

*“A” is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, and the “Children’s Literature of Atrocity”*

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Since the early 1990s, children’s books about trauma, especially the trauma(s) of the Holocaust, have proliferated, as well as scholarly treatments of those books. Despite the difficulties of representing the Holocaust, or perhaps because of them, there seems to be consensus now that children’s literature is the most rather than the least appropriate literary forum for trauma work. Subjects previously thought too upsetting for children are now deemed appropriate and even necessary. Thus, in “A New Algorithm of Evil: Children’s Literature in a Post-Holocaust World,” Elizabeth R. Baer emphasizes the urgency of “a children’s literature of atrocity,” recommending what she calls “confrontational” texts, and proposing “a set of [four] criteria by which to measure the usefulness and effectiveness of children’s texts in confronting the Holocaust sufficiently” (384).<sup>1</sup> “A” is now for Auschwitz, and “H” for Holocaust (if sometimes for Hiroshima). And “B” is still for book, though no longer necessarily the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Baer sees as exemplary texts like Roberto Innocenti’s picture book *Rose Blanche* (1985), Seymour Rossel’s nonfiction history *The Holocaust* (1981), and Jane Yolen’s novel *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (1988). Such books emphasize their protagonists’ direct experiences of the Holocaust, experiences that extend to and presumably interpellate the child reader outside the story.

How to explain this shift away from the idea that young readers should be protected from evil and toward the conviction that they should be exposed to it, perhaps even endangered by it? It’s almost as if we now expect reading about trauma to be traumatic itself—as if we think children can’t otherwise comprehend atrocity. Just how new is this faith in exposure, experience, and confrontation, and how do we assess its significance with respect to contemporary children’s literature and trauma studies?

Many people believe that the Holocaust fundamentally changed the way we think about memory and narrative, as well as about human nature. Presumably the exposure model became necessary because

we no longer have the luxury of denying the existence of or postponing the child's confrontation with evil. Certainly the Holocaust helped make the often entangled projects of literature and psychoanalysis especially ever more anxious and serious. Adorno's infamous declaration that "[to] write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" was received more as a call to narrative arms than a moratorium; Holocaust scholars have long insisted that Adorno was speaking *poetically* and not literally, saying we *must* write poetry after Auschwitz, just as we must put psychoanalysis to good use.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the Holocaust has only recently become a coherent narrative project in literary, psychological, and theoretical discourse. Lawrence L. Langer's foundational study *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* was published in 1975, and is one of the earliest long critical treatments of the "literature of atrocity." If Western culture has only lately come to terms with the Holocaust, those terms are largely literary and psychological, beginning with Holocaust memoirs and diaries, then historical analyses, and finally fictionalized treatments alongside academic trauma theory.

Only now can Baer insist that there's such a thing as "sufficient" confrontation with the Holocaust. Not everyone would agree; one of the counter-tropes of Holocaust narrative is that confrontation is impossible or always insufficient, that such faith in literature is foolish, even unethical. In any case, the Holocaust has arrived as a legitimate subject, and has ushered in the wider sense that trauma writing can be children's literature. It's not surprising that the Holocaust has functioned as a sort of primal scene of children's trauma literature, through which a children's literature of atrocity has been authorized within the last decade, asserted around both the power and limitations of narrative.

The psychoanalytic conceit is not accidental. The recent surge of Holocaust and trauma writing has many causes and vectors, among them the success of the progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the residual faith in literature as a form of identity, empathy, and community in a pluralist society. Holocaust writing would be unthinkable without the therapeutic ethos that at once nurtured this progressive culture and formed its popular and institutional corrective (in the form of Cold War psychology, for instance). As social historians have shown, the helping professions have engendered a belief in the complexity of psychic life and interpersonal relations, a belief with both progressive and reactionary tendencies. Psychoanalysis has long been wildly popular in the US, and now has a diffuse

cultural life. Thanks in part to the dissemination of psychoanalysis and the professionalization of mental health work, trauma is a key concept in our life and literature. Not surprisingly, recent academic theory privileges literature and psychoanalysis as interrelated forms of trauma “testimony.”

For better and for worse, the Holocaust has become nearly coterminous with the idea of the unconscious. Like the unconscious as theorized by Freud, the Holocaust is at once history and the never-ending story, the primal scene forever relived and reconstructed. It is something that must be spoken about but that remains inaccessible. The Holocaust is simultaneously an event that we’ve moved beyond and one that we cannot and must not forget: this is the necessary paradox of Holocaust writing, akin to the idea of the unconscious, the central and necessary conceit of psychoanalysis. Baer points to the promotional buttons for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which read “REMEMBER” and “NEVER AGAIN”; the Museum is a walking and talking cure, one that asserts the preventative as well as recuperative power of memory.<sup>4</sup>

This essay, however, does not argue for the supremacy of psychoanalysis as a tool for representing and understanding trauma in and around Holocaust literature. Instead I show how, for better and for worse, psychoanalysis and children’s literature have been mutually enabling, alongside and through academic trauma theory, which rewrites the “crisis” of representation in signal ways. Children’s literature, of course, has been very usefully understood as therapeutic and testimonial. Certain genres seem to function much like the dreamwork as Freud described it, at once acknowledging but distorting or screening trauma. Drawing upon Freud, Bruno Bettelheim famously suggested that fairy tales help children work through both painful experiences and everyday psychic trouble. And fairy tale motifs surface in other kinds of texts about war and especially the Holocaust. Thus Donald Haase, among others, examines “the fairy tale’s potential as an emotional survival strategy” (361) in and around Holocaust narrative.<sup>5</sup>

But because psychoanalysis and literature are so enmeshed, this kind of treatment begs the analytical question in a sense, using one discourse to discover in the other analogous procedures and truths. In the case of the fairy tale, we might also examine how fairy tales have helped articulate psychoanalytic discourse. And in the case of trauma writing overall, we might ask—as have Holocaust scholars

Adrienne Kertzer and Hamida Bosmajian in recent studies—how our understanding of trauma is discursive as well as lived, shaped by cultural pressures alongside personal experiences. What if psychoanalysis *isn't*, in fact, the best treatment for trauma, but rather one of its privileged modes of presentation? Do we usually now expect children's literature to testify to trauma in psychoanalytic fashion? Why not turn instead to alternative discourses of trauma work, among them "narrative medicine" and "narrative therapy"?<sup>6</sup> Or why not abandon psychological approaches altogether, in favor of sociohistorical analysis? In *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Ann Cvetkovich advocates what she calls "critical American Studies," which would provide "a fuller examination of racialized histories of genocide, colonization, slavery, and migration that are part of the violences of modernity, and whose multigenerational legacies require new vocabularies of trauma" (37).<sup>7</sup> Is it time to leave psychoanalysis behind?

Cvetkovich's work demonstrates the value of an integrative approach to trauma, one in which psychoanalysis doesn't dominate the interpretive scene, being understood as one heuristic among many. As I've argued elsewhere, psychoanalysis and children's literature share many of the same central themes, conceits, and institutional practices, which means we can't treat one discourse as method and the other as material. Psychoanalysis is not just a method of interpretation, but a foundational set of texts, ideas, rules, and habits; psychoanalysis is at once subject, method, and field. We can't either simply apply or renounce it; it's part of our heritage. We can, however, examine the interdependence of psychoanalysis and children's forms. And we can question their testimonial equivalence as asserted by contemporary trauma theory, as trauma theory has its own investments, and adapts from literature and psychoanalysis certain conventions and tropes.<sup>8</sup>

While it looks as if we've fashioned a more serious and sophisticated children's literature, what we're seeing is not only a breakthrough in the field but also a particular moment in the ongoing collaborative project of psychoanalysis and literature—both of which take the Holocaust as, in the words of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their book *Testimony* (1992), "the watershed of our times . . . whose traumatic consequences are still actively *evolving* . . ." (xiv; italics in original). That project is articulated as such in theoretical texts such as *Testimony*, which, despite its sophistication, seems to celebrate testimony as a kind of antidote to the otherwise troubling uncertainties of memory, history, and representation, attributing to testimony the very

agency at issue in psychoanalysis and much trauma literature. Such upbeat, personifying theory perhaps parallels the “Americanization” of Holocaust narrative.

Although children’s books differ from psychoanalysis and trauma theory, all three projects now make trauma more personal than political. After examining at length trauma theory’s complicity with an Americanized, fairy tale–inflected psychoanalysis, I consider first recent young adult novels about genocidal trauma, then picture books about 9/11. Whereas trauma theory is unconsciously sentimental, the young adult novels and especially the 9/11 books are openly so, appropriating the vulnerable/dead child as the representative American—as, in Lauren Berlant’s formulation, “the infantile citizen.” I conclude the essay by turning to a trauma text that urges communal rather than infantile citizenship, Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993). Lowry affirms our faith in testimony but protests the privatization and infantilization of the public sphere.

#### *Trauma/Testimony/Theory*

A key lesson of recent trauma theory is that psychoanalysis offers the best clinical and theoretical treatment of trauma. In *Testimony*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub propose that psychoanalysis is a form of testimony to the unspeakable, recognizing the unconscious witnessing of the subject. In their view, psychoanalysis acknowledged, “for the first time in the history of culture, that one does not have to *possess* or *own* the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker” (15). Put another way, the speaker does not possess the truth; the truth possesses the speaker. The traumatized speak in spite of themselves, and psychoanalysis is there to witness. *Traum* is German for *dream* (though the term “trauma” comes from the Greek for “wound”), and dreams and nightmares help make possible psychoanalysis and much trauma theory after it. Felman and Laub also describe literature as testimony, remarking that “[p]sychoanalysis and literature have both come to contaminate and to enrich each other”; both function “as a mode of *truth’s realization* beyond what is available as statement, beyond what is available, that is, as a truth transparent to itself and entirely known . . .” (15–16).

Felman and Laub are right to see psychoanalysis and literature as entangled forms of trauma testimony. High tragedy and other literary genres have long functioned as such, sometimes self-reflexively and sometimes not, and that's largely why Freud repeatedly drew from folklore and literature to dramatize his theories. But Freud's very invocation of folklore as evidence points to the limits of a standard psychoanalytic reading. Furthermore, even if psychoanalysis and literature testify to trauma, are we really reliable witnesses? And how much can we ever know about ourselves or about others?

Consider, in contrast to Felman and Laub's optimism, these characteristically apt words of Janet Malcolm in *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession*. Her subject is transference, but her comment applies to psychoanalysis more broadly:

The idea of infant sexuality and of the Oedipus complex can be accepted with a good deal more equanimity than the idea that the most precious and inviolate of entities—personal relations—is actually a messy jangle of misapprehensions, at best an uneasy truce between solitary fantasy systems. Even (or especially) romantic love is fundamentally solitary, and has at its core a profound impersonality. The concept of transference at once destroys faith in personal relations and explains why they are tragic: we cannot know each other. We must grope around for each other through a dense thicket of absent others. We cannot see each other plain. A horrible kind of predestination hovers over each new attachment we form. "Only connect," E. M. Forster proposed. "Only we can't," the psychoanalyst knows. (6)

Malcolm takes her book title from Freud's description of psychoanalysis as one of three "impossible professions," after education and government (Freud 203). Drawing from Freud's work and other materials, she authenticates what many Americans would see as the pessimism of classical psychoanalysis, pointing to the consistency of Freud's sense of the psychotherapeutic project as announced in the early work *Studies on Hysteria* (1899), cowritten with Josef Breuer: "transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness" (Breuer and Freud 305). With the exception of Jacques Lacan and a few others, most post-Freudian psychoanalytic thinkers have embraced a more hopeful psychoanalysis. This is particularly true of Americans, who tend to confuse psychoanalysis with self-help. Most historians of psychoanalysis underscore the positive (perhaps wishful) thinking that marks American

variants. At the least, then, the tribute of Felman and Laub needs to be tempered, as does much poststructuralist theory about trauma and disaster, which seems strangely detached from the gravity of its subject.

A return to the pessimistic Freud is not, however, a solution to the problem of voluntarist or utopian trauma theory. It might even be a distraction, as critical theory more broadly, not just trauma theory, is indebted to psychoanalytic and psychological narrative. Critical theory, of course, is a rich amalgam of philosophical and disciplinary projects, but chief among them is psychoanalysis, especially the work of Freud and Lacan, whose writings on subjectivity, desire, and language have been enormously generative. The influence of psychoanalysis on critical theory is both direct and indirect, acknowledged and unremarked.

For example, as Jane F. Thrailkill has very persuasively shown, a particular psychoanalytic trope runs from Freud to Lacan to the work of contemporary trauma theorists: the figure of the dead/wounded child. Long a literary staple—think Stowe's little Eva, for instance, or any of Dickens's angelic and all-too-mortal children—the trope of the dead/wounded child entered the psychoanalytic domain in Freud's dream of the burning child in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). As Freud reports, a sleeping father is mourning his dead child, whose body lies in state in the next room. The father wakes up when he dreams this anguished plea: "Father, can't you see I'm burning?" But he cannot save his son, who is already dead, or even his corpse, now being accidentally burned by sacramental candles. "What is [the child] burning with," writes Lacan after Freud, "if not that which we see emerging at other points designated by the Freudian topology, namely, the weight of the sins of the father, borne by the ghost in the myth of Hamlet, which Freud couples with the myth of Oedipus?" (Lacan 34). For Lacan, the dream illustrates the ethical nature of the unconscious and the existential state of humanity. In her influential study *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) trauma theorist Cathy Caruth in turn interprets and appropriates the dream: "If Freud asks, *What does it mean to sleep?* Lacan discovers at the heart of this question another one, perhaps even more urgent: *What does it mean to awaken?*" (99; italics in original).

They mean about the same thing for Caruth, who adopts the wounded child as a metaphor for the impossibility of trauma's conscious and localized apperception.<sup>9</sup> Rather than coming to terms with trauma, she says, we pass trauma along to the next person (here, the next theorist), keeping trauma unconscious and always moving. Caruth

sees this transmission as an enabling sort of anxiety of influence (and in fact she thanks Harold Bloom in her book's acknowledgements). Such transmission is not just productive; it's also ethical, in her view. "In thus relating trauma to the very identity of the self and to one's relation to another," she writes, "Lacan's reading shows us, I will suggest, that the shock of traumatic sight reveals at the heart of human subjectivity not so much an epistemological, but rather what can be defined as an *ethical* relation to the real" (92; italics in original). For Caruth, the impossibility of sufficient response to and representation of trauma is itself traumatic, and inaugurates an ethics of collective memory and cultural work. In her analysis of what we might call the sentimental unconscious of trauma theory, Thraikill shows how Caruth's reading privileges psychoanalysis:

Caruth suggests that contemporary theory-reading "trauma experts" have the following role: to take the traumatic death of the child and see that it is "transformed into the imperative of a speaking that awakens others" (108). This speaking is, as Caruth explains, "the passing on of psychoanalytic writing," which is intriguingly cast as something more akin to inspiration than interpretation . . . Theory in this account becomes a means of transcendence, and would appear to fulfill a psychoanalytic critic's dream: direct correspondence with Freud . . . Writers of trauma theory, and by extension, their audience of committed readers, are clearly designated as the keepers of the flame, the memorializers of not just this particular dead child, but of what that figure embodies and indeed etches on the body of the receptive reader. . . . (Thraikill 138–9)

Whereas for Malcolm, transference is the ultimate downer, for Caruth it is what makes intellectual life worthwhile. We might add that Lacan's discussion of the ethical nature of the unconscious is much more detached than Caruth implies; Lacan even suggests that to understand that ethical dimension, we must break with the accepted view of Freud as intrepid explorer. "[W]hen I say that Freud's approach here is ethical," writes Lacan, "I am not thinking of the legendary courage of the scientist who recoils before nothing" (34).

The sentimental invocation of the dead/wounded child is characteristic not just of trauma theory, as Thraikill shows, but of a certain strain of poststructuralist critical theory. Consider, for instance, Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980), a poststructuralist

theoretical meditation in the form of fragments. Blanchot's mode of critical theory likewise depends upon psychoanalysis, and particularly upon the writing of Serge Leclaire and D. W. Winnicott. About midway through his text, Blanchot takes up the subject of "[i]mpossible necessary death," and turns to Serge Leclair for wisdom: "According to him, one lives and speaks only by killing the *infans* in oneself (in others also): but what is the *infans*? Obviously, that in us which has not yet begun to speak and never will speak; but, more importantly, the marvelous (terrifying) child which we have been in the dreams and desires of those who were present at our birth (parents, society in general)" (67). The child as theorized by Blanchot is linked with "primary narcissistic representation" but is neither a child nor a child-like state: rather, a metaphor for "impossible necessary death," one with "the status of an ever-unconscious, and consequently, forever indelible, representation" (67)—one presumably transmitted through experimental forms of theory writing, despite Blanchot's declared resistance to "therapeutic" appropriation.<sup>10</sup> Blanchot even furnishes his own recollection of childhood, introduced parenthetically as "A primal scene?" (72).

Lacan and Blanchot both feature in Christopher Fynsk's *Infant Figures* (2000), a fascinating if also exasperating exploration of language and its discontents. Pairing up Blanchot's primal scene and the dream of the wounded child as reclaimed by Lacan, Fynsk claims, "all human speech and psychic life are haunted by the death of a child, a being whose passing is the condition of speech, and who is therefore, of necessity, without speech: *infans*" (3; italics in original). Fynsk extrapolates this idea from Lacan and Blanchot, as well as from literary and artistic treatments of dead children. He insists upon its universal truth against a more historicized analysis of the trope's intellectual and imaginative career. "A theoretical presentation that would attempt to read Blanchot from Lacan or Lacan from Blanchot," he writes, "would lose precisely what is at stake, whatever it is that lies in the resonance of those two phrases ('a child is being killed,' and "Father, don't you see I'm burning?') as they are brought to sound in the respective texts" (91). Fynsk holds that the death of the *infans* haunts psychoanalysis precisely to the degree that psychoanalysis is concerned with language as the marker of the human.

His formulations are quite engaging, perhaps when most diffuse ("whatever it is"), but like Caruth before him, Fynsk appropriates the trope of the wounded/dead child as a sentimental figure, as a pure or

transcendent site of narrative engagement. "No one can say fully, intelligibly, what the death of a child is, for all saying proceeds from such a death. But all saying is haunted by it" (50). While he acknowledges that Freud's burning child might be voicing abandonment ("Father, don't you see I'm burning?"), Fynsk holds that there "is also a kind of 'pure desire'" for death voiced in the dream (118). What Thrailkill says apropos of Caruth applies here: trauma promises a "point of contact or 'transmission' between the dead and the living; the theorist of trauma, then, might be said to act as Virgilian guide to his realm" (134–5).<sup>11</sup> *Infant Figures*, in fact, is dedicated to the memory of Fynsk's friend Jean-François Lyotard. "The words in this volume that were written for him are now left like orphans," writes Fynsk. "But I take solace in the thought that some of those who knew him (and perhaps even some who know only his writings) will recognize a trace of his gift in the many pages he rendered possible here, and I will listen for the sound of his humor in their reactions."

The trope of the wounded/dead child is but one index of the mutuality of psychoanalysis and critical theory. As Peter Ramandanovic underscores in his introduction to a special issue of *Postmodern Culture*, the term "trauma" first became an important keyword of critical theory with Shoshana Felman's essay "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," first published in 1991, just as the new "children's literature of atrocity" was appearing on the scene. Felman's essay, which presented psychoanalysis as a form of unconscious testimony, was reprinted in *Testimony*, cowritten by Felman and clinician Dori Laub. In the essay, Felman returns to Mallarmé's lecture "La Musique et les lettres" and a later text, both of which had already loomed large in Paul de Man's essay "The Crisis of Contemporary Criticism" (1967). In his many writings, de Man insisted that the role of theory and criticism is to "trouble and reinvent writing" (Ramandanovic 2), and Felman, in turn, troubles and reinvents "crisis," turning it into trauma/theory. "If de Man establishes criticism as the 'rhetoric of crisis,'" writes Ramandanovic, "Felman proceeds to relate the crisis—that is, theory—to education, and, more importantly, she takes the term crisis in a new direction as she focuses on the presence of history in writing" (3). Crisis thus yields to trauma. If we believe Felman, theory more broadly is trauma theory, at least to some degree. Theory is also framed as traumatic: it ostensibly traumatizes literature and those who love it (do we not all know academics who lament the profession's tragic fall into theory?)

Like de Man, notes Ramadanovic, Felman turns theory back upon itself, raising necessary questions about the limits as well as the possibilities of analysis.<sup>12</sup> Ramadanovic seems optimistic about the prospects of trauma theory that foregrounds its own “constitutive limitations” (9). That optimism, and that formulation of theory’s “self-consciousness,” ratify intellectual work as a form of academic testimony, even for those outside the clinical fold. Critical theory demands transference, ensures its own transmission, especially when concerned with trauma or psychoanalysis. It is simultaneously a form of cultural capital and a mode of transmission/acclaculturation.<sup>13</sup> Trauma theory appropriates the ethical discourse of testimony that is largely the legacy of the Holocaust and an international commitment to human rights. If “A” is for Auschwitz, “T” stands not only for trauma, testimony, and theory, but also for transference and transmission.

*The Uses (and Abuses) of Enchantment*

The sentimentality of the wounded child trope; the ease with which some theory sees the dead child as necessary to language; the rewriting of crisis as trauma; the incestuous kinship of psychoanalysis and theory: all helped inspire as much as they explain the contemporary “children’s literature of atrocity.” To give a proper account of that literature’s emergence, of course, we’d also need a thorough psychosocial history of childhood in the United States, dating at least from the end of the nineteenth century. Thraikill gestures toward such a history, locating her critique of recent trauma theory in the larger context of American literary sentimentalism, showing how the realist tradition that Mark Twain introduced against the excesses of “feminine” sentimentality has nonetheless made way for the reincarnation of the wounded/dead child in that most unlikely of places, critical theory. As Thraikill has it, the suffering literary child made thinkable the wounded child of social reform around the turn of the century, and now survives as the traumatized child of theory. Writing about the sudden popularity in the 1990s of adult trauma stories in which childhood looms large, Patricia Pace similarly points to the historical transformation of the American child from “economically useful” to “emotionally priceless” (238), drawing from Viviana Zelizer’s work on the subject. Clearly the emergence of a trauma literature for children is part of this complex history of childhood’s revaluation, of its merger with the idea of interiority. As Thraikill, Pace, and other scholars

working in the 1990s point out from various angles, childhood is now imagined as a psychic-developmental space at once sacrosanct and violated.

If that larger sociohistorical picture is beyond the scope of this essay, I can at least outline some of the more recent factors in the rise of a children's literature of atrocity. As I've shown, trauma has been authorized by psychoanalysis and/as critical theory, as well as by adult literature. One year after Langer's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* was published, Bruno Bettelheim's even more influential study *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) codified but also revised the trope of wounded child. *The Uses of Enchantment* was published to wide acclaim, and has had significant influence on how fairy tales signify. Even if Bettelheim knew nothing about children's literature—and in fact posed fairy tales against it—*The Uses of Enchantment* attests to the growing force of that expectation in the 1970s and continues to shore it up.

Not only did Bettelheim show us how to read fairy tales; the culture also showed Bettelheim. He had no interest in fairy tales originally, but had long been preoccupied with what I've elsewhere called the feral tale. Bettelheim was fascinated by accounts of wolf-children, and argued as early as 1959 that such accounts were really stories of autistic children. He was also preoccupied with the experiences of Holocaust survivors and the ways in which their behavior resembled that of emotionally disturbed children. The feral tale provides a useful bridge from his studies of particular experiences of trauma, especially in concentration camps, to his more professional focus on everyday trauma and how to manage it. A particular "wolf-girl" case, about a girl who lived in a bunker in Poland during the war, allowed Bettelheim to move from Holocaust trauma to autism to a more generic sense of trauma and dysfunction—at which point developed his interest in the fairy tale. Put another way, the dead/wounded child of Holocaust experience and of residential clinical work merges in *The Uses of Enchantment* with the traumatized but resilient child of psychoanalysis as theorized by Freud. Freud's detractors have long argued that, by emphasizing the power of oedipal fantasy, Freud denied or downplayed child abuse. Rather than take up that issue, Bettelheim blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality, abuse and everyday angst, turning to the fairy tale.

*The Uses of Enchantment* thus evades as much as registers the overdetermined, incestuous history of psychoanalysis and children's

literature, and represents the kind of personalized theorizing that risks trivializing individual as well as social history. *The Uses of Enchantment* gave pop-intellectual affirmation to the now commonplace idea that fairy tale reading amounts to self-help or bibliotherapy. Recent revelations that Bettelheim plagiarized and was an often nasty character have not tempered the public's enthusiasm for the uses of enchantment; rather, Bettelheim has become the Big Bad Wolf.

This contemporary tradition of child figuration, of course, differs from the trope of the dead child that drives the poststructuralist theoretics of Blanchot and Fynsk. But just as the dead child trope enables a theoretics of academic transmission and transference, so too does the wounded-but-resilient (inner) child of pop-psychoanalysis enable a poetics of popular transmission and transference, whose major genre is the fairy tale. Through the fairy tale, people tell stories about challenge and survival, hardship and hope. By the 1990s, the fairy tale was ever more entrenched in US pop-literary culture, in the form of novelizations, films, "politically correct" satires, etc. Most of these new fairy tale forms claim both psychological and historical relevance, and vis-à-vis each other. Thus in her afterword to *Briar Rose* (first published in 1992), Yolen can write, "This is a book of fiction. All the characters are made up. Happy-ever-after is a fairy tale notion, not history. I know of no woman who escaped from Chelmno alive" (241). Yolen can repudiate the happy-ever-after scenario precisely because we now expect fairy tales to be both *not happy*—i.e., therapeutic rather than conventionally satisfying—and *history*. It's as if Yolen is suggesting that while this particular plot element isn't accurate, the novel is still true to history—that is, to deeper psychological truths.

In this novel, ostensibly a variant of "Sleeping Beauty," a young woman does escape from Chelmno alive—an unthinkable and perhaps irresponsible plot, as Adrienne Kertzer argues in *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust*. Kertzer chastises Yolen for pandering to the naive American desire for a happy ending in Holocaust narrative. And yet Yolen clearly sees her work as legitimately historical as well as imaginative. So does her editor Terri Windling, in her introduction to the 2002 edition of *Briar Rose*. "Way back in the 1980s," writes Windling, "I was a young book editor in New York City, and Jane Yolen was one of my heroes. Not only was she, quite simply, one of the finest writers I'd ever read, but her knowledge of the world's great wealth of fairy tales was second to none. Like Jane, I was crazy about fairy tales, and so I had the notion of publishing a series of

novels based on these classic stories. Thus the Fairy Tale series was born . . .” (xiii–xiv). Windling furnishes a nutshell history of the fairy tale, pointing to its juvenilization by Disney and hinting that its legitimacy is now being restored through her series. She implies that Yolen’s novel will return to the fairy tale its rightful European seriousness, against Americanizations “stripped of moral ambiguities” and narrative complexities” (xiii). There’s even an epigraph from Jack Zipes’s *Spells of Enchantment*, which suggests how closely our faith in the sociological and historical significance of the fairy tale is entangled with our faith in its psychological import.<sup>14</sup> Whereas Kertzer sees the novel as a typically American exercise in imaginative denial, Yolen and Windling position *Briar Rose* as a higher truth. Kertzer and Bosmajian are right to point out that such texts are problematic, even if our disappointments with as much as our praise of children’s literature confirm our faith in its testimonial power.

Among the confrontational texts recommended by Baer are a group of time travel and/or “trading places” novels that operate in a magical realist register and emphasize an experiential, healing relation to Holocaust-related trauma. I don’t mean the Time Warp trio books of John Scieszka, but rather Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (1988) and Han Nolan’s *If I Should Die Before I Wake* (1994). These titles represent not a simple banalization of the personal, as with the 9/11 titles I discuss next, but rather the expectation that young readers must find history personally traumatic in order to know it. It’s as if Santayana’s famous remark has been amended to “Those who *want* to remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>15</sup>

I should first note that, as Kate Capshaw Smith pointed out in response to an earlier version of this essay, faith in the power of travel/trading narratives stems in part from the success of similar texts about African American historical trauma published decades ago, such as Virginia Hamilton’s *House of Dies Drear* (1968) and especially Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), arguably a text cross-written for (or at least cross-read by) adolescents. In the latter, the protagonist Dana is transported to and from 1976 California to 1815 Maryland so that she—and by extension, the reader—can experience firsthand the terrors of slavery. Another example is Hamilton’s *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (1982), in which the female protagonist Teresa (Tree) learns through a sort of psychological time travel of her family’s traumatic history of porphyria as well as abuse. Even when time travel or place exchange is not a central element, many if not most contemporary children’s

books about African American life are historical and often traumatic in emphasis, so pervasive is the legacy of slavery, Reconstruction, and the fight for civil rights. Tellingly, these books have yet to be reclaimed by the emergent field of trauma studies, suggesting again the dominance of Holocaust narrative. Though familiar with all three of these novels, I too failed to see them as trauma texts.<sup>16</sup>

The more contemporary protagonists of Yolen and Nolan are subjected through their Holocaust exposure to a splitting—even shattering—of their subjectivity, from which they must assemble a more adult self. Here, as in the texts of Hamilton and Butler mentioned above, the psychoanalytic-literary collaboration is productive and admirable. In Yolen's novel, a bored Jewish girl named Hannah opens the door for Elijah during her family's Passover seder and finds herself in Nazi-occupied Poland in 1942. With other Polish villagers, Hannah—now Chaya—is rounded up and taken to a concentration camp. Eventually, she sacrifices herself to save her friend Rivka. When she walks into the door leading to the gas chambers, she suddenly returns to her real life in the Bronx, with a new appreciation for history and modern rituals. Nolan's novel likewise whisks a contemporary teen girl back to war-time Poland, but this time that girl, named Hilary, belongs to a white supremacist group. She becomes Chana, a young Jewish girl, and learns some valuable lessons about racism and genocide. Unlike Hannah, Hilary trades ethnicity as well as place, in keeping with other trading places texts. I found this aspect of the transformation unbelievable, and wonder if ethnicity should be so easily elastic.

These stories are effective precisely to the degree that they capitalize on our conviction that historical trauma should be personal, in ways that are often surprising or unpredictable. Although I don't know enough about the genre, my sense is that historical fiction for children has become more than ever a metadiscourse of personal suffering that in turn demands pain from readers as proof of their engagement. Whether about the impact of slavery, the Holocaust, or other horrific world events (as in the recent spate of Great Depression stories), the genre seems now to thematize the reader's own exchange with the child protagonist. And such personalization, which seems consonant with post-1960s identity politics and the faith in empathy, can sometimes lead to a denial of history's complexities, which aren't always so easily plotted.

Much as I admire the work of Yolen and Nolan, I find the same conceit of split subjectivity disturbing in another young adult text,

Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *The Hunger* (1999), in which a fifteen-year-old Canadian girl named Paula simultaneously becomes anorexic and learns about the Turkish massacre of Armenians during the years 1915–1923. Half realistic, "problem teen" fiction and half historical fiction, the novel opens as the standard story of a perfectionist girl increasingly preoccupied with her body image but soon takes on another dimension. As she gets sicker, Paula learns more about the massacres online. After a dangerous run, Paula has a heart attack, passes out, and travels through a time tunnel. She finds herself face to face with "a mirror image of herself" (98) named Marta. "Paula stepped into the mirror image of herself and felt a loving warmth envelop her," writes Skrypuch. "Paula' no longer existed. She had just stepped inside of Marta" (99). Paula-Marta then wakes up in a Turkish orphanage in 1915, where her hellish history lesson begins. The brutalities she experiences link her specifically to her grandmother Pauline, who emigrated from Armenia in 1923 with her adoptive parents at the age of seven (meaning that she was born in the same or subsequent year in which the novel is set). Paula's grandmother Pauline is the daughter of Mariam, Marta's older biological sister, which makes her grandmother Paula's niece in the temporal logic of the story. (To make matters more complicated, Marta was not merely Pauline's aunt but also her adoptive mother.)

*The Hunger* is commendable for raising consciousness about the massacres, which have long been a taboo subject, especially in Turkey. Even so, I doubt that "real hunger" can or should serve as a wake-up call for teen girls with eating disorders in contemporary North America. When offered food, Marta seizes it eagerly, thinking, "The Turks may wish us to die . . . but I'm not about to cooperate" (115). Her brutal experiences with the Turks inspire a new will to live and therefore to eat. She earns how to keep food down: "This is medicine, medicine, medicine, she chanted" (160–1). Eventually she's returned to the present and to Paula, her struggle not over but her fatal aversion to food overcome. The novel enacts a split subjectivity only to portray eating as a matter of willpower and personal/familial experience of history. Clearly eating disorders are cultural, but the will to live and the will to eat are not so transcendent of historical context. Yet Amazon.com reviewers call the book a "skillful blend of the contemporary and the historical," and "an especially suitable gift for a young person struggling to overcome an eating disorder or to deal with personal or family trauma." Any personal or family trauma?

Skrypuch herself weighs in as a reviewer, describing her research and naturalizing the link between Paula's story and the historical trauma that Paula (re)lives. Asserting that Hitler modeled the Holocaust on the Armenian massacre, Skrypuch claims an even earlier primal scene of genocide, then uses it to authorize an object lesson for contemporary teens. The personal, it seems, is the historical, and both are billed as traumatic.

Why are Yolen and Nolan successful where Skrypuch is less so? Skrypuch isn't as masterful a writer as Yolen, to begin with, and *The Hunger* is her first novel. But it's also possible that Skrypuch can take greater license with her story because the Turkish massacre of the Armenians is only now being acknowledged publicly. Even now, perspectives are sharply divided along nationalist and political lines.<sup>17</sup> *The Hunger* at least attempts to grapple with the event and its consequences; it is a consciousness-raising book and was surely published to that end. Another somewhat contradictory explanation is that whereas the Holocaust is entangled with our ideas about memory, repression, and the intransigence of the unconscious, the Armenian tragedy seems more urgent (as un- or undertold) and also more open to invention, less haunted by mass trauma. I'm probably overlooking other possibilities, but in any case, *The Hunger's* ostensible "historicity" feels almost painfully voluntarist and presentist.

*The Hunger* is but one example of the ease with which historical trauma is used to authorize personal loss in contemporary young adult literature. In Edward Bloor's recent novel *Crusader* (1999), fifteen-year-old Roberta Ritter reconstructs the horrific murder of her mother through the supportive "screening" of Mrs. Weiss, the daughter of Holocaust survivors. Mary Ann Ritter was murdered while working one night in the family arcade, and the case has never been solved. Seven years later, Roberta begins to figure it all out. Just after her first viewing of an archival video of a news broadcast about her mother's murder, Roberta cries for the first time in those seven years, then stumbles to the home of Mrs. Weiss, who serves as a surrogate mother. Mrs. Weiss just happens to be watching Holocaust footage on television, and a long conversation ensues about human evil and accountability. "I had come here to get away from a horrible video," thinks Roberta, "and I had found another one" (204). The link is awkward, one of many problems with the book. To make matters worse, Uncle Frank, one of two problematic father figures, hosts parties in the new arcade that revolve around racist/genocidal virtual reality "experi-

ences," including "White Riot," "Lynch Mob," and "Krystallnacht." Roberta prefers unmediated reality, whatever that might be. *Crusader* is a novel of empowerment, and Roberta's growth depends upon her ambivalence about "enchantment" and her repudiation of her biological family, who are linked to history's worst villains—even as Bloor criticizes anti-Arab sentiment.

### *Picturing 9/11*

Of all contemporary genres of children's literature, the picture book offers the most dramatic and/or ironic testimony to trauma, precisely because the genre is usually presumed innocent. A picture book about the Holocaust has greater power to shock and presumably to educate. Innocenti's *Rose Blanche*, for instance, tells the story of a young German girl who secretly feeds concentration camp victims and is then mistakenly shot by the Americans who liberate the prisoners. Her death is abrupt and upsetting, and the book seems to affirm the idea that children should be exposed to rather than protected from trauma. Or consider Toshi Maruki's *Hiroshima No Pika* (1980), a devastating account of a seven-year-old Japanese girl's experience of the Hiroshima bombing. Young Mii "saw children with their clothes burned away, lips and eyelids swollen . . . There were heaps of bodies everywhere" (n.p.). Those heaps evoke the mass graves of the Holocaust, complicating any "adult" argument about the necessity of such drastic retaliation against the Japanese. In more recent picture books about the Holocaust, the photograph has become the preferred visual form, in keeping with a faith in the realism of photography (a realism that Kertzer and others usefully question).

If the Holocaust is now understood as the horrific event with which we have slowly come to terms—as the structuring and residually unconscious trauma of the twentieth century—then the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in our very American society of the spectacle, constitute the ultimate and easily knowable affront to self and nation. Whereas the Holocaust slowly became an acceptable topic for children's literature, no such lag occurred between 9/11 and the publication of children's and young adult books about that tragedy and the so-called "war on terrorism." More than twenty such books have appeared so far—most of them published in 2002—mostly picture books but also diary anthologies, graphic novels, and comic book issues (single and serialized). These titles are largely disappointing as

art and as social commentary. Many claim 9/11 as both a simple story and as personally traumatic, figuring the nation as a wounded innocent and ignoring our complicity in the exploitation of the world's people and resources.

In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, Lauren Berlant argues that "infantile citizenship" has displaced any meaningful participation in American public life. With the rise of the Reaganite right, she holds, "a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by one for fetuses and children . . . Portraits and stories of citizens-victims . . . now permeate the political public sphere, putting on display a mass experience of economic insecurity, racial discord, class conflict, and sexual unease" (1). In other words, privileged citizens claim, in the name of children born and unborn, to be traumatized—by progressive social politics, for example, such as feminism and affirmative action, and more recently by the events of 9/11. "Mass national pain threatens to turn into banality," writes Berlant, "a crumbling archive of dead signs and tired plots" (2).<sup>18</sup> Berlant even holds that the "ur-infantile citizen narrative is actually the presidential autobiography" (37), as if anticipating the election of President Bush.

The title of Rosina Schnurr's contribution to the growing body of 9/11 children's books nicely sums up the collective spirit: *Terrorism: The Only Way is through a Child's Story*. Another title, *911: The Book of Help*, is a collection of essays, poems, short fiction, and drawings created by young adult writers in response to the attacks—sort of a *Chicken Soup for the Traumatized Teen Soul*. Then there's Latania Love Wright's *A Day I'll Never Forget: A Keepsake to Help Children Deal with the September 11, 2001 Attack on America*. I couldn't find the book in my library (or bring myself to buy it), but according to the publisher's description, "[t]his is a book intended for every child between the ages of 4 to 10 years old who watched the worst attack on America . . . from their television set. This book is a keepsake in which the child's name, date given, and who the book was given by can be recorded. The fact that it is a coloring book involves the child in the reading and is a very educational resource . . . It is a resource that allows children to express their own individual feelings about that horrible day. Children of all races and ages are captivated by this book." Not one of these books seems to grapple with the political contexts of the attacks, and certainly not with the United States' own bullying practices or support for such. Instead, young readers are urged only to express their feelings and to appropriate 9/11 as a personal trauma—no matter

what their own experiences have been. Choose (and color in) your own 9/11 adventure.

One of the better 9/11 books is Goodman and Fahnstock's *The Day Our World Changed* (2002), an anthology of children's art that confirms our faith not only in the picture book as testimony but in children as reliable witnesses, if not expert interpreters. The book is a joint project of the NYU Child Study Center and the Museum of the City of New York, which suggests again how psyche and history convene of late. The book features gorgeous artwork by children alongside essays by therapists, journalists, teachers, politicians, and historians (including former Mayor Rudy Giuliani, novelist Pete Hamill, and Senator Charles Schumer). The book does represent varied perspectives on the attacks and their import, but once again, there's no attention to geopolitical context and its language is relentlessly pop-therapeutic. In his foreword, Harold S. Koplewicz, MD explains that "[I]n a single day, the illusion of our nation's invincibility was shattered for them. How they handle this new sense of vulnerability and, more importantly, how we as adults help them find their way, will have a tremendous influence on our country's future" (10).

There are a few signs of intelligent life in this anthology. In "Children as Witnesses to History," Sarah Henry traces the history of our national interest in children's voices; she even mentions the importance of *St. Nicholas*, as well as Freud, Dewey, progressive education, and the infamous 1913 Armory Show. Debbie Almontaser's "Growing Up Arab-American" is a welcome contribution about anti-Arab and anti-Muslim backlash after the attacks, even if Almontaser keeps her piece focused on strategies for preventing such bigotry rather than narrating actual incidents. For most of the adult contributors, however, the title of *The Day Our World Changed* is not ironic but a straightforward description of innocence lost that makes possible innocence regained. Pete Hamill titles his piece "Horror through Innocent Eyes." Rhapsody displaces analysis throughout the book. "So much that informs the great works of art of our time," writes Arthur L. Carter in his piece, "comes from the innocence, humor, primal joy, fear, and innate sense of humanity that children typically have . . . Many adults have tried to respond to the day, but few have done it as eloquently as our children. What a lesson! Their instincts have an emotional incisiveness that few adults can match" (107).<sup>19</sup>

In his spirited interpretation of 9/11, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, Slavoj Žižek proposes that terror has lately been made into "the hid-

den universal equivalent of all social evils" (111), in keeping with what he calls "the subjective economy of the realization of the Self's inner potentials" (77). For Žižek, Lacanian psychoanalysis is the cure for traumatic political realities. He puts his faith in the Lacanian Real against the "hegemonic liberal multiculturalist logic" (64) which, he says, makes more feasible notions of Absolute Evil. Counterintuitively he asks, "Is it not that today, in our resigned postideological era which admits no positive Absolutes, the only legitimate candidate for the Absolute are radically evil acts?" (137). He strenuously objects to the elevation of 9/11 to that status, as well as to comparisons of 9/11 to the Shoah. Though he admires some articulations of the Holocaust as the great singularity, he stresses the need to keep historical perspective on the Holocaust, against the kind of personal relativizations that make evil too easily Absolute, as in these children's books.

We don't have to share Žižek's faith in the recuperative power of psychoanalysis, but what better evidence of that "subjective economy" than these 9/11 titles? If the only way to understand terrorism is through a child's story, then we need children's books that actually reckon with the horrific world violence to which our nation handily contributes, and which challenge the masterplot of childhood innocence that has transformed our very understanding of citizenship. Instead we have books that promote infantile citizenship, that resort to a thematic of absolute evil and absolute innocence. Among them are books about the bravery of firemen and rescue dogs, alongside *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey*, the vacuous *On That Day* by Andrea Patel, and the twelve-book War on Terrorism series published by ABDO & Daughters. The titles in the latter series, perhaps the most reactionary of all the 9/11 books so far, include *Ground Zero*, *Heroes of the Day*, *Operation Noble Eagle*, *United We Stand*, and *Weapons of War* (all published in 2002—a book per month for a full year). This series is dumbly patriotic, with its stars-'n-stripes covers and its jingoistic support for America's war machine. President Bush comes off as a hero rather than a war zealot or just a politician. These books have wide distribution, as ABDO is a privately held company that publishes children's nonfiction for the school library market. As reported on the ABDO website, the War on Terrorism series has garnered praise from the American Library Association's *Booklist* magazine.<sup>20</sup>

Instead of nuanced history, we get *The Big Scary Picture Book of Terrorism*.<sup>21</sup> The child inside and outside the text is at once the wounded/dead child of trauma theory and the endangered child of

our reactionary national imagination. All this picture book talk of injury and vulnerability is cause for alarm, especially because such talk is supposed to be reassuring. Picture books about 9/11 insist upon a traumatized reader, but they also redefine trauma as the stuff of pop-psychology, emphasizing—and delimiting—choice, pleasure, and action. We want books to give children hope, to nurture them and aid their development. But a coloring book about 9/11? A personal "keep-sake"? Complexity and collectivity are refused in the name of the infantile citizen.

*Trauma and Memory in The Giver*

One of the best-known Holocaust titles for children, and so far the only one to be honored with the prestigious Newbery Medal, is Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* (1989). Set in 1943, *Number the Stars* tells the story of a Danish family and their friends who help smuggle Jewish neighbors out of Nazi-occupied Denmark and into Sweden. Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen becomes involved with the Resistance when her family hides Annemarie's best friend, Ellen Rosen, from the Nazis. As the novel unfolds, Annemarie comes to terms with the terrors of their situation.

Lowry alternately safeguards her protagonist Annemarie and puts her in harm's way, through changes in place and an emphasis on the defensive power of ignorance rather than innocence. Midway through the book, Annemarie discovers that her Uncle Henrik has been lying to her about their mysterious family business near the sea, and confronts him. "How brave are you, little Annemarie?" he asks, saying that the larger truth of their situation is too much for anyone, much less a child, to bear. Annemarie accepts this explanation, thinking "they protect[ed] one another by not telling" (91)—by not knowing or claiming too much individually, they avoid giving others away through German torture. In the book's climactic event, Annemarie is instructed to take a basket of food to her uncle on a docked boat. She knows her task is dangerous, but not why. Hidden in the basket is a handkerchief soaked with a concoction designed to throw off the German dogs brought aboard the boats to sniff out stowaways headed across the sea to Sweden. On her way she encounters German soldiers, who confiscate the lunch but let her take the basket to her uncle. The handkerchief arrives in the nick of time, and prevents the dogs from sniffing out the Rosen family members hiding in a secret com-

partment. While on the path, Annemarie realizes that she must seem as ignorant as possible. She thinks of herself as Little Red Riding Hood, and even tells herself that story as she walks along. Remembering the childishness of her younger sister, Annemarie feigns anger and confusion when the soldiers confiscate the lunch: “*Don’t!*” she said angrily. “That’s Uncle Henrik’s lunch!” (114–15). Innocence, she knows, is a defense. Some critics even hold that *Number the Stars* is not a story of lost innocence at all, but a meditation on the uses and abuses of innocence.

Unlike other Holocaust narratives for children, *Number the Stars* is not set in Germany, does not address life in concentration camps. For better or for worse, its indirection or remove helps explain its success. Unlike Baer, who argues for direct confrontation with trauma, Lowry hopes details will suggest the larger picture. In her Newbery acceptance speech for *Number the Stars*, Lowry remarks: “As a writer I find that I can cover only the small and the ordinary—the mittens on a shivering child—and hope that they evoke the larger events. The huge and the terrible are beyond my powers” (416). Lowry poses the question with which we’ve been concerned: How, when, and why to speak the unspeakable, especially to and for and in the name of children? In my view, Lowry does more than just “evoke the larger events,” and her images of child innocence and vulnerability engender a strong sense of community.

*Number the Stars* shows how the infantilizing loss of freedom goes hand and hand with pain and hardship. So, too, does Lowry’s second Newbery Medal-winning novel, *The Giver*, published four years later. Whereas *Number the Stars* is historical fiction, *The Giver* is a dystopian novel in the tradition of *Brave New World* (1932) and *1984* (1949). Even so, the continuities of theme are strong. In *The Giver*, twelve-year-old Jonas is selected to be the Receiver of Memory for his community, the bearer of his culture’s collective consciousness. His culture has gone to Sameness, refusing pain and poverty but also variety and choice. He begins his training with the current Receiver, whom he calls the Giver. Day by day, the Giver, weary from decades of pain and isolation, transfers memories and impressions to Jonas, in a manner reminiscent of the Vulcan mind-meld, Socratic pedagogy/pederasty, and the evangelical laying-on of hands. Everyone else in the community is shielded from pain and trauma, and soon Jonas finds his new burden intolerable. “I think it would be easier if the memories were shared,” he tells the Giver. “You and I wouldn’t have to

bear so much by ourselves, if everybody took a part'" (112). "The worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It's the loneliness of it. Memories need to be shared'" (153). The Giver agrees, and they carry out a plan to restore memories to the community and force people to make their own decisions. The conclusion is ambiguous, suggesting at once the success and failure of their mission, the survival and the death of Jonas and of baby Gabriel.

Ideologically, *The Giver* is an ambivalent text. On the one hand, it echoes the classic story of the chosen child, nearly always a boy, who becomes a savior figure by sacrificing himself for the greater good. The exceptionality of Jonas and the "newchild" he nurtures is very seductive, so that it's easy to miss the critique of heroic individualism central to the book. That is, *The Giver* is at once the pleasurable familiar story of the special/gifted boy, and a critique of that story.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of contemporary trauma literature, however, *The Giver* looks more progressive than not. The sequence of *Number the Stars* and *The Giver* points to their shared project of ratifying the political sphere against privatization and the banalization of trauma. In *The Giver*, the specific lessons of history take backstage to a generic respect for the importance of collective rather than individual memory. The Giver gives memories to Jonas slowly, unwilling to burden the boy with humanity's painful and largely unspecified past. Even so, in this book there are traces of war and even the Holocaust. The most upsetting memory that Jonas receives is of a brutal battle scene evocative of the Civil War. And the devastating secret that Jonas learns in his training is that people in his community are "released" or put to death when they are too old, too immature, or just troublesome. In horror he watches a videotape of his own father killing a baby by lethal injection, and it's hard not to think here of Nazi eugenics and medical experimentation. (This scene, incidentally, is often criticized as too horrific.)

*The Giver* is a novel of the education of the senses. At first pain is "beyond [Jonas's] comprehension" (70), but through transmitted memories of sunburns and broken arms, Jonas learns physical pain first; in the novel, physical pain provides a baseline for pain more generally. As he becomes more aware of human frailty and suffering, he becomes more impatient with the empty rituals of family life that merely gesture toward emotion. At one point, his little sister claims to be "angry," but Jonas realizes that she feels only irritation. He reacts "with rage that welled up so passionately inside him that the thought

of discussing [his sister's experience] calmly at the dinner table was unthinkable" (132). As he shares physical and emotional pain with the Giver, Jonas gains wisdom, specifically the wisdom that pain must be shared if humans are to have authentic selves. The privatization of pain/wisdom does not a legitimate culture make.

Thus Lowry dismantles the very pedagogical scene that is so seductive in the novel. (Even after finishing the book, my students often tell me they'd like to be Givers.) Like so many heroes of fantasy and utopian narrative, Jonas is the chosen one, destined to assume the most urgent role in his community, to his own surprise and growing dismay. With great power, after all, comes great responsibility: we know the cliché. But while Lowry never dislodges Jonas as the redeemer hero of her story, she does interrogate the classic male homosocial fantasy of private instruction and social stratification that ensures a dead public sphere. Against that classic fantasy she urges the redistribution of knowledge and memory, the sharing of pain and/as wisdom, even if her vision for the redemption of culture still depends, curiously, on both man-boy love and a highly sentimentalized portrait of family life—namely, a Christmas story, a memory of family intimacy and warmth that the Giver transmits to Jonas. Against its own custodial investments, we might read *The Giver* as a cautionary tale about contemporary US culture, and about the need for a thoughtful literature of atrocity. *The Giver* offers an allegorical, abstract solution to the problem of narrating trauma and, by being less "historical" than other trauma texts, is less easily made into a keepsake.

Lowry concludes her afterword to *Number the Stars* by quoting Kim Malthe-Bruun, a young man killed for his participation in the Resistance. "I want you all to remember," he writes in a letter to his mother, "that you must not dream yourselves back to the times before the war, but the dream for you all, young and old, must be to create an ideal of human decency . . ." (Lowry 137). Resistance to nostalgia and emphasis on human decency distinguishes Lowry's ethic of transmission from those marking trauma theory and the more banal, politically empty rhetoric of sharing and caring typical of the 9/11 books. Lowry is not the hero of my story, but her work offers an engaging model of children's literature as trauma testimony—one that is necessarily imperfect but that reckons with the difficulty of memory and narration—against that "subjective economy of the realization of the Self's inner potentials" (Žižek 77).

Notes

My thanks to Katharine Capshaw Smith and Richard Flynn for their feedback and support. I dedicate this essay to the memory of Patricia Pace and Mitzi Myers.

<sup>1</sup>Baer adapts Lawrence Langer's phrase "the literature of atrocity," as formulated in *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*.

<sup>2</sup>In the *New England Primer*, "A" stands for Adam and original sin: "In Adam's fall/We sinned all." Early children's books on both sides of the Atlantic were largely exercises in shame and abjection, written to subdue children and curb their sinful nature. In a sense, children's literature has always been both traumatized and traumatizing, at once an affirmation of evil and its narrative antidote. As Baer likewise notes, contemporary young adult fiction especially seems preoccupied with social ills, at once protecting and exposing teen readers to pain, loss, and alienation. But if original sin still lurks in the collective unconscious of children's literature and popular culture (think of all the "bad seed" movies, from *Rosemary's Baby* to *The Good Son*), the idea of human depravity was given new and distinctive affirmation by Hitler's genocidal program. Rather than argue for the newness of evil or trauma, Baer introduces into her analysis a mathematical conceit; what the twentieth century bears witness to during and after the Holocaust, she holds, is a new "algorithm" of evil, a new configuration or formula.

<sup>3</sup>Adorno later revised this formulation, remarking in *Negative Dialectics* that "it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living . . ." (362–3).

<sup>4</sup>The Holocaust is also represented as proof of man's inherently sinful nature, in keeping with a Calvinistic worldview residual in but not identical to psychoanalysis: here the analogy between the Holocaust and psychoanalysis falters somewhat.

<sup>5</sup>Haase looks at imaginative literature as well as autobiographies of war survivors; among the texts he treats is the Sendak-illustrated edition of *Dear Mili* by the Brothers Grimm.

<sup>6</sup>Although inspired by many disciplines and practices, narrative medicine is largely the brainchild of Dr. Rita Charon, whose Narrative Medicine program at Columbia University emphasizes the importance of "narrative competence" for physicians-in-training. After practicing medicine as an internist for a number of years, Dr. Charon took a doctoral degree in English and has since devoted herself to bringing the two disciplines closer together. Students of narrative medicine take clinical cues from literature as well as from their patients' stories, learning how to interpret the languages of the body and the mind. Narrative therapy, by contrast, is more closely affiliated with humanist psychology and with poststructuralist theory; founding figures Michael White and David Epston emphasize the "disciplinary" work of narrative even as they stress the freedom of individuals to create their own meanings and tell multiple stories. Without further study, it's hard to say if either of these movements offers much by way of content or method; most of the descriptions I found seem pretty generic.

<sup>7</sup>Cvetkovich points out that most contemporary discussions of trauma in the academy are psychoanalytic rather than sociocultural or political in emphasis. Her own allegiances—feminism, critical race theory, Marxism, and queer theory—help position trauma instead as "a social and cultural discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events" (18). She names as traumatic not only the usual historical suspects but also the everyday events of sexual, racial, class-based, and homophobic violence. These events are often not perceived as traumatic because they don't always demand dead or even damaged bodies, and/or because those bodies don't add up to "mass" trauma.

<sup>8</sup>In an essay on the "storying of war," the late Mitzi Myers notes that war-themed writing for the young "coincides with accelerating late-twentieth century violence and

reflects adult preoccupations with human evil: all forms of moral, psychological, and material destruction; past and present genocides, from the Holocaust to more recent ‘ethnic cleansings’; the ever-present possibility of nuclear disaster” (328). “Adult social history,” she continues, “cultural studies, and postmodern/postcolonial literary theory—all much concerned with redefining what counts as ‘war’ and with exploring how conflicts escalate and how war is represented in history, memory, and words—filter into the expanding and impressive volume of war stories for the young” (328). The storying of war, she suggests, is entangled not just with social history and with literature but also with theory.

<sup>9</sup>Caruth’s scholarship “has circulated within a milieu that includes work by Geoffrey Hartman, Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Lawrence Langer, and others that is centered on the Holocaust” (Cvetkovich 27). Among this group LaCapra has been the most critical of the privileging of psychoanalytic method in Holocaust criticism, and as Cvetkovich notes, has also tried to historicize the place of the Holocaust in trauma theory. Even so, LaCapra turns to a psychoanalytic conceit in his analysis, remarking that the Holocaust “stands as the repressed event that guides poststructuralist theory, particularly in its European contexts—a historical locatedness that is especially likely to be lost in the translation to a U.S. context” (27). Cvetkovich eschews the conceit of the return of the repressed, noting only that the Holocaust “offers validation of theory’s applicability to concrete and pressing historical circumstances, and it serves as a compelling example that unrepresentability and aporia can be integral to lived experience rather than the deconstruction of experience” (27). She gives trauma theory a hopeful countenance while stressing the importance of developing alternative trauma projects such as her own work on trauma and lesbian public cultures.

<sup>10</sup>Blanchot takes issue with Winnicott’s “impressive” but faulty formulation of childhood as an individual existential experience, calling it

a fictive application designed to individualize that which cannot be individualized or to furnish a representation for the unrepresentable: to allow the belief that one can, with the help of the transference, fix in the present of a memory (that is, in a present experience) the passivity of the immemorial unknown. The introduction of such a detour is perhaps therapeutically useful, to the extent that, through a kind of platonism, it permits him who lives haunted by the imminent collapse to say: this will not happen, it has already happened; I know, I remember. It allows him to restore, in other words, a knowledge which is a relation to truth, and a common, linear temporality. (66)

<sup>11</sup>Fynsk also justifies his project as the legacy of Hegel as well as that of Lacan: “if there is anything legitimate in the link between death and language that Hegel established for us, then I believe we have the grounds to pursue this problematic of the *infans* through the vast literature devoted to the death of children, and that such a reading would be ‘responsible’ in the deepest senses of the term” (88).

<sup>12</sup>Felman’s most recent contribution to trauma theory is *The Juridical Unconscious*, which examines how twentieth-century law and jurisprudence respond to as well as perpetuate trauma in the public sphere.

<sup>13</sup>In *Cultural Capital*, John Guillory argues that theory more broadly is a form of literary language, a kind of intellectual capital. He proposes, vis-à-vis de Man and Lacan, that theory effects a sort of “transference of transference,” displacing the student’s love for the teacher—the first transference necessary to successful pedagogy—onto the love of the teacher’s discourse, thus dispensing with (denying) the problems of both transference and countertransference. We don’t love the teacher or student; rather, we love literature and/or theory. See especially 176–98.

<sup>14</sup>The epigraph also suggests that Zipes has displaced Bettelheim as the fairy tale critic of choice in this particular series.

<sup>15</sup>Santayana's actual line: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

<sup>16</sup>"A trauma history of the United States," writes Cvetkovich, "would address the multigenerational legacies of the colonization and genocide of indigenous peoples as well as of the African diaspora and slave trade—a project, it should be noted, that is necessarily transnational in scope" (119).

<sup>17</sup>Another recent and higher-profile return to this tragedy is the documentary film *Ararat* (2002), directed by the Armenian Canadian director Atom Egoyan. In January 2004, Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism Erkan Mumcu gave official and controversial permission to Turks wanting to see the film, emphasizing that Turkey is now a democracy. By and large, Turks and Armenians have told different stories about the events beginning in 1915; Armenians avow that they were chased out of their ancestral homeland and executed brutally, whereas the official Turkish line is that the Armenians, encouraged by Russia, were rebelling against the Ottoman Empire and were thus suppressed. Egoyan himself likened the film to *Schindler's List*, Steven Spielberg's Holocaust film, adding more fuel to the political fire. Belonging to the more skeptical genre of political documentary, the film raises consciousness not only about this traumatic episode but also about the difficulties of coming to terms with history and/as trauma.

<sup>18</sup>In her chapter "America, 'Fat,' the Fetus," Berlant notes that "the pregnant woman becomes the child to the fetus, becoming more minor and less politically represented than the fetus, which is in turn made more *national*, more central to securing the privileges of law, paternity, and other less institutional family strategies of contemporary American culture" (85; italics in original).

<sup>19</sup>Another such collection of children's testimony is *Messages to Ground Zero: Children Respond to September 11, 2001* (2002), featuring writings by children collected by Shelley Harwayne in cooperation with the New York City Board of Education.

<sup>20</sup>Here's the magazine's review of *Weapons of War*, as cited on the ABDO website: "Clear and well focused, this highly accessible text delivers the basic facts and the advantages of various craft. Excellent color photos show a dozen different planes, as well as five helicopters, and four support planes in flight, and the others [sic] major weapons in use" ([www.abdopub.com](http://www.abdopub.com)).

<sup>21</sup>ABDO & Daughters is not the only children's publisher to join the bandwagon; there's also Scholastic, often championed as socially progressive. In his very engaging paper "Marketing 9/11: Children as Victims, Agents, and Consuming Subjects," Richard Flynn turns his attention to "the good corporate citizen" Scholastic, which "mobilizes" its resources on behalf of the wounded nation and the vulnerable child (2–3). As Flynn points out, Scholastic.com constructs the child as not only vulnerable but already traumatized, in need of expert help, shopping incentives, and patriotic pedagogy. Speaking more broadly about corporate children's culture, Flynn holds that such materials "reinforce an image of children as infantile, vulnerable, voracious consumers" (10). Flynn presented this paper at the Children's Literature Association Annual Conference in 2002.

<sup>22</sup>In a recent Foucauldian reading of the novel, Don Latham argues that the novel seems both a narrative exercise in discipline and punishment and a refusal of such, and that it "both resists and fulfills the role of the typical adolescent novel . . . namely to integrate adolescents into the power structure of society" (149).

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