the final sentence of the passage, which stands in critical judgement not of her mother's suggestion, but of the way in which she failed to act upon it.

Later in the text, Klüger tries to analyse her mother's response to the camps, and in particular her proposal of suicide. She asserts:

My mother had reacted correctly to the extermination camp from out the outset, that is, with the sure instinct of the paranoid. Her suicide proposal of the first night is evidence of her understanding. [...] Yet I still think that it was not her reasonableness but an old and deep seated sense of being persecuted which enabled her to save our lives. [...] I think that people suffering from compulsive disorders, such as paranoia, had a better chance to pick their way out of mass destruction, because in Auschwitz they were finally in a place where the social order (or social chaos) had caught up with their delusions. [...] But isn't the price she paid too high: this madness that she carried inside

her, like a sleeping tomcat? The cat would occasionally stretch, yawn, arch his back, softly case the joint, suddenly chatter with his teeth, reach with sharp claws for a bird, and go to sleep again – leaving the bloody feathers for me to clean up. I don't want to carry such a predator inside of me, even if he could save my life in the next extermination camp. (121-122)

Interestingly, Klüger identifies the qualities within her mother that made their survival possible, which from Ruth's perspective identified her as a perpetrator, to be masculine. This is in line with her perception of the act of persecution and the Holocaust as being fundamentally male in nature. Yet at the same time, her mother is also the persecuted, and it is in recognising this duality of both persecutor and persecuted within her mother's nature that Klüger the narrator is able to differ to Ruth in her understanding of her mother. Yet whilst Klüger's voice and attitudes enter into the text, she does not attempt to silence Ruth, and the two personas live alongside each other, alternately constructing the mother as both victim of her circumstances and as perpetrator.

Reiter suggests that the representation of the troubled mother-daughter relationship throughout the narrative should be interpreted not only as a personal account of Klüger's family history, but also within the wider context of her feminist reading of the history of the Holocaust. "Klüger's criticism of her mother," argues Reiter, "[...] is not so much a condemnation of her but rather presents a paradigm of the general helplessness of the Jewish woman confronted with her family's deportation and extermination" (Ich wollte es wäre ein Roman 334). Klüger's criticism of her mother is thus a screen for her feminist criticism of male oppression.

Certainly, Landscapes of Memory stands as a text that is as much influenced by Klüger's post-war experiences as a feminist professor of German literature in America as by her childhood wartime experiences in Europe, the landscapes of the title seemingly echoing this geographical shift. She constructs a strongly feminist fashioning of history, curiously both casually dismissive of historical fact and at the same time insistent upon detail. For Klüger, it is essential that the name of each of the camps she was imprisoned in is remembered. She explains:

My third place of internment, whose name nobody can remember, was Christianstadt, which was called a work camp and was an extension, an *Aussenlager*, of another concentration camp, Gross-Rosen. There were many of these work camps, or *Arbeitslager*. Hitler's Europe was dotted with them, but there is a great reluctance to pay attention to their names [...] Death camps seem easier to comprehend if we put them all into the basket of one vast generalisation, which the term *death camps* implies, but in the process we mythologise or trivialise them. (77)

In this passage, Klüger argues that historical accuracy is essential in order to prevent the history of the Holocaust from disappearing into the realm of myth. Naming anchors her experiences in reality, and prevents the possibility that her specific experiences will be subsumed into a generalised shorthand of Holocaust history. In this context, the broad term 'death camps' denotes only an imaginary place; there was no place called 'death camp.' Indeed, as she points out, "the term *extermination camp* didn't exist yet" (74); the implication is that by using this non-contemporaneous terminology, real places are transformed into places of myth. It is perhaps this concern that motivates her to include the contemporaneous German terms *Aussenlager* and *Arbeitslager* (yet curiously not *Konzentrationslager*). And yet, is it possible for names that belong to a now lost landscape to evoke a sense of that landscape as real? Klüger laments the inadequacy of the term 'landscape' that she adopts for the title of her testimony, stating that "I want my timescapes. Evocations of places at a time that has passed" (74). The places that she names are places that belong to a separate timescape to the present, and therefore their usage does not necessarily resurrect them as real places. Klüger suggests that the names she records are like "piers of bridges that were blown up, only we can't be quite sure of what these bridges connected" (75). Yet to leave the places unnamed, to submit to a generalised discourse, is, for Klüger, to participate in the process of mythologisation and trivialisation. The only response, then, however unsatisfactory is to "start with what is left: the names of the places" (75).

Yet this emphasis on communicating the exact historical detail of the Holocaust that Klüger expresses in this passage cannot be considered as a prevailing attitude in the text. Indeed, she exhibits a certain disregard for conventional historical narrative in her testimony, for example when relating the tales told to her in Birkenau

by an acquaintance, Liesel, whose father was a member of the *Sonderkommando* and passed on all that he witnessed to his teenage daughter:

From her I learned that the gold fillings of Jewish teeth weren't permitted to stay in dead Jewish mouths, and much else that is common knowledge today, can be researched in many reference books, and need not be repeated here. (115)

Her belief that she has no need to repeat the role of the *Sonderkommando* in any detail as it is already so well documented in history books implies that the tales that she does relate, mainly the stories of her own experiences and those of other women, are necessary as they are outside of the history books. This suggests that for Klüger the history of the Holocaust has been told by men, is primarily about men, and that her role is to rectify this situation. She readily encourages the idea that her book is both about women and for women, writing that “most of [my readers are] likely to be female, since males, on the whole, tend to prefer books written by fellow males” (77). Not only does Klüger locate in the act of reading women's autobiography a female tradition of readership, but, in line with Cavarero's thinking, she also identifies remembrance and the autobiographical process as inherently female.

“Remembrance,” Klüger declares, “is a branch of witchcraft” (75). Bearing in mind the historical marginalisation of women's autobiographical texts, it is interesting that she selects witchcraft, with its associations of female persecution, as a metaphor for her act of memory and self representation. She continues the metaphor by likening the process of sharing memory with that of sharing recipes in a “witches' kitchen” (75). She urges:

“Use your best wooden spoons with the longest handles to whisk into the broth of our fathers the herbs our daughters grew in their gardens. If I succeed, together with my readers – and perhaps a few men will join us in the kitchen – we could exchange magic formulas like favourite recipes and season to taste the marinade which the stories and histories offer us. (75)

It is tempting to interpret the image of the father's broth and the daughter's herbs as a symbol of the integration of male and female traditions of autobiography. The stories of men and the stories of women come together to form our “favourite recipes.”

Whilst for Klüger “recipes for gefilte fish are no recipe for coping with the



Holocaust” they may offer a way of coping with the demands of memory and representation (24).

Whilst Klüger’s omission of certain historical details that are already so often told in accounts of the Holocaust in order to allow space for the articulation of a specifically female experience of the Holocaust is perhaps justifiable, more concerning is her distortion of historical fact in accordance with her politicised views on gender. At one point in Landscapes of Memory, she belligerently asserts that:

Female guards are often called ‘SS women.’ It’s a misnomer, since there were no women in the SS. The SS was strictly a men’s club. Everybody knows this, and yet the term remains in use, as if to make sure that women get half the blame for an organisation that was never theirs. (135)

Far from everybody knowing that there were no female SS guards, many survivors, including Livia E. Bitton Jackson, Charlotte Müller and Charlotte Delbo, make explicit reference to SS women in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. Daniel Goldhagen refers specifically to 27 female SS guards who served at Ravensbrück and Helmbrechts (a Flossenbürg satellite camp), although he notes that they were not recruited until the late stages of the war, and that “their resemblance to real SS men was close to nil. The head woman guard [Helga Hegel] referred to them in her testimony as ‘SS’ guards, with ironical quotation marks around SS” (337-338). Whilst the majority of SS members were certainly men, and women primarily acted as auxiliaries rather than leading in senior positions, to suggest that the SS was an exclusively male organisation is to rewrite history of the period. Klüger also states that “no women were charged in the great postwar trials at Nuremberg or later at the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt” (136). This comment once again offers a misleading interpretation of historical fact. Luise Danz, for example, had served as a guard at a number of different camps, including Plaszow, Majdanek and Auschwitz. She was placed on trial in Poland in 1946, and was given a life sentence for crimes she had committed during the Holocaust, although was later released in 1956.

Klüger does, however, recall that there were female guards at Christianstadt, but she is reluctant to identify them as members of the SS. She argues that these

women were drawn “from families with little education, and were put into uniforms since they could hardly wear civilian clothes to work in the camps” (136). This somewhat ambiguous description suggests that officially these women were members of the SS, or at least wore the uniform of the SS. Yet from Klüger’s perspective, these women should be recognised as SS in name only; they did not embrace the ethos and ideology of the SS organisation in any way. Instead, the women guards came from poor and uneducated backgrounds and were in no position to make an informed choice about the role they played in the perpetration of genocide. Indeed, Klüger seems to be positing a radical reinterpretation of the perpetrator-victim relationship, whereby the female guards are constructed as victims of the male-dominated Nazi regime.

Characteristic of many of the eye-witness accounts of the behaviour of female SS guards is an account of their unusual brutality and cruelty. Charlotte Müller recalls an attack by a female SS guard on her work battalion at Ravensbrück: “the SS Weiber could really beat a prisoner. She was beating the girls, the table knocked over, the chairs kaput and everything which way and didn’t let anyone get out. She stood there in the doorway, hitting all around her with a club” (163). Yet it is precisely this demonisation of women that Klüger objects to so strongly and she presents an impassioned defence of their actions in her narrative. She states:

I believe on the basis of my own experience as well as from what I have heard and read, that in average they were less brutal than their male counterparts. It is hardly news that women are less violent than men. [...] The women guards at Christianstadt were moderate in their authoritarianism. When they were in a bad mood they took it out on us. [...] But they weren’t egregiously cruel – not that I can remember. (137)

Whilst her view that women were less brutal than men certainly contradicts the accounts of many other witnesses, it is interesting that she tempers this assertion with a reference to the potential fallibility of her own memory. This could be read as a tacit admission that her memory of her experiences has been influenced by her post-war political views on gender. Yet the ‘I’ also reminds the reader that this is her personal account. Early on in *Landscapes of Memory*, Klüger suggests that: “wars, and hence the memories of wars are owned by the male of the species” (7). Her

distinctive feminist 'I' acts as a challenge to this male historical discourse that marginalises the experiences of female perpetrators and victims. For Klüger, it is only by rectifying this gender imbalance in the history of the Holocaust that a better understanding of the event can be reached. She denies that her testimony is an "attempt to exonerate the women who committed crimes;" rather, it is an attempt to situate female criminality within a more balanced historical context (136). From Klüger's perspective, it is because female criminality was the exception rather than the rule that known female perpetrators, such as Ilse Koch, are rendered infamous through accounts of their perverse brutality. Klüger points out that "it seems we always pull the same names out of the hat when it comes to women, while the names of the men who committed atrocities are legion" (136). Klüger disregards as irrelevant the claim that the only reason women did not commit the same number of crimes as men was because they did not have the opportunity to do so. "We don't condemn people for what they might do under different circumstances," she argues, "but for what they actually did" (136). Yet in light of her misleading rendering of historical facts, this apparently judicious comment is little short of disingenuous. Collectively, it may well be true that women had less opportunity to commit crimes than men as they were disproportionately represented amongst the perpetrators. However, individually, there is little to suggest that female perpetrators committed fewer criminal acts than their male counterparts. This approach has led to some of the strongest criticism of her testimony. Lore Dickstein in particular challenges this aspect of the Landscapes of Memory, arguing that "This reflexive, outdated feminism, which regards anything male as suspect and all women, even Nazi women, as essentially powerless sisters, seriously mars the book and threatens to undermine its credibility" (26).

Whilst Klüger's brand of feminism certainly draws on an essentialist rhetoric often associated with American first-wave feminism, it is unfair to say that this politicised approach undermines the credibility of her account. Firstly, Reiter suggests it is in fact her highly politicised stance that enables her to avoid "the sentimental representation of life in the camps which is so often apparent when the victims are children" (Ich wollte es ware ein Roman 332). Secondly, Dickstein's use of the word "credibility" is somewhat ambiguous; historical inaccuracy is after all, relatively common in accounts based on memory, although admittedly, Klüger's

inaccuracies are rather glaring. Alternatively, Dickstein may be suggesting that her style undermines Klüger's position as a feminist and scholar by employing a feminist rhetoric which is out of keeping with early twenty-first century feminism. What Dickstein is overlooking in her criticism of the text is that whilst Klüger's account of the (non)-culpability of female perpetrators may not be in keeping with certain known historical facts, it is vital to her representation of the Holocaust as a part of the history of male oppression of women. Indeed, at one point in her narrative she describes witnessing her mother being punished in Birkenau by being forced to kneel on bricks for an extended period of time. Klüger defines this moment as her "most vivid and lurid memory of Birkenau" (130). Yet she is swift to argue that the situation of a daughter being forced to witness the abuse of her mother is not unique to the Holocaust, and contextualises it within a longer history of female oppression: "I have described something that is in many ways a common sight to the children of wife beaters and was common to the children of slaves in the nineteenth century" (130). These parallels serve to reinforce the way in which she approaches the history of the Holocaust. She states quite emphatically that "fascism is a decidedly male property, whether you were for or against it" (7), and even more bluntly that "the Nazi evil was male, not female" (136). In accordance with her politicised feminist view of history, she presents the Holocaust as an assault on women. Yet unlike many other testimonial accounts by women, Klüger chooses to focus not on physical bodily experiences specific to women, but rather on women's behaviour and coping strategies during the Holocaust.

A distinguishing feature of women's testimonial accounts of the Holocaust is the effect of physical trauma and deprivation on the body. Accounts of the shaving of hair, menstruation and amenorrhea, pregnancy and childbirth, the fear of infertility, enforced sterilisation, the fear of sexual abuse and gynaecological experiments are routinely included in women's narratives. In comparison with other women's testimonies, Klüger's narrative is notable for its marginalisation of these specifically female experiences.

An appropriate testimony for comparison is Livia E. Bitton Jackson's account, Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust. A similar age to Klüger during the Holocaust, Jackson was deported with the rest of her family to Auschwitz from the

Nagymagyar ghetto in 1944. Like Klüger, Jackson too remained with her mother throughout the war and although she often writes of her mother with great love and affection, the mother-daughter relationship is never foregrounded as it is Klüger's testimony. Jackson and her mother endured frequent transports; from Auschwitz to Płaszów, back to Auschwitz, then to Augsburg in south east Germany where they were forced to labour in a factory. As the war drew to a close, the women of Augsburg and surrounding camps were forced into wagons and moved ceaselessly in an attempt to evade the advancing American army. As is so often the case in Holocaust testimony, the moment of liberation is recorded anticlimactically. The women in the railway wagon, including Jackson and her mother, simply awoke one morning in the wagon to find an American soldier staring in at them. "So it has come," she recalls. "We are liberated. It is all over now" (212).

Throughout her text, Jackson repeatedly focuses on bodily female experiences as compounding the misery of the camps. One particularly notable passage deals with her horror at witnessing a woman menstruating during a morning roll call. She writes:

All at once I notice that blood is flowing on the legs of the girl before me. A thick red stream of blood on the inner side of each leg. Oh my God, she must have been shot! What should I do? Then, in a flash, I realise. She is menstruating. Poor girl. Of course, we have no underwear...there are no pads...the blood simply flows. Down her legs. My God, but this is horrible. Why doesn't she say something? Ask for a pad or something? But from whom? Whom can she say anything to? She might even be shot for reporting that she is bleeding. Does menstruating constitute sabotage? (93-94)

The juxtaposition of the familiar – menstruation – with the unfamiliar – the camp – at first prevents Jackson from understanding what is going on. In the camp, she has come to associate blood only with violence and pain. Yet when she suddenly understands the situation, her horror turns to a frustrated and impotent sympathy for the unnamed woman. Just as quickly, however, she recognises that her first association between blood and violence may have been correct. She fears that her own body will threaten her chances of survival, that menstruation will be construed as a sign of rebellion, sabotage even, punishable by death. Baumel confirms that

Jackson's fears were indeed justified, as there was a significant threat "that any female inmate whose uniform would be stained with menstrual blood would be killed" (25). Jackson recognises that as a woman she may be endangered not only by her actions, but simply through being. When menstruation abruptly ceases some weeks later due to the effects of starvation, Jackson reveals that she is "secretly grateful [...] Avoiding the fear, pain and embarrassment of menstruation is worth any sacrifice to me at the moment" (103). Yet whilst Jackson herself is grateful, she relates with feeling the fears of the older women that they are being secretly sterilised with bromide in their food:

Married women keep wondering about the bromide in their food again and again. Will they bear children again? What will their husbands say? Perhaps less of the food will cause less of a damage. Some try to eat less and the conflict is painful. Rejection of a means of survival for the sake of a dubious gain. (104).

This fear of infertility appears often in women's narrative, and is intimately bound up with the hope of survival. Marlene Heinemann argues that amenorrhea and the accompanying fear of infertility constituted a form of "psychological assault" unique to women, which "threatened them with the loss of the specific biological function which society insists upon as the chief vocation for women. Thus the loss of fertility could be construed as a threat to the possibility of a worthwhile life afterwards" (67). The rumour of bromide in the food presented many women with an unbearable paradox. Abandoning the fear of sterility and eating the food was for many women to abandon the hope of a life after the war as a wife and mother. Yet to refuse to eat the food would mean a more certain and immediate death in the camp. Another survivor, Gerda Klein recalls "the thought of sterility did worry me. More forcefully as the long nights passed, the idea returned that someday I must have a baby of my own. I felt that I would endure anything willingly so long as that hope was not extinguished" (156).

In contrast, Klüger refers to these issues of menstruation and the fear of infertility only briefly. Indeed, the fear of sterility she dismisses as a bourgeois concern expressed only by those who had never before experienced hardship and suffering.

Everyone was so undernourished that no one menstruated. But perhaps the cause was not only hunger, but imprisonment itself. Even well nourished animals seldom have a full litter in a zoo. Prison is bad for us living things, from the lower to the highest links on the food chain. Some women thought the Nazis had put something in our food to prevent menstruation, which only goes to show how well off they had been before, since they didn't know the effects of starvation. (141-142)

The anguish and horror so prevalent in Jackson's account of menstruation and amenorrhea is utterly absent in Klüger's account. Writing in a more detached fashion, she is capable of reflecting on the reasons for the absence of menstruation, and wryly references dehumanising Nazi rhetoric in her explanation. She is scornful of "the presumed justification of a woman's life, having children" (252). Perhaps it is due to her relatively young age whilst in the camps that she does not acknowledge these fears fully; she claims that she could not understand the despair women experienced at having their hair shaved off because "she was too young to grasp the deeper and symbolic significance of this despoilment" (138). Yet for the similarly aged Jackson, the experience of having her hair shaved off was of great import. She reveals:

The haircut has a startling effect on every woman's appearance. Individuals become a mass of bodies.[...] We become a monolithic mass. Inconsequential. [...] The shaving of the hair had a curious effect. A burden was lifted. The burden of individuality. Of associations. Of identity. Of the recent past. (78-79)

In common with Klüger, Jackson does not recognise despair in the experience of losing her hair. Instead, she describes the loss of individual identity positively, finding comfort in the 'monolithic mass.' This echoes her previous description of her feelings on entering the Nagymagyar ghetto, where she explains: "I like it all. I am a part of every life. And every life is partly mine. I cease to be an individual. I am a limb of a larger body. In this I find solace" (37). This emphasis on the need for community is in itself a characteristic of many female authored texts. Many women cite in their testimonies that the reason for their survival was belonging to a mutually protective 'camp family', usually comprised of four or five women who were often unrelated. Jackson recalls forming just such a group with her mother, her aunt and two cousins whilst in Auschwitz:

We decide to form a family of five. Suri says it is much easier to survive in Auschwitz if you are five. [When food is distributed] every five get one portion of bread and a bowl of food and it is divided among them. If you don't know the others, you may end up without provisions. [...] But if you have family and friends on the line, you share the food equally. (89)

Whether these groups actually did improve chances of survival is difficult to judge; those who did not survive may well have also sought refuge in protective groups. Lawrence L. Langer suggests that despite the prevalence of accounts of camp families in women's narrative, "the full context of these narratives shows us how seldom such alliances made any difference in the long-range effects of the ordeal for those who outlived it" (Gendered Suffering 351). Ringelheim was initially an advocate of the theory that these 'camp families' offered women a greater chance of survival, but later revised her opinion, pointing out that:

The focus on friendship, affection, and so on, distorted our understanding of a larger situation in which that experience may have played only a small role. The bonding was limited and exclusive. It was not a bonding against the enemy in solidarity with women. Did the terror of isolation and death *not* affect the women because they bonded? (Women and the Holocaust 388)

Ringelheim also questions why readers and critics are so keen to attribute such great importance to these groups, suggesting that it is more to do with a retrospective search for a positive image in the Holocaust than with historical accuracy (388). A further point to note is that whilst these accounts are significantly more common in women's testimonies than those authored by men, this does not necessarily mean that it was an exclusively female mode of behaviour; merely that it has not been recounted in the majority of men's narratives. The focus on camp families in women's narratives should perhaps be more accurately recognised as style of narration, rather than a representation of historical reality.

Klüger's narrative is no exception in noting the importance of female relationships during the Holocaust. Indeed, the formation of just such a small group is also a pivotal moment in her changing relationship with her mother. Klüger writes: "now this is the best and the most unusual thing that I can say about my mother: she adopted a child in Auschwitz. She decreed without any fuss that this girl belonged



with us, as if it was the most natural thing in the world” (146). The child in question was Susi, a teenage girl about Klüger’s age, who remained with Klüger and her mother until their liberation in 1945. The coincidence of name between Susi the surrogate sister and Susi the child protagonist in the early passages of the text is startling, and on first reading is suggestive of a narrative device employed by Klüger as part of her representation of her relationship with her mother. Yet Susi the sister is far more sympathetic towards Alma than Klüger describes her child protagonist to have been.

A key example of this emerges from an experience Klüger recalls from her time in Christianstadt. Beaten by an SS man after asking for food leftovers, Klüger returned to the barracks and told her mother about her experience. Typically, Klüger describes her mother’s response to be unsympathetic, claiming that “if she had been there, she would have hit back” (151). Her angry reaction to her mother’s words is expressed in Ruth’s contemporaneous voice in a particularly coruscating passage:

My mother irritates me, because she stylises herself at my expense: she is the potential heroine, unlikely as it may seem, and reduces me to poor-little-victim status. As if the humiliation of having been hit wasn’t enough, she has to add her superior airs and her pity. (151)

Yet this rage towards her mother is immediately tempered by her inclusion of Susi’s memories:

And yet, reading this passage, Susi reminds me of something I had forgotten. My mother, oddly enough, was for a short time a kind of protegee, inasmuch as she got work in the laundry, which was a privileged job. She achieved this position in an unlikely way – she complained to one of the guards that her children had been treated unfairly. (151-152)

These are the memories of Susi the surrogate sister, but the coincidence of name makes it tempting to read them as a figurative invocation of Susi the child protagonist. Could these positive memories of Alma represent a rehabilitation of the neurotic mother-daughter relationship between Susi and Alma as represented in the early stages of the narrative? Yet this reading runs the risk of misinterpreting historical actualities as literary conceits, an approach which should be resisted when

analysing testimonial narratives. It is preferable, then, to acknowledge the duplicated names as a curiosity of historical happenstance, rather than as a narrative device.

Ruth and her mother maintained a relationship with Susi after the war when all three were living separately in America, although Klüger's mother would periodically go through stages when she would reject any contact at all with Susi. Klüger herself describes Susi still as "my sister, for there is no other term to describe our relationship, which seems absolute, although we share few, if any, interests" (146). She cautiously accepts the idea that the relationship between the three women played a significant role in their survival, commenting that: "Susi always thought that my mother saved her life. [...] I can't tell whether she would have remained alive without my mother. But I suspect that all three of us can claim a share in having saved each other" (146). Whilst Klüger acknowledges that in terms of emotional support their small group was significant, she shies away from depicting their relationship as harmonious and idyllic. She recalls the period when they were at Christianstadt and were set to labour in a nearby forest. At that time, Susi had contacts with the workers in the staff kitchen, and was often able to secure extra pieces of food for their group. Whilst these extra rations undoubtedly contributed to the welfare of the group, Susi's actions also created tensions within the group as Klüger felt compelled to compete with her for her mother's love and praise. Whilst in the forest, she somewhat recklessly approached a civilian foreman to ask him for some of his food. He refused her begging, and Klüger was fortunate not to suffer any repercussions from her actions, but she recalls that she believed her actions were justified because "I wanted it not just for myself, but to bring back to my mother and Susi as a token of my skill, not only because I loved them, but also because I wanted to say, here, look, I am good for something" (149).

Yet whilst she describes the flow and ebb of the tensions and reconciliations within the group, it seems certain that their escape and consequent survival would not have been possible without the bravado of a group to push them. As the Russian front grew closer, prisoners from all the camps in the surrounding areas were forced into gruelling marches further and further west. During this period, Klüger, her mother and Susi joined together with three Czech women to plan an escape amidst the chaos of the mass marches. The decision to escape was not unanimous; whilst Klüger was

desperate to take the chance when it arose, her mother was reluctant to attempt such a dangerous venture. Their inability to reach a mutual decision could have thwarted their escape attempts, but Klüger was eventually able to persuade Susi to agree with her, and with the added impetus of the three Czech women who were keen to make an escape attempt, the group of six eventually fled successfully into the night.

Whilst Klüger does acknowledge the importance of the group in their survival, she also explores other coping mechanisms that women developed. A principal strategy that she explores is supportive female conversation, epitomised through the exchange of recipes. She recollects that whilst in Christianstadt, she would constantly hear women:

exchang[ing] recipes the same way I recited poems. At night a favourite game was to surpass each other with the recital of generous amounts of butter, eggs, and sugar in fantasy baking competitions. I didn't even know many of the dishes they cooked up and listened with a growling stomach, just as I listened with a hungry imagination to their tales of travel, parties, dates and university studies. (138)

Exchanging recipes open up shared avenues of memory for the women, and provided a link to the world before, as well as hope for survival, of the future meals they would prepare. Remembrance and hope for the future constitutes a coping mechanism, and is expressed in the female narrative through the recreation of the pre-war domestic sphere and the exchange of recipes.

Once again in Klüger's narrative, cooking serves as a metaphor for remembrance and continuity. Yet, whilst this shared experience of domesticity drew some of the women together, Klüger felt exiled from this 'witches' kitchen.' She notes that she was too young to be able to share in their memories, and felt little sense of community with them. The recipes represented connections to a world Klüger had never known, a world that was as alien to her as Auschwitz was to the older women. The only life she could remember before the camps was characterised by the experience of persecution, and she explains that "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). The world of dinner parties and everyday domesticity jarred with her understanding of the world, and she doubted the truth of the pre-

Holocaust world described by her fellow inmates. “How could the past have been so rosy,” she questioned, “if it had led to Auschwitz and Christianstadt? What was really out there?” (138-139). Instead she relied upon the recitation and writing of poetry as her link with the world before. From an early age, Klüger had adopted the recitation of poetry as a protective ritual. She recalls that as a young child: “while walking in the unsafe streets [of Vienna], I would mutter verses as if they were a magic spell” (9). Once again, Klüger is reinforcing the connection between witchcraft, womanhood and remembrance through her use of the magic spell simile. For Klüger, it is the escape into fantasy through the discourse of poetry that provides her with a form of coping mechanism; for the older women, it is the mutual retreat into the reality of the past that provides a strategy to deal with the horrors of the present.

### ***Ecriture Feminine? Women’s Writing and the Testimony of Charlotte Delbo***

Discussing Delbo’s work in the context of politicised feminist literary theory poses two initial problems. Firstly, Delbo herself has challenged this approach to her work, stating emphatically that “I must not be discussed as a woman writer. I am not a woman in my writing” (qtd. in Rittner and Roth 99). Nevertheless, critics of her work have noted “distinctly feminine qualities” to her writing (Rittner and Roth 99). Rose Yalow Kamel suggests that “Delbo makes use of the traditional forms often used by women writers to inscribe their lives as gendered beings: the diary [and] transcription of oral testimony” (66). Yet the vague reference to “feminine qualities” in Delbo’s work fails to acknowledge the distinctive thematic and stylistic aspects of her writing. Similarly, diary and oral testimony are not exclusively “feminine” modes of writing, and as descriptions of the relationship between gender and writing do little to identify Delbo’s singular voice in the traditionally male dominated canon of Holocaust literature.

The second problem is broader in scope and questions the relevancy of this form of analytical approach. This is not to suggest that these texts cannot be analysed through an interpretative lens of, for example, French feminist literary theory, (post)-structuralism, or postmodernism; rather it is the manner in which these analytical frameworks are applied to the texts that needs to be questioned. Writing on Klüger’s Landscapes of Memory Reiter warns against describing her style as feminine: “rather

than labelling her narrative style and mode of reasoning as particularly feminine it may be more accurate to see it as the result of the conflation of a number of experiences and influences during her life” (Ich wollte es ware ein Roman 336). If testimony is to be considered as a new and distinct genre, then perhaps it is appropriate to call for a renewed form of critical discourse with which to analyse this genre. Standard literary theory, then, should be informed by an appreciation of the emerging critical discourse on trauma texts.

In contrast to the other Holocaust testimonies discussed in this thesis, Delbo was a non-Jewish victim, arrested for her role in the French Resistance movement. She was touring in South America with a theatrical company when the German occupying forces entered France in 1940, and against the advice of her colleagues, she returned to Paris in 1941 after learning that a friend of hers had been executed following a trial of communists in occupied France. Together with her husband, Georges Dudach whom she had married in 1934, she worked with the Resistance, producing and disseminating anti-German pamphlets. They were both arrested for their activities in 1942 by the French police, who promptly handed them over to the Gestapo. Dudach was executed by the Gestapo on August 24 of that year, and Delbo was detained in Santé Prison for three months before being moved to Romainville. It was at Romainville that she made contact with other women who had also been arrested on political grounds, fostering a sense of community that would continue when they were deported en masse to Auschwitz in January 1943. She was imprisoned in Auschwitz and a satellite camp, Raisko, until 1944 when she was deported to Ravensbrück. There were two hundred and thirty women on Delbo’s convoy to Auschwitz in 1943; only forty-nine were left alive when the Red Cross finally liberated the group from Ravensbrück in the final days of the war.

In common with many other survivors, Delbo reflected on her Holocaust experiences in successive publications. Her first three books, None of Us Will Return, Useless Knowledge, and The Measure of Our Days were brought together in her seminal trilogy Auschwitz and After (first published in English translation in 1995). Delbo wrote None of Us Will Return immediately following her liberation in 1946, but did not have it published until 1965, later explaining to her translator Rosette C. Lamont that, “ I wanted to make sure it would withstand the test of time,

since it had to travel far into the future” (qtd. in Delbo, Days and Memory x). Sections of Useless Knowledge were also written in 1946 and 1947, although she withheld publication of this book too, until 1970. The third book, The Measure of Our Days was published soon after this. Whilst her reluctance to publish immediately was in part due to her concerns about the potential longevity of the text, almost certainly a further consideration would have been the reception such an account would have received in the immediate post-war years. There was a certain reluctance, if not outright hostility, towards hearing stories about the camps, and survivors often struggled to find a sympathetic publisher. Primo Levi, for example, wrote If This is a Man shortly after his return to Italy in 1947, but was unable to attract significant interest from a publisher until 1958.

Delbo’s final book, Days and Memory, was published in 1985, the year of her death, and contains perhaps some of her most philosophical reflections on the Holocaust. Towards the end of the book, Delbo interestingly begins to contextualise her own experiences of the Holocaust within a larger framework of twentieth century atrocity, expressing comradeship with those imprisoned in the Siberian gulags and Algerian victims of French oppression. Through her denial of the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a unique point of suffering in the twentieth century, Delbo situates both her her experiences and her writing not simply within a tradition of Holocaust testimony, but within a wider tradition of twentieth century trauma. Thus, in addition to her claim that her writing should not be considered as part of a female tradition of writing, Delbo is also implicitly asserting that her writing should not be considered as part of a tradition of Holocaust writing. Rather, her testimonial writing demands a place within a broader canon – that of twentieth century trauma narratives.

Klüger also contextualises the memory of the Holocaust within a wider context, referring directly to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, an event which she interprets as comparable to the Holocaust in terms of the struggle to represent and commemorate the past. “The Japanese,” she writes, “are as frustrated in coping with past horror as we are, because they, too, can think only of the mantra ‘Never again.’ It’s easy to recognise the helplessness in this strange city [Hiroshima]” (69). Whilst she does consider the comparison with the atomic bombings apt, Klüger objects strongly to arguments which attempt to draw parallels between the Holocaust and

other events, specifically the American genocide of the Native Americans and the ongoing hostilities between Israel and Palestine. Whilst Klüger rejects these comparisons as too simplistic, she clearly acknowledges a special relationship between the Holocaust and the atomic bombings, a relationship which forms the central premise of this thesis. Whilst she does not elaborate on her reasons for accepting the validity of a comparison between the Holocaust and the atomic bombings, it appears that she identifies similarities not necessarily between the historical events, but certainly between the post-event attempts of survivors to deal with the experience of unprecedented trauma. In this way, she locates herself within a community of not only Holocaust survivors, but survivors of other twentieth century atrocities, an approach she shares with Delbo.

In a further overlap with Klüger's work, Delbo also leans towards a distortion of history in order to justify her interpretation of her approach to writing. Delbo argues that there was no "distinctive female experience of the Holocaust" (qtd. in Rittner and Roth 99). Whilst this brief yet conclusive statement does not offer such a prolonged and radical reinterpretation of history as Klüger does in Landscapes of Memory, it nevertheless obscures the fact that there were substantial historical differences between the experiences of men and women during the Holocaust, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Yet in making this statement, Delbo is bolstering her argument that her testimony should not be interpreted as women's literature. If there was no distinctive female experience, her argument suggests, then there cannot be – indeed there is no need for – a distinctive female voice to narrate those experiences. However, despite Delbo's objections, there are thematic and stylistic elements within her testimonial literature which appear to bear the characteristic hallmarks of *écriture féminine*.

Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* challenges traditional concepts of women's autobiographical writing as first proposed in the 1980s, and thus calls for a reinterpretation of the way in which Delbo could be considered to be writing as a woman. Estelle C. Jelinck, for example, argued that:

irregularity rather than orderliness informs the self portraits of women.  
The narratives of their lives are often not chronological and

progressive but disconnected, fragmentary or organised into self sustained units rather than connecting chapters. (17)

Looking initially at Delbo's "None of Us Will Return," Jelinek's defining feature of women's autobiographical writing certainly appears to be helpful. Delbo does adopt a basic chronological framework in this account, beginning with her opening chapter "Arrivals, Departures," and culminating with her bleak eponymous conclusion "none of us will return. None of us was meant to return" (Auschwitz and After 113-114). However, belying the apparent orderliness of this chronology is a series of disconnected camp life vignettes, constantly interrupted with post-war reflections on suffering. Stylistically too the text is characterised by discontinuity as Delbo switches between prose, poetry and transcripts of conversation. Yet problematically, Jelinek's description is rooted in the autobiography binary which defines women's writing in opposition to men's writing: Order/Disorder, Coherent/Fragmentary, Progressive/Discontinuous. The binary permits only the possibility of observing difference, rather than analysing the nature of women's autobiographical writing. We can note generalised stylistic features such as disorderliness and discontinuity, but what does this tell us about the meaning of writing as a woman? Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine* offers the opportunity to escape from this binary formulation. There is then a fundamental difference between women's writing as it is conceived of by the critics of female autobiography writing in the 1980s and Cixous's *écriture féminine*. As Susan Sellers notes, for Cixous "feminine writing will challenge the present modes of perception and representation, and thus herald into being a new schema to replace the existing hegemony" (1).

"Woman must write herself" exhorts Cixous in The Laugh of the Medusa (245). She asserts a fundamental connection between female writing and the female body. If there is truth in her maxim "censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time," (250) then lifting this censorship through the act of female autobiographical narration liberates the female body and allows it to take its place both in the world and on the page. In The Sex Which Is Not One, Luce Irigaray theorises that woman is inscribed on the page and in speech in a manner which is imitative of the female body. For Irigaray, the female body "is neither one nor two" (101); the plurality of the female sex organs oppose the "dominant phallic economy"



(100); which presupposes the authority of singularity, of the one. In contrast to this 'one', "a woman 'touches herself' constantly without anyone being able to forbid her to do so, for her sex is comprised of two lips which embrace continuously. Thus within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one – who stimulate each other" (100). For Irigaray, then, *fémininité* is identified as a plurality – for it is plural, not only double, as "woman has sex organs just about everywhere" – that is characterised not by fragmentation but by continuity between the constituent parts (103). The pluralistic nature of *fémininité* informs the way in which women come to express themselves in language. "'She' is definitely other in herself," asserts Irigaray:

that is undoubtedly the reason she is called temperamental, incomprehensible, perturbed, capricious – not to mention her language in which 'she' goes off in all directions and in which 'he' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. (103)

It is, perhaps, this plurality that underlies the falsity of the autobiography binary. The definition of women's writing cannot be derived from a supposition that it is a deviation from men's writing practices; rather it is a form of writing in which 'he' can find no coherence because it originates not from points of difference to men's writing but from a wholly unique and specifically female place. Writing as a woman is constructed as a celebratory activity in which female language becomes a joyful manifestation of female sexuality. In *The Mechanics of Fluids*, Irigaray continues her definition of women's language as "continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductable, diffusible" (111). In this definition, Irigaray undermines the supposition of the critics of female autobiography such as Jelinek who present division and fragmentation as synonymous with discontinuity. For Irigaray, it is the very fact that the female body, and so *fémininité*, is divided and pluralistic that permits the possibility of continuity.

If it is the characteristics of continuity and fluidity that go some way to defining what it means to write as a woman, then it appears that Delbo's writing does exemplify a style which is concomitant with the theory of *écriture féminine*. "Arrivals and Departures", the first chapter of *None of Us Will Return* displays precisely the conjunction of fragmentation and fluidity that Irigaray claims characterises women's writing. The chapter deals with the arrival of a transport at an unnamed camp, and

although the context suggests that it is Auschwitz, the absence of a given name suggests this is an 'every-camp', the single description accounting for the experiences of the many, rather than a specific few. The textual layout of multi-clausal sentences separated primarily by line breaks rather than punctuation leaves the impression of the words touching yet not touching, this fluidity suggesting echoes of *écriture féminine* styling on the page:

This is the station they reach, from wherever they came.  
They get here after days and nights  
having crossed many countries  
they reach it together with their children, even the little ones who were  
not to be part of this journey. (Auschwitz and After 3)

Delbo's use of poetic enjambment within a piece of prose is indicative of a style which is not confined by the strictures of one genre. In this passage, the use of enjambment evokes a sense of relentless movement on the page, echoing the constant forward motion of the train journeys that are the subject of the passage. Delbo's style frequently echoes her subject in this manner; later in the chapter she lists without pause the countries from which the victims were taken:

Departure from France and Ukraine Albania Belgium Slovakia Italy  
Hungary Peloponnesus Holland Macedonia Austria Herzegovina from  
the shores of the Black Sea the shores of the Mediterranean the banks  
of the Vistula. (5)

The omission of punctuation appears to erase the borders between the countries figuratively in terms of their presentation on the page, at the same time evoking the sense of the Europe-wide genocide which swept through national borders without pause. In her most sustained passage of enjambment in this chapter, Delbo describes the victims who arrived at the station:

Some came from Warsaw wearing large shawls and with tied  
up bundles  
some from Zagreb, the women their heads covered by scarves  
some from the Danube wearing multicoloured woollen  
sweaters knitted through the long night hours  
some from Greece, they took with them black olives and  
loukoums  
some came from Monte Carlo

they were in the casino (5)

The passage continues without pause in this fashion for some further eleven clauses. The fragmentation of these clauses represents the disparate origins of the victims in terms of nationality, class and gender, yet through the inclusion of all the victims in one long continuous sentence, Delbo acknowledges that despite their diversity they are brought together through the experience of persecution.

Morag Shiach suggests that the most defining feature of *écriture féminine* is “its proximity to speech” (22), and in this context, Delbo’s inclusion in her testimony of a transcript of a conversation between two unnamed women assumes a renewed significance. Toril Moi declares that “femininity in writing can be discerned in the privileging of the voice [...] woman, in other words, is wholly and physical present in her voice” (114). The body, the voice and writing are thus intimately connected in the practice of *écriture féminine*. Care must be taken, however, not to interpret this relationship between *écriture féminine* and speech too literally; whilst Delbo’s use of a speech transcript certainly emphasises this relationship, the practice of *écriture féminine* does not depend upon the inclusion of direct speech in writing. Rather, it makes possible a seamless transition from speech to writing in which writing should be understood as, “no more than the extension of this self-identical prolongation of the speech act” (Moi 114).

Nicole Thatcher suggests that Delbo’s testimonial writing is characterised by a use of poetic language and form, both in her prose and, of course, most explicitly in the poems Delbo includes intermittently throughout the text. Thatcher suggests that Delbo uses this poetic language, “in order to touch the reader by appealing to his or her senses so that he or she becomes part of the vision presented, participates in it, is engulfed by it and does not remain an outsider” (34). This close relationship between writer and reader is, as discussed in the introduction, symptomatic of women’s writing. The female writer exceeds the boundaries of the text and enters into a relationship with the reader, and as such feminine writing becomes characterised as a mutual endeavour shared between the author and the (female) reader.

Yet regarding Delbo's narratives as examples of *écriture féminine* potentially poses more problems than it solves. As a mode of discourse, *écriture féminine* has been criticised for its essentialist nature and for elitist posturing which assumes a universality of *fémininité* which applies to all women. Ann Rosalind Jones points out that the definition of the relationship between female sexuality, *fémininité* and female literary practice is in fact restrictive rather than liberating, and fails to take into account the multiple interpretations of sexuality and female identity held by women living under different social conditions across the world. She argues:

What is the meaning of 'two lips' to heterosexual women who want men to recognise their clitoral pleasure – or to African or Middle Eastern women who, as a result of pharaonic clitoridectomies, have neither lips nor clitoris through which to *jouir*? [...] And it is hard to see how the situations of old women, consigned to sexual inactivity because of their age, or if they are widowed, to unpaid work in others' families or to isolated poverty can be understood or changed through a concept of *jouissance*. (378)

The problematic assumption that *écriture féminine* can offer a voice to all woman is intensified in the context of women's Holocaust narratives such as Delbo's. *Écriture féminine* represents a connection to and celebration of the female body. Yet does this maintain any currency in a representation of the female body subjected to suffering and deprivation: can such a body be considered as a site for textual celebration? How can the female sexual organs and sexuality be celebrated by women who lived in fear of sexual abuse and barbaric gynaecological experimentation? For Cixous the practice of writing as a woman is bound up with the relationship with the mother. The mother figure in Cixous's writing, whilst not necessarily being a representation of a literal biological relationship, is a symbol of nurturing and nourishment that protects the women writer from separation from herself. She is integral to writing as a woman: "There is always within her [the female writer] at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink" (Cixous 251). Yet what does it mean to write as a mother's daughter when the mother has been murdered in the gas chamber? The glorification of motherhood is also out of place in a context where the state of motherhood jeopardised the possibility of survival or when the fear of infertility plagued the female prisoner.

Delbo's writing, I would then argue, emanates not from a sensibility of *écriture féminine*, but rather from one of trauma. Her style is influenced not so much by her experiences as a woman as by her experiences as a victim of the Holocaust. The stylistic traits that could be identified as those belonging to *écriture féminine* in fact belong to trauma narratives. It is in this reading of her work that Delbo's assertion that "I must not be considered as a woman in my writing" begins to make sense.

The combination of stylistic fluidity and fragmentation in "Arrivals, Departures" is perhaps best understood not in the context of *écriture féminine* but rather as representative of the constant tension between the urge to 'tell the tale' which constantly pushes the text forward, and the inability to fulfil this narrative impulse, as discussed in chapter two. The fragmentation of her testimonial account as a whole, in terms of its non-linear narrative and frequent changes in narrative form and style, is symptomatic once again not of *écriture féminine*, but of the testimonial genre as described in this thesis, whereby chaotic style can function as a reflection of chaotic experience.

The most significant failure of *écriture féminine* as a descriptive for Delbo's testimony becomes apparent in a consideration of Delbo's representation of the self. "Woman must put herself into the text," declares Cixous, yet for Delbo there is no stable sense of self that can be inscribed in the text (245). In Days and Memory, Delbo asserts that "I feel that the one who was in the camp is not me, is not the person who is here, facing you today. [...] I live within a twofold being" (4). She can locate no point of identity, no continuity between the self that experienced Auschwitz, and her post-Auschwitz self, and thus her body is inhabited by two distinct selves that live alongside each other, yet are unrecognisable to each other. As discussed in chapter one, this representation of the self as permanently divided as a consequence of experiencing trauma is a characteristic feature of testimonial literature. Yet in "The Measure of Our Days" written prior to Days and Memory, Delbo goes further than representing her self as divided, and claims instead that "I'm not alive. I died in Auschwitz and no one knows it" (Auschwitz and After 267). Delbo is at once, then, both selves and no-self. In the fragmenting of the self, or

perhaps more precisely the absence of a self, that is anchored to the body, the practice of *écriture féminine* is an impossibility for Delbo.

Yet making such a distinction between the sensibility of women's writing and the sensibility of trauma writing may in itself be a false endeavour. When reading Holocaust testimonies, gender should be understood as linked to the experience of trauma as discussed in section 3.2 of this chapter. Accordingly, Delbo is writing from a double perspective, as a woman *and* as a survivor of trauma. This suggests the emergence of a new form of writing, which could be appropriately termed *holocauste féminine*. The recognition of such a style would make possible the identification of women's Holocaust narratives as distinct from men's in terms of style and content, and allows an understanding of the way in which Delbo's narrative skilfully blends a poetics of gender with a poetics of trauma.

Yet an initial focus through the lens of *écriture féminine* can be helpful when approaching women's testimonies. Ann Rosalind Jones suggests that a more helpful way of reading Cixous' *écriture féminine* is "to recognise it as a conscious response to socioliterary realities" (380). In this way, it becomes possible to identify a style of writing that is specific to women, but does not attempt to universalise a relationship between body and text common to all women. Understandings of the distinctive nature of women's writing should thus be contextualised in accordance with their provenance. Comparisons between testimonial literature by female Holocaust survivors and female *hibakusha*, then, should not be undertaken on the basis of a unified theory of women's writing. A focus on the experiences of the female body and the impact of trauma on femininity is shared by female writers from the Holocaust and Hiroshima, but any identification of common thematic concerns should be tempered with an acknowledgement of historical and cultural specificities unique to each event; unique indeed to each individual author.

### **3.4 Writing the Female Experience of the A-bomb**

The tradition of women's literature has taken a very different path in Japan as compared to Europe. Rather than being marginalised in literary history, as the writing of women is often perceived to be in European history, Japanese women's writing developed as a different yet arguably equal tradition alongside men's writing. Joan

Ericson suggests that the emergence of a distinct form of women's writing can be traced back to the Heian period (8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century), a period which witnessed a weakening of the prevailing Chinese cultural influences in Japan, and the emergence of a distinctly Japanese culture. A significant aspect of this cultural shift was the introduction of two Japanese syllabaries, derived from Chinese script – *katakana* and *hiragana*. These were both used alongside the existing *kanji* which had been adopted from Chinese script. At this time, levels of literacy amongst the general population were very low, and the practice of writing was primarily if not fully confined to the Imperial court and religious authorities. Court convention dictated that men wrote formal, official and public documents in *kanji* and *katakana*, whereas women wrote more personal and impressionistic works of literature written almost exclusively in *hiragana*. Writing in *hiragana* required no knowledge of *kanji*, and as women did not have access to the same level of education as men they had little choice but to write primarily in *hiragana*. Very rapidly then, *hiragana* became identified specifically as women's writing (*onnade*, literally translated as 'woman's hand') and *katakana* and *kanji* as men's writing (*onode*). Although by the tenth century, *hiragana* had become much more widely used by men as well as women, it even now retains its *onnade* sensibility. Literary culture during the Heian period was dominated by women's *hiragana* writing, and was characterised by an evocative and emotional style which dwelt on the details of everyday life and reflections on the nature of beauty. The intimate relationship between these thematic and stylistic characteristics and women's writing endured, and came to inform interpretations of what it means to "write as a woman" in Japanese culture.

By the twentieth century the identification between women's writing and a sentimental lyrical style had become firmly entrenched. Ericson explains that "attributes presumed to be natural in a woman's voice – sentimental lyricism and impressionistic, non-intellectual detailed observations of daily life – were the result of a confluence of social and literary trends that in the 1920s crystallised the characteristics of a distinct 'woman's style'" (101). The early twentieth century witnessed a boom in both women's writing and readership due to the social changes of the period which saw increasing levels of literacy among the female population, and the increased mobilisation of an urban female workforce. However, the existence of such a strong female literary tradition did little to offer female writers the

opportunity to develop stylistically in a period which was focussed very much on an emerging style of literary realism. Whilst women did make significant inroads into the genre of the 'I'-novel (autobiographical fiction), they frequently struggled against a tradition that dictated female writing to be lyrical and sentimental in style.<sup>1</sup>

The trauma of the atomic bombings precipitated an intensification of this struggle. As discussed previously in this thesis, *hibakusha* seeking to record their eye-witness accounts were hampered by the lack of a native literary tradition that could offer a blueprint for trauma narratives. Women were arguably doubly challenged, on account of both genre and gender, in terms of the restrictions imposed upon them by the *onnade* tradition. Yet the traditional focus on domesticity and the minutiae of daily life actually offered a pathway into writing testimonial literature. Women's A-bomb writing is characterised by an almost exclusive emphasis on the domestic details of everyday life in the aftermath of the bomb. Themes of illness and thwarted attempts at treatment, child-care, relationships with family and friends are common, alongside detailed descriptions of the economic hardships of life after the bomb.

John Whittier Treat argues that female *hibakusha* rapidly developed a distinctive testimonial voice, suggesting that women's A-bomb testimony is characterised by a "special attention [paid] to the long term disruption of biology, and to those cultural and social values linked to biology: fertility, marriages and child-bearing – in other words, to the survival of the race" (Gender of Ground Zero 279). Treat suggests that these characteristics are so prevailing that they actually come to constitute a form of A-bomb *écriture féminine*, a form of testimonial literature that is inextricably bound up with both social constructions of gender and biological sex, both of which are represented in the symbol of motherhood. Yet Treat's consideration of women's A-bomb literature as *écriture féminine* is not unproblematic, and actually bears little relation to the theories proposed by Cixous and Irigaray. A fundamental flaw in Treat's approach is his attempt to define an A-bomb *écriture féminine* through

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst a full discussion of the development of women's literary culture in Japan cannot be articulated within the constraints of this thesis, a more detailed account can be found in The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing. Ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A Walker. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996.



the identification of thematic concerns in women's narratives. This is inconsistent with Cixous' understanding of *écriture féminine*, firstly because the very act of definition contradicts the concept of writing as a woman, and secondly because it posits content rather than an unmediated relationship between body and text as the dominating characteristic of *écriture féminine*. Furthermore, by suggesting that women's A-bomb literature can be defined as *écriture féminine* on the basis that it recounts personal female experience, Treat makes explicit a link between the sex of the author and the practice of *écriture féminine*, a connection that Cixous strenuously objects to.

Yet there are wider problems with attaching the appellation of *écriture féminine* to women's A-bomb literature, many of which echo those discussed above in relation to Delbo's Holocaust testimony. For example, the experience and narration of trauma problematises the nature of the relationship between the body and the text assumed by *écriture féminine*; in this context, can the irradiated female body be considered as a site for textual celebration? A further challenge to the description of women's A-bomb testimony as a form of *écriture féminine* is the extent to which a theory born out of a philosophy of Western culture can be considered relevant to writings by women from the Far East.

Preferable to Treat's attempt to define women's A-bomb literature as a form of *écriture féminine* is an attempt to identify shared thematic and stylistic concerns expressed by women through an exploration of their testimonial narratives.

### **Images of Motherhood and the Rhetoric of War and Peace**

Motherhood may have been a symbol of peace in peacetime, but during the war it was mobilised as a symbol in the execution of war.  
(Ueno 169)

Ueno Chizuko has written persuasively on the way in which contradictory images of motherhood have been mobilised for the purposes of both war and peace. Wartime Japan venerated the position of women as mothers, creating what Ueno refers to as a "strategy of segregation" in gender politics (43). She locates within this strategy the beginnings of Japanese feminist discourse, in that women were granted a

status as equal yet different to men. The role of women in wartime Japan was defined in the rhetoric of war, which termed them as “reproductive warriors” and “warriors in the economic war” (44). According to these roles, it was expected that women would perform a dual role as key workers in the wartime mobilisation of labour in the absence of men, and more significantly as the bearers of children. The creation of the Ministry of Welfare in 1938 led to the passing of legislation to enshrine the position of women as mothers in Japanese society. Motherhood moved from the private to the public sphere, as population growth became a political concern. 1940 saw the instigation of awards for Excellent Families with Many Children, awarded to women who had borne ten or more children. In 1941, the Outline for the Establishment of a Policy on Population laid out plans stating that the population should “increase by approximately 27 million over the next twenty years, reaching 100 million by 1960” (qtd. in Ueno 44). The development of Japan became a burden placed firmly on the shoulders – the wombs – of Japanese women.

Ueno draws parallels between this situation in Japan and the role of women in European wartime totalitarian states. She argues that the strategy of segregation and the focus on motherhood dominated gender politics in both fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, constructed as an appreciation of “manly men and womanly women” (43). In the context of Nazi Germany, she argues that the existence of the “death factories [created] to exterminate ‘inferior races’ [...] made it possible to imagine ‘reproductive factories’ employing birth control” (47). Certainly, Nazi ideology venerated motherhood and the family in a way similar to Japan, promoting it in both ideology and legislation. Abortions were illegal for German women, and contraception was outlawed. Women with large families were awarded the Mother’s Cross for services to the Reich at either bronze, silver or gold level. Bearing a large family was perceived as an act of patriotism, as Wilhelmine Haferkamp, who was awarded the gold Mother’s Cross after the birth of her tenth child, recalls in her testimony of the war years:

When one had ten children, well, not ten, but a pile of them, one should join the [Nazi] party; ’33 it was, nicht? I already had three children and the fourth on the way. [...] Ja, what else could my husband do? They joined the Party, nicht? There was nothing else we could do. I got thirty marks per child from the Hitler government,

came every month, and twenty marks from the city of Oberhausen. Was fifty marks per child. That was a lot of money. I sometimes got more 'child money' [Kindergeld] than my husband earned. [...] With a lot of children you also had a lot of ration cards, nicht? And there were cards for cooking, flour cards, all of that. (19)

Here, Haferkamp makes explicit a link between political Nazism and motherhood. Yet her testimony also reveals a certain reluctance to join the Nazi party, and she represents her and her husband's decision to join more as a consequence of the financial rewards it brought to motherhood, rather than because of any significant political leanings. This reluctance to subscribe to Nazi ideology is borne out in the remainder of her testimony in which she describes the way in which she used her extra food rations to feed enemies of the state, the slave labourers working on a construction site near her home. Significantly, these were non-Jewish enemies; to aid Jews would have been a far more dangerous task. Even so, she recalls that she was under the threat of being denounced for her actions. Whilst Haferkamp recalls that she was proud to receive the Mother's Cross, she was unhappy with the burden of motherhood that was placed on her:

At the time, when you were going to have a child and you didn't want to, the word always was, 'Better ten on the pillow than one on your conscience.' [...] When you had a child you were praised, honoured, esteemed. [...] I did not want so many children [...] [I] would tremble for weeks, I hope I get my period, I hope I get my period, I said 'I was pregnant before I knew it.' That is fact. I did not want so many children. (27-28)

The propaganda that venerated motherhood is exposed as oppressive and manipulative by Haferkamp in her testimony. Her professed desire to have fewer children was denied by a society she understands as having valued motherhood over womanhood. In repeating the watchword that one child was a burden on the conscience of a woman, Haferkamp implicitly affirms that motherhood was a political act in wartime, in which the individual choice of a woman to become a mother or not are subsumed by a greater rhetoric of patriotism.

An exploration of Japanese women's testimonies of the period reveals that similarly that whilst the condition of motherhood may have been venerated on a public, political level, the lot of the individual woman was very different.

Motherhood itself was not intrinsically valued; rather, as Ueno points out, “the family itself was the stronghold where the masculinity of the soldiers of the Imperial Army was defined” (48). According to this rhetoric of maternalism, women are taken out of the equation, and the emphasis is placed on the value of the male soldiers that she produces. Sara Ruddick develops this further and argues that “misogyny is a useful element in the making of a soldier, as boys are goaded into turning on and grinding down whatever in themselves is ‘womanly’” (77). To interpret this through Cixous’ theory of the binary, it can be seen that the role of women is that of the other, against which masculinity can be clearly defined. The role of femininity – symbolised by motherhood – is to be the foil against which masculinity can be constructed. Such an interpretation serves to marginalise the role of women and exposes that which Ueno refers to as the “dark side” of the maternal experience (48).

Nishimoto Setsuko describes the harsh reality of bringing up eight children in Japan after her marriage in 1919 in her testimony “We were an odd couple, but...” Her testimony appears in a collection entitled Widows of Hiroshima: The Life Stories of Nineteen Peasant Wives. The testimonies featured are transcripts of oral interviews conducted by the editor, Kanda Mikio. Kanda’s presence as a mediator between the body and the text further refutes in this instance Treat’s view that women’s A-bomb testimony constitutes a form of *écriture féminine*.

According to tradition, her parents arranged her marriage to a man she had never met who was nine years her senior. As a young wife, her position in society was not cemented until she became a mother, and Nishimoto writes that she cannot remember the date of her wedding because “in those days, they didn’t put you in the family register until you had a baby” (2). She recalls her marriage as unhappy, characterising her husband as a “tyrant,” describing him as:

a heavy drinker and a very hard man to live with. Even when I was suckling the baby, he would hurry me up and say ‘Get back to work quickly!’ But however much I tried to hurry, babies don’t drink that fast. I used to really get in a sweat. (2)

There is little evidence in Nishimoto’s testimony of the honour apparently accorded to mothers. Whilst she never directly refers to the politically sanctioned relationship between motherhood and the war effort, she does bear witness to the difficulty she

had reconciling her duty as a “reproductive warrior” and a “warrior in the economic war”:

I brought up eight kids, so it was nothing but work, work, work. [...] With so many kids I had a really hard time of it. My whole life has been a penance. I had one child after another, so with the baby strapped on my back, I'd rear any number of silkworms and do all the other jobs. By day, I'd work my heart out in the fields and at night I'd be busy grinding grain. [...] There was never a night that I went to bed without doing some work first. (3)

Whilst her husband was not a soldier, he did work away from the home in a factory in Hiroshima, leaving Nishimoto to provide for the family alone. Her resentment of him is made clear in her testimony when she complains that whilst she worked so hard, “all *he* ever did was pass the time of day with the neighbours and pop in here and there to drink *saké*” (4). As she represents her life, it seems that Nishimoto personally had little involvement with the larger political situation that saw her condemned to such a harsh way of life. She recalls cutting up a kimono to make monpe trousers on the order of the Women's National Defence Association, “or whatever it was called” (4). Yet whilst she fails to acknowledge it explicitly, by bearing children who were all compelled to play their part in the war effort, she fulfilled her role as a “reproductive warrior.” Her eldest son, Shigeto was enlisted as a soldier, and was killed in battle in 1943. Her second son, Yoshiaki, was taken to work in the Clothing Depot in Kure, and her third son, Akio, worked in the Mitsubishi Shipyard. Her fourth son, Morito, was sent to Manchuria with the Youth Volunteer Corps, and her eldest daughter, Taeko, was sent to work in the Clothing Depot in Yoshijima when the high school pupils were mobilised. Her remaining three children stayed with her, too young to be of any use in the war.

Her husband failed to return from work in Hiroshima after the A-bomb was dropped, and fearing the worst she and her son Akio went to the city to try and recover his body. Within her description of this journey, her otherwise coherent narration begins to falter, signalled in the text by the presence of ellipses. Of her close neighbour whose husband was also missing, she writes “I heard later that Mrs Nomura set off straightaway, but her husband was already dead...”(6). This form of pause in the narration, unusual in A-bomb testimonies as discussed in the previous chapter, suggests the presence of a commemorative silence for Mr Nomura. She

follows this ellipsis with another in the next paragraph at a point where language falls short of the possibility of description: “We peered into the air-raid shelters too. They were full of dead bodies piled up. They were all charred you know...” (6). They were unable to find his body, and as time progressed, she learned that at the time the bomb fell, he would have been at roll call on the Aioi Bridge. His survival would have been impossible.

In common with many A-bomb testimonies, Nishimoto completes her account with a plea for peace. She asserts her position as a storyteller, citing her fears that:

Youngsters today seem to think that if war broke out, it would be exciting.[...] They don't know what war means. They didn't live through the hard times of the war, so it seems to them that war is exciting and something flashy. I tell my children and my grandchildren just what it was like during the war. War musn't happen again. (10)

In stating that she speaks to her children and her grandchildren about her experiences of war, Nishimoto is unwittingly reclaiming motherhood and the family from their wartime functions, and imbuing them with the rhetoric of peace. She is utilising family structure to communicate a message of peace, and in doing so presents a reversal of the relationship between motherhood and war.

Yoneyama argues that the trope of motherhood was reconfigured in the post-bomb years to become representative of peace (193). Sentimental assumptions about the maternal proliferated, and the condition of motherhood became synonymous with peace, innocence, victimhood and compassion. The bond between mother and child was especially venerated, as revealed in the testimony of Ogura Toyofumi. Entitled Letters from the End of the World, Ogura structures his testimony as a series of letters written to his wife, Fumiyo, who was killed in the attack on Hiroshima. Published in 1948, this was the first eye-witness account to emerge from the atomic bombings. In letter five, Ogura recounts seeing a desperate woman running through the streets searching for her lost child, and reflects:

I was filled with a keen awareness of the intensity of the bond between a mother and her child. I began to think that rather than being purely spiritual in nature, such feelings seem to have physiological and primitive or even animalistic origins. (65)

Ogura's identification of the maternal instinct as biological in origin captures the prevailing sentiments about motherhood in post-war Japan. The maternal instinct is understood to be natural, and as such, suggests Yoneyama, stands in direct opposition to "modernity, science, and technology"(196), which subsequently become identified with masculinity and maleness in an essentialist gendered discourse which recalls Cixous' Culture/Nature, Male/Female binary relation. At the heart of this maternally-oriented memorial discourse is the understanding that the fundamental crime of the atomic bombings was the destruction of the natural bond between mother and child. Recurring frequently throughout A-bomb testimony by both men and women is the tale of the mother who was force to abandon her child in order to save her own life. Ogura recounts just such a tale in letter four of his testimony (Letters 50-51), as does Hiroshima survivor Hiratsuka Shige. In Hiratsuka's testimony, "A Voice from the Flames," she narrates the experience of having to abandon her own child. The force of the bomb blast levelled her home, and her six year old daughter, Kazuko, became trapped under the debris. Unable to free her child, Hiratsuka had little option but to flee as flames drew closer and closer to them, and she writes "I realised I was afraid to die. I could not let myself be burned alive. Tears streaming from my eyes, I placed my hands together and asked my daughter to forgive me" (142). It is this unbearable memory that continues to haunt Hiratsuka throughout the rest of her life. Towards the end of her testimony, she writes that despite her grief, "I want to continue living as a memorial to my dead [...] children" (145). This identification of the maternal body as a physical site for remembrance plays a key role in A-bomb memorial discourse. Hiroshima survivor Fujioki Michiko explains that her decision to have a baby some years after the war was motivated by her "duty to keep alive the horror of the atomic bomb" (189).

The trope of motherhood potentially gave women a privileged platform from which to speak about the horrors of atomic warfare and campaign for peace. Indeed, it could be said that whereas "Holocaust memory has been shaped most decisively [...] by men," the memory of the atomic bombings has been influenced most

significantly by the voices of mothers (Rittner and Roth 38). Yet this memorial discourse is not unproblematic. Whilst ostensibly centralising motherhood and maternal sacrifice, Yoneyama suggests that it actually “erases disturbing knowledge about women’s bodies” (197). Absent from the dominant memorial discourse, she argues, is the representation of “abnormalities associated with childbirth, including infertility, miscarriage, deformity, stillbirth, and newborns developing leukaemia and other health disorders” (197). Also neglected, of course, are the experiences of women who were not mothers. It would be more accurate to claim, then, that atomic bomb memory is shaped not by women’s voices, but by an idealised interpretation of motherhood. Whilst it is impossible to make generalisations about the role that women’s A-bomb narrative play in supporting or undermining this celebratory representation of the maternal, a notable feature in many women’s testimonies is the narrative recollection of the experience of traumatised, rather than idealised, motherhood. From a testimonial perspective, from the perspective of the actual rather than idealised mother, the forced abandonment of a child is not a symbol of the conflict between feminine peace and masculine violence; it is the trauma of the loss of a child.

Also excised from the dominant memorial discourse are the experiences of scarring and the disfigurement of the female body. Women’s testimonies frequently bear witness to the trauma of disfigurement, and the impact it had upon their sense of femininity. The significant exceptions to this rule are the “Hiroshima Maidens”. The Hiroshima Maidens were twenty-five young women, notably not mothers, who had been left with terrible keloids after being exposed to the Hiroshima bomb. In a significant departure from the ABCC’s official non-treatment policy, as outlined in chapter one, these women were selected to be taken to America for reconstructive surgery. The Hiroshima Maidens enterprise was widely publicised both in Japan and America, yet the spotlight was arguably not on the disfigured women themselves, but on the symbolism of such a gesture as a sign of reconciliation between the two countries. The Maidens themselves interpreted their experiences somewhat differently. Yamaoka Michiko was one of the twenty-five, and recalls in her testimony:



When I went to America I had a deep hatred toward America. I asked myself why they ended the war by a means which destroyed human beings. When I talked about how I suffered, I was often told, 'Well, you attacked Pearl Harbour!' I didn't understand much English then, and it's probably just as well. From the American point of view, they dropped that bomb in order to end the war faster, in order to create more damage faster. But it's inexcusable to harm human beings in this way. (387)

Yamaoka's testimony reveals that she found little sympathy in America. Her interpretation of the American attitude suggests that just as the atomic bomb was recognised as an effective remedy to end the war, so the Hiroshima Maidens were seen as an effective remedy to heal the residual wounds of war. Yet the physical wounds of the individual women were largely marginalised in a celebratory rhetoric that focussed on healing rather than acknowledging the trauma caused by disfigurement.

There is, then, a significant gap between women's experiences as represented in the conventions of atomic bomb memory and in their own testimonial accounts of their experiences. In order to identify the realities of the female experience of the atomic bombings, it is necessary to engage with their testimonial voices.

### **"Something has to be sacrificed:" The Testimony of Tada Makiko**

Yoneyama suggests that women's testimonial narratives are characterised by a dominating motif of self-sacrifice in which women are primarily configured as mothers who are, "devoted, persevering women who aid in their children's recovery and who agonize over lost families" (196). This description suggests that women combine the representation of idealised and traumatised motherhood in their testimonial accounts. This approach is certainly apparent in the testimony of Tada Makiko, "My Husband Does Not Return." The reference to her absent husband in the title identifies her testimony as an account of loss, not only of her husband, but of the consequent loss of her own self-identity as a wife. As a single mother, she experienced significant economic hardship and was doubly stigmatised in a culture that discriminated against single mothers and *hibakusha*. Contrary to assumptions that may be drawn from the title of her testimony, Tada's husband did not die in the

atomic attack; rather, he got a job with a travelling circus and abandoned his family in 1951. Tada suffered increasingly from ill health throughout her life, and towards the end of her testimony she reveals that friends suggested that she should formally divorce her husband and give him full custody of their children, “but,” she explains, “I have brought them up until today because I never felt like parting with them” (180). Whilst her reluctance to part with her children is undoubtedly attributable to her maternal instincts, the surrendering of her children would mean a figurative surrendering of her identity as a mother. If, as early critics of female autobiography such as Jelinek and Bratton argue, women’s identity is constructed through social relationships with others, then Tada’s loss of identity as wife and mother potentially compromises her sense of self as a gendered individual. Her chosen title, then, represents not only an indication of the content of her testimony, but also bears witness to the way in which the experience of the atomic bomb has compromised – sacrificed - her sense of self. The self as represented in Tada’s narrative is doubled into a distinct gendered self and sexed self. Tada reveals each of these selves to have different concerns in the aftermath, and the representation of each self is characterised by the adoption of different narrative styles.

Tada contributed her account of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima to a collected volume of testimonies, The Atomic Bomb: Voices From Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1989. At the time the A-bomb was dropped Tada was 39 years old, and living in Hiroshima with her husband and son, Mutsuzumi. Her husband, who remains unnamed in her narrative, worked for the Electric Railroad Company during the war, and their accommodation was provided by his employers. In 1945, both Tada and her husband began working for the Ministry of Communications, winding wire on drums. As a woman, Tada was paid only half of her husband’s wage and received fifteen yen a day for her work. In addition to this, Tada also worked for the wartime ration distribution committee, as well as taking care of their son and the home. On the morning of August 6 she was walking to work at the warehouse with Mutsuzumi, and was outside when the bomb fell. Tada recalls, “the moment there was the flash, it felt as if thickly mixed paint was thrown at me, and I thought that heaven had fallen” (173). Although they survived, both Tada and her son were badly injured in the explosion, and Tada received severe burns to half of her body. Her husband was

already at work in the warehouse, and was protected from the force of the blast by the building.

Tada's testimony is characterised by an emphasis on the effects of trauma on the female body. Indeed, she explicitly describes her injuries within the context of female bodily experiences, writing, "my chest was burning, my stomach ached like I was in labour" (174). Her experience of pregnancy and motherhood in the aftermath of the atomic bomb forms a key part of her narrative. Failing to have made a good recovery by February 1946, Tada visited a doctor only to be told that unbeknownst to her she had been pregnant and suffered a miscarriage. She became pregnant again shortly after receiving this news, and endured a difficult pregnancy. She gave birth to a healthy daughter, Masumi, in November 1946 but immediately faced further problems with breastfeeding. She was unable to nurse her child, and eventually was given an operation. "According to my doctor," she writes, "when my chest was burnt by the atomic bomb, most of my mammary glands became plugged so that even though milk was produced when the child was born, it had no exit and that gave me a hard time" (177). Her simple comment that she had "a hard time" would seem to be a significant understatement of her experience, but is characteristic of the detached style Tada adopts in this section of her narrative which marginalises the representation of maternal trauma. Whilst she describes her medical condition in some detail, Tada offers no account of any personal anxieties and fears about her difficult pregnancy and inability to breastfeed. Indeed, the only indication that she suffered any concerns at all comes through her admission that, "my husband and midwife only scolded me, saying, 'How you fuss,' and they didn't take me seriously" (176). Tada's concerns are thus doubly silenced; contemporaneously by her husband and midwife, and later by her own narratorial persona, perhaps for fear that she once again would not be taken seriously.

Tada suffered a further miscarriage after the birth of Masumi, but gave birth to another daughter, Kosumi, in 1949. Abandoned by her husband in 1951, Tada was left alone to provide and care for her three children. She writes extensively on the hardships of her situation, and represents herself in accordance with Yoneyama's image of the 'devoted and persevering woman.' Despite suffering from serious ill health as a consequence of her exposure to the bomb, manifested in the form of

frequent heavy bleeding and pains in her chest and back, Tada was forced to undertake arduous labour in order to support her family. She was fortunate to receive minimal welfare payments from the government, but had to supplement this income first by collecting rubbish and later by working at the sewerage plant under the auspices of the unemployment relief bureau. Tada recounts an incident that took place whilst she was working there, when her supervisor beat her violently for an imagined infraction of workplaces ethics, claiming falsely that she had submitted a formal letter complaining about her low wages:

Since he was six feet tall and well built, with a judo certificate, my body really felt it when I was twisted down. I had bad bleeding at the worksite, lost consciousness when I came home, and faintly came to when my child fetched a doctor. [...] Because of this, I am still unwell. (179).

Whilst this is the only passage in Tada's testimony which describes such violent aggression towards her, her narrative is characterised by an essentialist discourse which presents her own maternal caring attitude in contrast to male hostility towards her and her children. Male figures in the text almost invariably occupy positions of authority over Tada and hold a set of values polarised to her own. In the moments immediately following the A-bomb explosion, she describes her husband rushing not to help her and their son, but to their home in order to try and rescue their possessions. She writes, "my husband said we would be in trouble if we didn't get our money out, even a little. I said, forget the money, let's go the doctor's, what good will it do if our child and I lose our lives?" (174). Following her husband's refusal to help her, she appealed to a soldier for assistance, but he too refused, on the grounds that "I wasn't the only injured person. I felt sorry for my child and put him on my back as I crawled on the road" (175). Her vulnerability is emphasised through her description of the way in which she crawled along the ground, and implicitly reflects the difference in social status between herself and the male soldier. On reaching the doctor, help is once again refused and she recalls that she:

asked to be examined, but he flatly refused. "At least take a look at this child. Please put mercurochrome on him, leftovers from what you've used for others is fine. It'll comfort him," I begged from the bottom of my heart but the doctor declined even that. (176)

In each instance, it seems that for Tada the most shocking aspect of the men's behaviour is their refusal to help her son, so at odds is it with her own maternal instincts as a woman. This motif of male hostility, or at least indifference, in contrast to female maternal compassion ties into the wider discourse of A-bomb remembrance that identifies mothers with peace and men with militaristic violence.

In Tada's narrative, however, her resentment towards the war emerges not from her experience as a mother, but from the trauma of disfiguration. Physical disfiguration represents, for Tada, a loss of her femininity which she understands to be intrinsically linked to her aesthetic appearance. Tada recounts that as a young woman she was chosen to be a finalist in a Tokyo beauty contest, for which she was awarded a ruby ring. Her obvious pride in her beauty, symbolic of her femininity, was shattered when she was left permanently scarred on her face and body following the burns she received during the atomic explosion. In a poignant passage, Tada recalls the first time she realised the extent of her disfigurement:

On our way home [from the hospital], some children playing at the roadside ran home crying at the sight of me and looked at me through the window, terrified. I myself felt how dreadful I looked then, and I resented the war all the more. I thought that we should make this the very last war, construct a peaceful era, and save children from going through such sorrow. (176)

Here, Tada is protesting the war not in terms of her identity as a reproductive woman, but rather in terms of her compromised femininity. Throughout her description of her pregnancies, miscarriages and problems with breastfeeding, at no point does Tada express any resentment towards the war. It is only at this point, when she fully appreciates the loss of her beauty and femininity for the first time, that she articulates her bitterness towards war. In doing so, she is reacting against the dominant collective discourse of A-bomb memory, as described by Yoneyama, which roots women's objection to war in their experience of motherhood. Tada's narrative is not exceptional in this approach; indeed, many women's A-bomb testimonies reveal that the loss of signifiers of femininity is central to their anti-war sentiments. In her testimony, The Epitaph in my Heart Kubo Mitsue, a Nagasaki *hibakusha*, recalls visiting a female friend, who she names only as S-san in order to protect her identity,

some months after the bomb was dropped. As a result of being exposed to radiation, S-san had lost all of her hair. Kubo writes:

I perceived in her mournful, stern look her grief at having been deprived entirely of her black hair, symbol of her female beauty. I saw in her eyes a cursing condemnation of the inexcusable cruelty of the atomic bomb. (62)

Through centralising the trauma of lost femininity in their narratives, women's testimonies frequently undermine the dominating memorial discourse of the atomic bomb which identifies the experience of motherhood as the central feature of women's experiences. Yet despite her rejection of the experience of motherhood as the primary influence on her resentment towards the war, Tada still frames her call for peace within a rhetoric of motherhood and maternal compassion which calls for the protection of children.

Tada believes that her disfigurement may have been the reason that she was abandoned by her husband, and writes:

In those days, things were still scarce, there was no wine to drink, few women were beautiful and maybe because of that my husband called me Makiko, Makiko, and cared for me, a woman with spots in both eyes, worse keloid scars than others, skin stuck right on the raw flesh around the shoulders, and only a little bit of the original skin colour left on the abdomen. (177)

Tada recalls with affection the early years after the bomb when her husband cared for her, calling her by a pet name, despite her terrible appearance. Yet underlying these memories is her surety that he remained with her not for love (for how could he love such a woman, she implies), but simply because there was no temptation for him to leave her. She suggests that his eventual abandonment of her was inevitable once the austerity of the post-war years eased. Lifton defines Japanese culture as placing "great stress upon aesthetic presentation and 'appearance' in every sense," and it seems that these cultural values influenced Tada's belief that the loss of her femininity devalued her worth as a wife (Death in Life 185).

In contrast to the detached style of narration she adopts when writing about her experiences of pregnancy, Tada's account of her disfigurement is characterised by a focus on her emotional responses. Indeed, the change in style seems to suggest that she experiences a greater degree of trauma at the effects of the A-bomb on her feminine gender identity than her female sex identity. Tada recounts an incident when she was told not to attend her local bathhouse, as other customers were complaining about her presence. The owner of the bathhouse said to her, "if you get in the bath, even customers who are thinking of taking time to wash their hair [for an extra fee] quickly leave, saying it's unpleasant, it's ugly, so I want you to refrain from coming to our bath" (179). Tada's feeling of painful humiliation is evoked in the text:

That time, if at no other, heartfelt tears really came out, and it touched my nerves for a while so I couldn't sleep nights. Had my body become that ugly? When I realised it, I never even once went back to that bathhouse. (179)

The tears and anxieties that are silenced in her account of the impact of the A-bomb on her female reproductive body are freely expressed in this passage that focuses on her lost femininity. In Tada's narrative, traumatised femininity is narrated subjectively with a full account of her emotional response to disfigurement. In contrast, the traumatised reproductive female body appears as the object of the narration. Tada represents herself as being disengaged from the experiences of her body; she has to be told that she has suffered a miscarriage, she has to be told that her inability to breastfeed is due to her exposure to the bomb. Her own voice, which could speak subjectively about her traumatised reproductive body, is silenced.

Women's testimonies emergent from both the atomic bombings and the Holocaust reveal a common focus on experiences specific to the female body and representations of traumatised femininity. As such, they challenge dominant memorial discourses of each event that have frequently marginalised, or falsely idealised in the case of A-bomb memory, the experiences of women. Due to the differing literary traditions in each cultural context, stylistic commonalities between women's A-bomb and Holocaust testimonies are perhaps harder to identify. As discussed, theories such as Cixous' *écriture féminine* and those suggested by critics of female autobiography, such as Jelinek, are not immediately helpful, and fail to

fully account for the way in which women narrate the experience of trauma. Nevertheless, shared narrative strategies are suggested through the way in which they write their testimonial accounts. The self, for example, is commonly represented in terms of relationships to others, be it as a mother, daughter, sister, or, specific to Holocaust narratives, in terms of their role in a “camp family”. Rather than identifying women’s testimonial narrative simply as “women’s writing”, they can be more appropriately recognised as a form of trauma narrative. They represent not *écriture féminine*, but perhaps *écriture traumatique*.



## Conclusion

In his conclusion to 'Contrasting Two Survival Literature: On the Jewish Holocaust and the Chinese Cultural Revolution,' Sheng –Mei Ma suggests that the practice of comparing testimonial literatures “offers an insight into one catastrophe in light of another” (92). The extent to which an exploration of testimonial accounts emergent from different events can offer a privileged access to understanding the experience of trauma for the non-survivor is debatable. As Elie Wiesel often reminds us, “he or she who did not live through the event will never know it” (Holocaust as Literary Inspiration 7). More accurately, then, it could be argued that developing a critical comparative approach to testimonial literature offers an insight into what it means to write in a testimonial form.

Throughout the analysis of the texts discussed in this thesis, one of the most significant recurrent themes has been the urge to tell the tale, and a subsequent struggle with the demands of representing the experience of trauma. It is this relationship between the narrative impulse and the challenges of representation, I would argue, that is central to testimonial writing and gives rise to the set of narrative strategies and techniques that I have characterised in this thesis as distinct to the testimonial genre. A primary concern of chapter one was to identify these strategies as distinct from those employed by authors engaged in autobiographical writing through an exploration of the autobiographical and testimonial work of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel. This chapter demonstrated that one of the key aspects of testimonial genre is the relationship between the narratorial self and the experiential self, and the usually unfulfilled struggle to reconcile these two, as evidenced in the writing of Levi, Wiesel and Hara Tamiki. Testimonial literature from both the Holocaust and the atomic bombings is characterised by a common crisis in the representation of the self. As shown in the discussion of the *The Witness of Those Two Days* project, the crisis of self-representation in atomic bomb testimony is also revealed through the struggle to represent individual experience, rather than a homogenous *hibakusha* experience common to all survivors.

A further key aspect of testimonial writing is the employment of a fractured narrative, interrupted by unexpected deviations from a linear chronological progression. This disrupted narrative takes a number of forms in different accounts; in Hara Tamiki's testimony, for example, the text opens with an account of the explosion and ends two days before the bomb was dropped. The testimonies of Ōta Yoko and Hachiya Michihiko interrupt the progression of the narrative through the inclusion of newspaper reports or scientific information. Narratives are also often interrupted by switches in genre, Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After* being a key example. A further example of disruption are pauses in the chronological narrative to provide narratorial/authorial reflection and comment on past events, common to both Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies. These disruptions can be interpreted in part as an attempt to mirror the chaos of the traumatic experience in a fractured narrative. They can also be viewed as evidence of the struggle to represent experience.

This struggle is the primary concern of chapter two of this thesis which looks specifically at the use of silence as an expressive tool, a central characteristic of testimonial writing. Kali Tal has disputed this theory, arguing that it is "wildly Orwellian" to presume that silence can be understood as a form of communication. "If speaking is speaking," she argues, "and silence is speaking, then what possible way is there not to testify?"(59). The response to Tal's somewhat simplistic assertion lies in acknowledging the context of silence, and the way in which it comes to represent an active and expressive presence in testimonial literature. Silence as it is configured in testimonial literature takes on a number of forms: failed language and a breakdown in the signifier/signified relationship, textual silence in the form of ellipses and white spaces on the page, silence as a thematic concern, silence as a space in which the dead can be acknowledged as present rather than absent, and silence as a form of language. The analysis of A-bomb testimonies revealed that silence in these texts is often manifested through the inclusion of scientific data, for example, distance from the epicentre, temperature of the bomb etc. These statistics are not part of the individual's experience. At the time, they would have had no awareness of their distance from the epicentre; indeed the majority had no understanding at all of what had befallen them. A common characteristic of A-bomb testimony is the falling silent of the narratorial voice, and the insertion of imported data to mask the silence of their response to the experience of trauma. Whilst silence

takes on different forms in the narratives discussed in this thesis, I would argue that each form stems from a shared struggle to represent the experience of trauma.

It is important to note that these characteristics of the testimonial genre often take different forms in Holocaust and A-Bomb narratives. There is not a simple homogeneity of generic rules which can cover all texts emergent from trauma. The specificity of each historical event and the differing literary cultures from which these accounts emerge deny this possibility. However, what should be acknowledged is that whilst the precise nature of these characteristics may differ, they are each evolved from the shared problem of bearing witness to the experience of trauma, and it is this that offers the strongest definition of a testimonial genre.

However, as Robert Eaglestone has pointed out, “genre is not just a way of writing: it is simultaneously a way of reading. Genres for horizons of understanding, interpretation and reading where text, readership and knowledge come together” (7). The significance of the role of the reader, or listener, has also been acknowledged by Dori Laub. As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, Laub argues that the act of testimony can only take place in the presence of a second party, a witness to the act of testimony. It is through the enabling presence of this secondary witness that the eye-witness is able to commit to the act of witness and testimony. Testimony should, then, be considered as a genre which has its roots in the mutual responsiveness of author and reader. In this way, testimony as a genre demands the active participation of the reader in order to bring it into being. Kali Tal, however, has responded to this interpretation of testimony as dialogue rather than monologue with hostility. Tal argues that critics working from a postmodern perspective adopt a hubristic attitude in assuming significance for the reader at the expense of marginalising the voice of the survivor. Tal asserts that:

The survivor herself has disappeared from the picture, reappearing only as a device for pushing the listener to self-examination, to allow him to participate in the reliving and re-experiencing of the event. (57)

Her chosen personal pronouns in this extract anticipate the strongly feminist stance of her critique and she presents her argument within the confines of an essentialist and somewhat reactionary framework which presents women as victims/survivors and

men as oppressors, both in terms of the actual event and in terms of bearing witness to the event. In this manner, Tal's approach is similar to that expressed by Ruth Klüger in her testimonial narrative, as discussed in chapter 3, but like Klüger's it should also be treated with caution. It runs the considerable risk of marginalising male testimonial voices, and defining testimony and the act of bearing witness as feminine. Tal's criticism of the importance of the reader in the testimonial relationship also lacks an understanding of the balanced relationship which is required between author and reader. Tal presents the relationship as a simple binary – it is either the reader *or* the writer that has authority in the relationship. Eaglestone, however, clearly explains that such a power struggle is antithetical to the process of engaging with testimony as a reader. He asserts that testimony “demands a way of reading which does not consume [texts] through the process of reading” (72). The role of the reader is to provide a space for the act of bearing witness, and so make testimony possible. In the absence of a reader/listener a survivor cannot testify to the experiences – indeed, throughout his texts, Primo Levi repeatedly expresses the fear that his desire to bear witness will be defeated through the absence of an audience.

Whilst Tal's theorising of the relationship between the reader and the author is flawed, it is central to her politicised reading of testimonial writing in which she seeks to restore power to the survivor. “Bearing witness,” she claims:

is an aggressive act. It is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity, to endure a lifetime of anger and pain rather than to submit to the seductive pull of revision and repression. Its goal is change. (7)

Tal interprets testimonial writing not as an individual response to trauma, but rather as part of a wider political act which seeks to empower those who have suffered, and induce change through bearing witness. This perspective is very much in line with the admonition of “Never Again.” Indeed, a plea for future peace and the prevention of such an event happening again is a common feature in many testimonial writings by both Holocaust and A-bomb survivors. However, in removing testimony from the private sphere of individual experience and situating it within a polemical context, Tal risks encouraging exactly that which she criticises in others – obscuring the identity and experience of the individual survivor. Perhaps rather than identifying

bearing witness as an aggressive act, it would be more appropriate to term it an act of resistance. Levi has explicitly described his urge to bear witness as associated with his will to survive and tell the tale of his suffering and that of those who did not survive. Rather than being understood as a willingness to “embrace conflict,” testimonial writing is more commonly thought of by survivors as an attempt at catharsis, an attempt to purge the experience of trauma. Whilst this result appears to be rarely achieved (as is attested to by survivor-authors) it is nevertheless a need for peace rather than conflict that drives the testimonial impulse.

Having identified relevant features which together can be considered to be indicative of a distinct testimonial genre, it is appropriate at this point to consider the presence of these narrative characteristics in eye-witness narratives of traumas other than the Holocaust and the atomic bombings.

### **Extending the Genre of Testimony**

In the context of Holocaust literature, James Young has argued that the struggle to represent limit events and experiences has actually had the effect of creating a testimonial template which has been adapted by survivors of subsequent traumatic events:

It is ironic that once an event is perceived to be without precedent, without adequate analogy, it would in itself become a kind of precedent for all that follows: a new figure against which subsequent experiences are measured and grasped. (99)

Whilst Young is specifically referring to Holocaust narratives, the atomic bomb can be regarded as equally unprecedented (as discussed in the introduction) and as such A-Bomb narratives contribute equally to the creation of a testimonial archetype. If, indeed, the idea of a testimonial archetype holds currency, then the conclusions drawn in this thesis regarding the narrative strategies which identify the texts discussed as belonging to the testimonial genre can be usefully applied to analyses of eye-witness accounts emergent from a broader spectrum of traumatic experiences. The narrative characteristics that I have identified as common to testimonial accounts of both the Holocaust and the atomic bombings can also be recognised in eye witness accounts of other traumatic events. For example, the urgency of the narrative impulse and the subsequent struggle to fulfil it is identified by Subarno Chatterji as also

characteristic of writing by American Vietnam veterans. He comments that their testimonial narratives “reveal a deep, almost pathological desire to bear witness” (111), but that this desire is frequently thwarted due to the fact that language has been “used and abused by war” (81). In his account of the Rwandan genocide, We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families, Philip Gourevitch refers directly to both the Holocaust and the atomic bombings, using an existing template in order to communicate the scale of the genocide:

The dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust. It was the most efficient mass killing since the bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (3)

The testimonial genre should not, however, be considered as restricted to those who have experienced a historical, public trauma such as war and genocide. Authors who seek to represent personal suffering in a private sphere have also drawn on narrative strategies common to testimonial writing. Rachel Falconer has identified testimonial characteristics in contemporary mental illness narratives, noting in particular the way in which personal experience is often reflected in the structure of the narrative. “Memoirs about depression,” she argues, “can be ‘difficult,’ ‘demanding,’ ‘self-involved’ and ‘self indulgent,’ all characteristics that are symptomatic of depressive illness” (118). This relationship between experience and narrative structure is a feature of many Holocaust and A-bomb testimonies, where fragmented narrative styles function to echo the chaos of the traumatic experience. Falconer also pays close attention to the way in which the experience of mental illness is represented through frequent recourse to the imagery of hell, a common feature of A-bomb and Holocaust testimonies.

However, the idea that the events of World War II acted as a trigger for the development of a testimonial genre is subject to challenge. Whilst Eaglestone has contended that “literary, historical and philosophical writing since 1945 are involved in a new genre, testimony, with its own form, its own generic rules, its own presuppositions,” literary antecedents of this genre can be located in pre-1945 writing (7). Deborah Pearson, for example, has noted narrative characteristics which can be identified as testimonial in nature in accounts of World War I. The struggle to represent the experience of trauma as discussed in this thesis is also often

encountered in WWI narratives. Pearson refers to the common “problem of articulation” (177) and describes the eye-witness accounts of soldiers engaged in trench warfare as “shell-shocked,” the fragmented structure of the narrative reflecting precisely the traumatised conditions of the returning soldiers (187). A further comparative example can be found at the end of Erich Maria Remarque’s classic account of World War I, All Quiet on the Western Front. In common with many Holocaust and A-bomb survivors, he asserts that:

And men will not understand us-for the generation that grew up before us, though it has passed these years with us already had a home and a calling; now it will return to its old occupations and the war will be forgotten – and the generation that has grown up after us will be strange to us and push us aside. We will be superfluous even to ourselves, we will grow older, a few will adapt themselves, some others will merely submit, and most will be bewildered;- the years will pass by and in the end we shall fall into ruin. (190)

This passage reveals his conviction that despite his testimony, those who were not there will not understand the truth of his experiences. His experience of trauma will continue to haunt him as a shadow following him through the rest of his life until it ends in ruin. This awareness of the inability to communicate his experiences effectively, and the sense of a doubled traumatised self that lives alongside his post-war self is a common motif in the testimonial literature emergent from the Holocaust and the atomic bombings discussed in this thesis.

These various points of commonality that exist between testimonial accounts of widely different events has led Tal to posit the existence of a community of trauma writers, connected not by a unity of experience but rather by a unified struggle to represent their experiences. Focussing her argument particularly on the issue of language and its failure to represent traumatic reality, she suggests that:

The ability to ‘read’ words like *terror* may extend *across traumas*, so that the combat veteran of the Vietnam War responds viscerally to the transformed signs used by the survivor of the concentration camp since they mirror his or her own traumatic experience, while the non-traumatised reader will come away with a different meaning altogether. (16)

Not only do Tal’s comments indicate the breadth of a potential canon of testimonial

literature, and suggest pathways for future research into comparative analysis and the testimonial genre, they also suggest a need to consider the place of testimonial writing within the wider categorisation of trauma literature.

### **Testimony and Trauma Narratives**

George Yudice argues that a defining feature of testimony is that it must be written by a witness to the event, a view shared by Bernard-Donals and Glejzer who define testimony as “representations of witnessing” (52). However, both of these definitions fail to identify that which distinguishes testimony from other witness accounts of trauma, such as autobiography and diary. As such, these definitions threaten to obscure any distinctions between testimony and other forms of traumatic narrative. Even Tal, whose theories potentially lead to a consideration of the differences between testimony and trauma narratives, argues that “literature of trauma is defined by the identity of its author” (17). In making this assertion, Tal represents testimony and trauma narrative as being synonymous terms, thereby discouraging attempts to locate testimony as a specific genre within what I would argue is a broader canon of trauma narratives.

Eaglestone sheds light on the specificity of testimony as distinct from other trauma narratives by arguing that the characteristics of testimony are not “a simple reflection of the psychology of trauma.” “Rather,” he suggests, “their tropes and strategies are empowered by their differences to other forms and genres of writing to offer – to be – testimony” (69). Testimony, then, is identified as a genre in its own right by its literary form, rather than only by its content.

By comparison, the trauma narrative appears broader in its definition. Cathy Caruth has identified a trauma narrative as “the narrative of a belated experience.” It is through the latent acknowledgement of trauma that the traumatic event is finally experienced. At the heart of the story of trauma, Caruth asserts, “is the oscillation between *a crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event, and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (Unclaimed Experience 7). The trauma narrative is then, perhaps, more accurately a literature of crisis, identified by the fact that it deals with the irreconcilable nature of



experiencing and witnessing. Trauma narrative is then, to borrow Eaglstone's terminology, the "reflection of the experience of trauma." The different literary forms that this reflection adopts then determine whether a text is most appropriately identified as, for example, a testimonial trauma narrative, or an autobiographical trauma narrative.

### **Concluding Comments**

The intention of this thesis has been to perform a comparative analysis of the testimonial literature emergent from the Holocaust and atomic bombings. Through the identification of commonalities and differences between the two literatures, I have sought to move closer towards a definition of testimony as a distinct literary genre. Certainly, it has been possible to establish certain shared features, such as the urge to tell the tale juxtaposed with the inability to communicate the experience of trauma, the fragmentation of the experiential and narratorial selves, and the thematic and stylistic concerns dealt with in narratives written by both men and women. By drawing together these features, it has been possible to develop an understanding not only of what constitutes testimony, but crucially also how it differs from other forms of life writing and trauma narratives.

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