

Re-examining the Holocaust through Literature

Edited by

Aukje Kluge and Benn E. Williams

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Re-examining the Holocaust through Literature, Edited by Aukje Kluge and Benn E. Williams

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
<i>Sara R. Horowitz</i>	

Acknowledgements	ix
------------------------	----

Introduction	xi
<i>Aukje Kluge and Benn E. Williams</i>	

Part I: Mixing Genres, Histories, and Representation

<i>Car cela devient une histoire: Issues of Representation in the Imaginative and Collective Memoirs of Charlotte Delbo</i> <i>Elizabeth Scheiber</i>	3
--	---

<i>Peter Weiss's Die Ermittlung: Dramatic and Legal Representation and the Auschwitz Trial</i> <i>Scott Windham</i>	29
--	----

<i>The Limits of Holocaust Representation in the Arab World</i> <i>Esther Webman</i>	61
---	----

Part II: Fiction, History, and Moral Choices

<i>Varying Shades of Gray: Pierre Assouline at the Frontier of Fact and Fiction</i> <i>Benn E. Williams</i>	111
--	-----

<i>Suffering, Heroism, and the Healing Arrival of the Saviour: The Holocaust in Evangelical Literature</i> <i>Yaakov Ariel</i>	131
---	-----

<i>A Thousand Darkneses: Elie Wiesel's Night</i> <i>Ruth Franklin</i>	155
--	-----

Part III: Comic Books, Film, and Poetry: The Holocaust and the *Other* Genres

The Holocaust through Comic Books <i>Tal Bruttman</i>	173
“Life and Counterlife”: The Topos of Wish-Fulfillment in Holocaust Literature <i>Jehanne Dubrow</i>	201
Samuel Fuller at Falkenau: From Soldier to Film Director <i>Christian Delage</i>	217

Part IV: Reflections on Current and Future Research

Epilogue “Simply and Complexly Something Else” <i>Benn E. Williams</i>	231
An International Bibliography of Holocaust Literature <i>Benn E. Williams</i>	245
List of Contributors	387
Index	390

CHAPTER FIVE

SUFFERING, HEROISM, AND THE HEALING ARRIVAL OF THE SAVIOR: THE HOLOCAUST IN EVANGELICAL LITERATURE

YAAKOV ARIEL

Since the 1970s, evangelical Christians have written extensively on the suffering of Jews and others during the Second World War. Books relating to the Holocaust have become popular in evangelical circles, often in conjunction with other themes such as the position of the Jews in God's plans for humanity. A series of biographies, memoirs, and novels have come to inform evangelical readers on the realities of the Nazi regime in Europe from 1933 to 1945, as well as to educate Christians as to the meaning and purpose of the events that took place during those years and how they fit into the larger scheme of divine plans for human salvation. Such biographies and novels have further come to set standards for the proper Christian behavior during trying times. They have also come to contend with major moral and theological questions arising from the murder of millions of innocent people. Such writings reassure evangelicals that true Christian believers had nothing to do with the persecution and annihilation of the Jews and had in fact gone out of their way to protect Jews. Evangelical writers have further pointed to the horrors of the Holocaust as a proof that all human beings are in need of the ameliorating Gospel and should accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and follow in his footsteps. They would thus assure their status as righteous persons in this era as well as their spiritual and physical salvation for eternity.

Evangelical Literature discovers the Holocaust

The evangelical interest in learning about what happened to the Jews during World War II and the wish to make sense of it morally and spiritually corresponded in some ways to the relation of American society at large towards the Holocaust. During the late 1940s and through the 1960s, most Americans, including American Jews, were reluctant to confront the horrors of the Nazi harassment and annihilation of the Jews.¹ Such interest, however, grew considerably during the 1970s and '80s, becoming a topic that Americans have taken much notice of by the 1990s. By that time, the Holocaust came to occupy an important place in Christian evangelical literature as well. During the 1970s-1980s, evangelical writing on the subject had been mostly popular biographies and autobiographies, depicting real life stories of both Jews and non-Jews who had suffered under the Nazi regime. In the 1990s-2000s a new genre has taken over among evangelicals: the evangelical representation of the Holocaust and its meaning has moved to the pages of novels that reconstruct the Holocaust and interpret it through fictional characters and semi-imaginary events.

A major element in the evangelical representation of the Holocaust has been the implicit claim that the evils and horrors of the Nazi regime were committed by non-Christians. True Christians, those who had undergone genuine conversions and established personal relationships with Jesus, would not, by definition, take part in such regimes and atrocities. In fact, Nazi transgressions had been carried out by anti-Christians, even if nominally some of them were members of churches. This outlook has not been based on an historical examination of the involvement or noninvolvement of Protestant groups with the Nazi regime in occupied Europe.² The historical reality that many Protestant leaders and churches in Germany supported the regime has often been ignored by evangelical writers.³ They have concentrated instead on the heroism of individual

¹ Cf. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999); David Cesarani, ed., *After Eichmann: Collective Memory and the Holocaust Since 1961* (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Penguin, 1995).

² Cf. Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, eds., *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

³ Cf. *The Holocaust and the Christian World*, edited by Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith, Irena Steinfeldt (New York: Continuum, 2000), Friedrich Zipfel,

members of Pietist or evangelical churches, and have presented the actions of such outstanding persons as normative. Such representations have come to convey the message that true Christians behaved in a manner that demonstrated Christian ideals. Refusing to take part in the Nazi ideology and actions, they went out of their way to protect Jews and non-Jews persecuted by the regime and hide them, risking their own lives along the way. In evangelical narratives, good Christians and Jews have stood on one side of the dividing line and the Nazis on the other.

Exemplary Christians and the Rescue of Jews: *The Hiding Place*

The most popular evangelical book on the Holocaust has been *The Hiding Place*. Published in the early 1970s, it was widely read in evangelical circles until the 1990s, overshadowed only at the turn of the 21st century, by the popularity of a new genre of evangelical novels. The narrator-protagonist of *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom, had initially published her memoirs nearly twenty years prior.⁴ The evangelist Billy Graham recognized ten Boom book's potential as an instructive evangelical tract and invited the Dutch heroine to the United States to lecture on her experiences. Furthermore, Graham sponsored a new version of her book. John and Elizabeth Sherrill, two professional writers for Billy Graham's network, wrote a book with her and it immediately became an evangelical bestseller. In addition to millions of copies sold in America, *The Hiding Place* was translated into a number of languages, reprinted in numerous editions, and was produced as a film.⁵

The Hiding Place tells the story of the ten Booms, a devout Dutch Reform family, who operated a watch shop in Haarlem, a city near Amsterdam. Two unmarried sisters, Corrie and Betsie, lived with their aging father above the shop. Following the Nazi occupation of Holland, when the persecution of Jews began, the ten Booms gave shelter to Jews and non-Jews who were hiding from the Nazis. The family became involved in a clandestine operation to hide Jews, as well as Dutch youths

Kirchenkampf in Deutschland 1933-1945 (Berlin: DeGruyer, 1965), and Richard Steigman-Gall, *The Holy Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴ Corrie ten Boom, *A Prisoner and Yet* (London: Christian Literature Crusade, 1954).

⁵ Idem with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Washington Depot, CT: Chosen Books, 1971). The 1975 movie of the same name was directed by James F. Collier and starred Julie Harris and Jeannette Clift as the sisters Betsie and Corrie ten Boom.

who were in danger of being taken to forced labor in Germany. Corrie ten Boom offers a vivid account of many aspects of the rescue activity. The family had to be wary of collaborators and informers, and had to keep their rescue operation secret from those who did not take part in it. Daily life with the hidden Jews is described with credibility. For example, it was difficult for the hidden persons to remain in their cramped quarters. One Jewish woman who could take it no longer virtually gave herself up by walking out into the streets; she was recognized and arrested.

While ten Boom gives an accurate picture of Holland under Nazi occupation, indicating that only a minority was willing to save Jewish lives, her book implies that true Christian believers, brought up on biblical literalism, were in the forefront of the rescue mission. Indeed, according to one scholar, the percentage of fundamentalist Dutch Protestants who rescued Jews during World War II was more than three times their percentage in the total Dutch population, making up about 25% of those who saved Jews.⁶ Ten Boom's edited memoirs also promote the belief that the Lord guided and protected the righteous rescuers. Corrie's sister-in-law, for example, insisted on speaking the truth in all circumstances. At one time, the police, who had been informed of the presence of Jews, searched the house and inquired whether a blond, blue-eyed, Aryan-looking girl was Jewish. "Yes," came the answer of the sister-in-law who would not lie.⁷ The poor girl was arrested, but later was released, so the story goes, by the Dutch underground. Another miracle that, according to ten Boom, manifested God's guiding hand had to do with the possession of copies of the Bible. While in Ravensbrueck concentration camp, Corrie obtained a copy of the Book of Books and managed, in defiance of all regulations and inspection, to keep it and read it.⁸

In actuality, the family paid dearly for disobeying the authorities. "The hiding place," was exposed. Corrie and her sister, father, brother, and nephew were arrested. Only Corrie survived. The story is that of Christian martyrdom. The ten Booms kept their faith and values at all times, and were a source of inspiration and encouragement to the prisoners around them. Corrie portrays her father and sister as saintly figures, bringing tranquility, peace, and hope to the prison cells or concentration camp

⁶ Joseph Michman, "Some Reflections on the Dutch Churches and the Jews," in *Judaism and Christianity Under the Impact of National Socialism*, edited by Otto Dov Kulka and Paul Mendes-Flohr (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1987), 349-352.

⁷ Corrie ten Boom with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Minneapolis: A Chosen Book, 1971), 123-124.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 193-194.

barracks where they were interned. She, herself, emerges from the pages of her reminiscences as a remarkable person, highly conscientious, humorous, and humane. Readers are invited to look upon her as an exemplary Christian. Jesus, she informs the readers, was her source of strength and guidance during her time of trial. It is he, she asserts, who provides human beings with the ability to overcome the challenges and miseries of life. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross has offered humanity eternal life, and true believers who accept him as their Lord and Savior are assured of their place in the world to come. This knowledge offered her solace and comfort when confronted with the deaths of those who were so dear to her.⁹

A major message of the book is the Christian command of forgiveness and love for one's enemies. According to the narrative, the ten Booms felt sorry for the Germans, for letting themselves engage in evil and destruction. Corrie's father gives voice to a premillennialist, Pietist, and evangelical understanding of Jews and their role in history, saying that the Germans were doomed because "they have touched the apple of God's eyes."¹⁰ Likewise, holding to a more literal reading of the scriptures, ten Boom asserted that the Jews were still God's chosen people, destined to regain their role as God's first nation. The German attempt to destroy the Jews was futile, and ultimately harmed the perpetrators. After the war and the German defeat, Corrie ten Boom promoted a message of forgiveness and reconciliation. The book's evangelization efforts target Germans, too, as potential readers and converts. It carries the message "love thy enemy," as well as the idea that the truly converted are utterly forgiven. Righteous Christians are expected to forgive their enemies and the Christian victims and persecutors of yesteryear are situated currently on the same boat, that of the forgiven and redeemed.

Ten Boom became a celebrity and her story often became a venue for evangelical Christians to construct a narrative of the realities of Nazi-occupied Europe and of Christian behavior during that time. Her memoirs, however, were not the only ones that gave expression to the evangelical understanding of the Holocaust.

⁹ Ibid., 163, 189, 223.

¹⁰ Ibid., 86.

Suffering and Redemption: When Nazi Germans and Jewish Victims Become Born-Again Christians

A series of memoirs during the 1970s and 1980s presented born-again Christians who had witnessed the Nazi regime from different angles. Although providing important historical information, the autobiographies have come first and foremost to offer spiritual messages. They attempt to give evidence to the courage and righteousness of the truly converted, as well as to their miraculous deliverance. Taken as a whole, such books promote the idea that all people who had undergone the Nazi regime, Jews and Gentiles alike, have been in need of the ameliorating Gospel, if they had not held to it earlier, and that once they repented and converted they have all been forgiven and are justified before the Lord. Evangelical narratives were among the very first to look upon the Germans as victims of the war the Nazi state had initiated, even if many of them supported that regime. Such narratives portray ex-Nazis as people who for a while had been led astray by the powers of the devil, but redeemed themselves when they repented and accepted Jesus as their Savior. Amazingly, secular memoirs and novels, with similar emphases on German suffering in the last stages of the war, appeared in English only in the early 2000s.¹¹

Such repentant ex-Nazi autobiographical evangelical tracts include those of Maria Anne Hirschmann, *Hansi's New Life* and *Hansi, The Girl Who Loved the Swastika*.¹² The books narrate the political and spiritual journey of a Nazi woman who became a born-again Christian in America.¹³ Hirschmann recounts the suffering of the Germans at the end of the war: the shock of the defeat, the fear of being raped by Soviet soldiers, and the escape to West Germany from the Sudetenland, which became part of Czechoslovakia. Her reminiscences follow her immigration to America with her husband, who had served as a submarine officer in the German navy, their adaptation to their new homeland, and the spiritual journey that led her towards a conversion experience. "Jesus and I became friends one warm summer night under the stars ... I was like Paul, a chief sinner, I had rejected Christ deliberately when I became a Nazi," she

¹¹ For example, Irmgard A. Hunt, *On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005) and Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin* (New York: Picador, 2006).

¹² Maria A. Hirschmann, *Hansi: The Girl Who Loved the Swastika* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970).

¹³ Maria A. Hirschmann, *Hansi's New Life* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980).

wrote. "I despised His name and His life story as unacceptable to German superiority ..."¹⁴

She sought and obtained, the reader learns, the forgiveness of God and his true believers. Hirschmann complains about the Jews, who in her opinion had failed to show forgiveness. Jewish Journalists "tortured" her by asking her if she knew about the concentration camps. While Germans bear guilt, she declares, Jews carry hate and prejudices.¹⁵ She asserts that she forgave her own oppressors.¹⁶ Hirschmann's memoirs end with an encounter with Corrie ten Boom. At first, she writes, she was afraid to meet this righteous Dutch savior of Jews, who, she knew, had spent time in a concentration camp. But this perfect Christian accepted her warmly. Ten Boom's attitude towards Hirschmann exemplifies the forgiveness every Christian is supposed to show towards her former enemies. Ten Boom even wrote a preface to Hirschmann's book, in which she expressed that opinion. Thus, Hansi's Nazi past is forgiven by both Jesus and his followers.

Hirschmann's perspective has been unusual. More often it was Christian Jews who described, in carefully edited evangelical autobiographies, their spiritual journeys in the midst of persecution and suffering. A widely circulated book, Johanna Ruth Dobschiner's *Selected to Live*,¹⁷ offers a special meaning to the conversion of a victim of the Nazis. Like other evangelical memoirs of Holocaust survivors, it has remained in print from its first publication in the 1970s and until the 1990s. It tells the sad story of an Orthodox German-Jewish family, who fled as refugees from Germany to Holland. In 1940, the Nazi occupation caught up with them again. The first to be taken to a concentration camp were Ruth's two brothers. Some time later her parents too were deported to a camp. Ruth hid when her parents were arrested and lived in homes to which the Jewish council assigned her, working as a nurse in hospitals and children's homes. The deportations continued, and the inhabitants of hospitals and children's homes were also rounded up and sent to the death camps. Ruth was "chosen" by a clandestine Dutch network that rescued Jews and placed them in Christian homes. Her first hiding place was in the home of a Dutch Reform minister who was later executed by the Nazis.

It was in the hiding place that Dobschiner discovered the Old and New Testaments, read them in their evangelical interpretation, and converted to Christianity. Dobschiner describes her rescuer "Domie" in terms similar to

¹⁴ Hirschmann, *Hansi's New Life*, 106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁷ Johannah R. Dobschiner, *Selected to Live* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1976).

those generally reserved for Jesus. For her, he symbolized purity, love, protection for the meek, and self-sacrifice. “He died to secure my life in this world, Christ died to secure it in the next,” she wrote.¹⁸ Like Domie, Jesus served as a father figure for her. When Dobschiner reached the passages in the New Testament that described his death, she mourned for him “according to the custom of my people ... seven days.”¹⁹ In addition to being the religion of her kind saviors, Christianity embodied for the young woman hope for a new life, and an end to her loneliness and misery. The adoption of Jesus as a personal Savior worked to overcome the loneliness of the hiding place:

I found I could tolerate my isolation without frustration always longing for the next opportunity to learn more about Him for He had become my hero. [...]
With warm love He surrounded me in that bare attic. His Holy Spirit, able to be everywhere at the same time, covered me with security. I knew myself loved, even when no human being considered my need.²⁰

Her survival, predetermined by God, demanded a struggle, but also offered an opportunity for a spiritual journey that came to open her eyes to the truth of the Christian faith.

Dobschiner’s autobiography is that of a Holocaust survivor and a convert, intended, among other things, to promote the belief in what the evangelical community considers to be the one true faith. Its targeted audience includes Jewish readers, whom evangelicals have wished to convert. And so Dobschiner’s narrative includes statements that are intended specifically for Jews. She describes herself before her encounter with the Christian faith as holding suspicions towards Christianity. But her prejudices, she asserts, had resulted from ignorance as to the true nature of that faith. Christians, she found out, were kind people. Their behavior, she decided, must result from their faith. “It must be a special religion ... hence their kindness in taking us in ...”²¹ “I felt protected and loved among them,” she concludes.²² Her message is that if Jews only knew what Christianity was really about, they would embrace it wholeheartedly. When Jews encountered nominal Christians who mistreated them, they mistook Christianity for the religion of the enemy. “But this is our religion

¹⁸ Ibid., 224.

¹⁹ Ibid., 162.

²⁰ Ibid., 159, 197.

²¹ Ibid., 163.

²² Ibid., 213.

... the trouble is that our people don't know it, they have to be told ... they have to," she emphatically writes.²³ She asserts that the suffering and murder of the Jews under the Nazis was a result of the fact that the Jews had not placed themselves under the wings of their Savior.²⁴ However, in keeping with the evangelical outlook on the Jewish people, Dobschiner foresees a hope and future for the Jews in the messianic age. "God would one day send the Messiah. He would deliver Israel and call nations to see true light in God."²⁵

Another widely-acclaimed evangelical biography, *Pursued*, promoted a similar outlook.²⁶ Vera Schlamm's memories of her experiences in Nazi-occupied Europe have also served to give special meaning to the suffering of Jews who later found spiritual comfort in Christianity. The Schlamms were also German Jews who came to Holland as refugees and were sent during the Nazi occupation to a concentration camp. They, however, took active steps to secure their lives by obtaining passports of a neutral South American nation. Schlamm describes the harsh life in Bergen-Belsen, the German concentration camp to which she and her family were sent from Holland. As citizens holding passports of neutral countries, they were able to receive parcels from relatives abroad and were immune from being deliberately killed.

Surviving the war, the Schlamms immigrated to America, where Vera studied medicine and trained as a pediatrician. It was during her years in California that she gradually became persuaded of the truth of the Christian message. Her conversion offered a new perspective to her experiences during World War II, which became, in retrospect, meaningful steps in her spiritual odyssey. The book conveys the notion that Schlamm's conversion was predetermined. Jesus was waiting to embrace her and bring her under his wings, hence her survival of the horrors of the Holocaust. Although she was not yet a Christian when she underwent those travails, her survival is presented as another manifestation of the wonderful gifts God bestows on his followers. The truly converted were predestined to be saved. Jews for Jesus, the largest group evangelizing the Jews in the 1970s-2000s decided to publish Schlamm's memoirs and a member of this missionary group co-wrote the book.

Pursued is a typical convert's memoir: written with the help of professional evangelists and presenting the protagonist narrator's earlier

²³ Ibid., 191.

²⁴ Ibid., 177-178.

²⁵ Ibid., 156.

²⁶ Vera Schlamm and B. Friedman, *Pursued* (San Francisco: Hineni Ministries, 1972).

life experiences from the perspective that the narrator acquired later in life, when she has become a convinced believer. Literary critics speak about “formulation” in the construction of such memoirs.²⁷ For example, they tend to emphasize the spiritual and moral transformation that conversion brings with it. Autobiographies in general, scholars of the genre remind us, are ultimately about the present more than about the past. Autobiographies display what their writers “remember” and how they understand their past at the time they sit down to write their memoirs or provide the information to professional writers. In this case, Holocaust survivors who converted to Christianity tell their stories to evangelical writers and editors, who use them as effective literary material. They use such literature to educate Christians about the horrors of Nazism, and provide models for Christian behavior during time of duress, as well as use the stories of such exceptional life experience to direct people to accept the Gospel. Taken as a whole, these books reflect the values of evangelical Christianity during the 1970s-1990s more than of the protagonists during the 1930s and 1940s. However, while all the autobiographies of evangelical Holocaust survivors provide similar messages, they each speak in their own unique voice. While each of the protagonists explains their experiences in a “formulated” manner, each provides some unique nuances.

A somewhat different testimony than Dobschiner’s and Schlamm’s is Rose Warmer’s *The Journey*. Like other memoirs, *The Journey* evolved from an earlier, shorter work.²⁸ The evangelical community was yearning to read Holocaust survivor-converts’ life stories, and Myrna Grant, a professional evangelical writer, interviewed Warmer in her old-age home in Haifa and came out with a best-selling autobiography.²⁹ The author begins by setting the stage and describing Rose Warmer’s early life. Born into a middle class Jewish family in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Rose studied art, music, and dance and led the bohemian life of an artist in pre-World War II Vienna and Budapest. In keeping with other converts’ biographies, this book describes Warmer in her pre-conversion state as centered on earthly interests and pleasures; consequently, she felt spiritually and morally empty. Finally, Rose found Christ and became an evangelist. During the war years, Warmer could travel freely, with official permits she obtained as a Baptist missionary. Protected by Christian

²⁷ John G. Carvelti, *Adventure Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

²⁸ Rose Warmer, *12 Months in the Concentration Camp* (Columbus, OH: Bible Literature International, n.d. [c. 1960]).

²⁹ Myrna Grant, *The Journey* (London: Hodder and Stoughton / Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978).

friends, she could have hidden during the war, but she chose, instead, to join her suffering sisters.³⁰ She felt that she had a mission—to bring the message of salvation to women in the death camps. So, despite the fact that she could have avoided being deported, Warmer went to the concentration camp almost voluntarily. Warmer trusted Jesus and knew that he was protecting her. She realized that she would undergo physical suffering, but she also knew that she would be saved, granted that morally and spiritually she could stand the trial.

Being young and fit, the Nazis sent Rose from the concentration camp to a work squadron in Germany, where she suffered hunger and cold. But as far as she was concerned, she was fulfilling a mission, setting an example to the other women, and bringing them a message of hope and redemption. At times she encountered anger and resentment on the part of some women. But she also found willing listeners among them. Jesus, Warmer believed, was a father and mother, a brother, and sister. She therefore felt especially inclined to bring Jesus to those who had lost their entire families in the Holocaust.³¹ God's guiding hand was evident in Warmer's experiences as a prisoner. Her belief gave her courage to continue living even when she felt completely exhausted. Giving up the struggle for life would have meant suicide on her part, and then she would never have had the privilege of meeting the Lord.³² Having a Bible with her meant a great deal to Warmer, and she carefully hid the copy she had brought. When she was forced to give it up, she sought ways to replace it. Once, a Nazi SS officer gave her a copy of the Bible. Another time, she approached the commander of the labor camp for a copy and received one.³³ The fellowship of true Christian believers was also very important to her, and she rejoiced when she met other Christians with whom she could pray or read the Bible.

Surviving a "death march" in Germany, Rose returned to Hungary. After the birth of the State of Israel in 1948, Warmer emigrated there, settled in Haifa, and spent the rest of her life as a missionary to the Jews. The book sees a logical continuation between the Holocaust, the birth of the State of Israel, and evangelism of the Jews. Such a connection would become particularly strong in evangelical novels at the turn of the 21st century. In line with that ideology, Warmer saw her mission to enlighten Israelis as to who their Savior really was and what was the true Jewish role in history. She became a leading figure in the Messianic Jewish

³⁰ Ibid., 104-107.

³¹ Ibid., 118.

³² Ibid., 136.

³³ Ibid., 137.

community in Israel of the 1950s-1970s, which had been composed of Jews who had converted to Christianity in its evangelical form but retained their Jewish identity. She interprets the emergence of the new state and the ingathering of the Jews there as part of God's plans for humanity. She herself was living proof that God remained faithful to his people. "I was part of the promise! I had returned."³⁴ Rose Warmer's journey to hell and back is presented as part of a broader spiritual journey: that of finding her Savior, submitting to his love and protection, discovering the many ways in which he bestows his favors on his followers, and being a witness of this to others.

A biography of a somewhat different kind, but with similar messages, is Jan Markell's *Angels in the Camp*.³⁵ It is an important war memoir that tells the story of a *Mischling*, the daughter of a Jewish mother and an "Aryan" German father. Like other books of its kind, *Angels in the Camp* comes to educate the evangelical community about the realities of life under the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945, and the horrors that befell Jews and others during that period, as well as to give evidence about God's mercy and protection. Anita Dittman's testimony, which Markell wrote and edited, is instructive because it offers a window into the travails of *Mischlinge* and their emotional and spiritual perspectives. According to Dittman's reminiscences, during the Nazi period people such as herself and her mother gravitated towards Christianity in order to find solace and meaning in their precarious lives. Her father and mother being separated, Dittman grew up without her father and she attributed her attraction to Jesus to this emotional vacuum: "perhaps my inner longing for a loving father drove me to my heavenly father so early in life."³⁶ Growing up in the German city of Breslau with her mother and sister, Anita and her small family joined a Lutheran congregation, whose pastor took special interest in converting Jews. Unlike "full Jews," Dittman was allowed to continue her studies in regular schools well into the war years. In the summer of 1944, the Nazis sent her to Barthold, a labor camp for children of mixed marriages, where the young inmates dug ditches to allegedly help in the war effort. Dittman found solace in her faith and was certain that Jesus had protected her all along the way. She attributes her survival to his divine saving graces, as well as the good will of her pastor, who demonstrated an appropriate Christian behavior, which the book wishes to cherish and promote.

³⁴ Ibid., 213.

³⁵ Jan Markell, *Angels in the Camp: A Remarkable story of Peace in the Midst of the Holocaust* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979).

³⁶ Markell, *Angels in the Camp*, 9.

Like other evangelical books, *Angels in the Camp* comes to offer answers to the kind of questions that readers might come up with in relating to the evils that a Christian country inflicted on vulnerable members of its own society as well as on those of other communities. The protagonist-narrator differentiates between “true” Christians, who had remained loyal to Christian principles, and “nominal” Christians, who had identified with the regime and its goals. “But those people aren’t Christians; they just give real Christians a bad name,” Dittman asserts.³⁷ The book also confronts the question of how “a loving, all powerful God would allow such horrible things to happen” and offers an answer: “granted, millions perished, but God also allowed millions to survive.”³⁸ The book also presents the eventual German defeat as a result of its unethical brutal behavior. Like ten Boom’s father, Dittman’s admired pastor makes the claim in the book that “the Jews are the apple of God’s eye. Because Germany has harmed them, she will never be the same.”³⁹ Like all Holocaust memoirs produced by evangelical publishing houses, this one, too, has a clear agenda of spreading the Gospel and emphasizing the healing powers and constructive guidance of Jesus. The book’s subtitle “a Remarkable Story of Peace in the Midst of the Holocaust” reveals the message that the harsh times of the Nazi regime also enabled some people to discover the truth of the Gospel and that Christian believers can find peace, comfort, and reassurance even in the midst of horror.

A somewhat more critical narrative, but with similar conclusions, was provided by Rachmiel Frydland, who was also a missionary to the Jews. Like other Holocaust memoirs written by survivors who converted to Christianity, Rachmiel Frydland’s *When Being Jewish Was a Crime* evolved from a previous, shorter, and less polished work.⁴⁰ Frydland’s story begins with a narration of his life before the Holocaust.⁴¹ He grew up in a village in eastern Poland, but left as a teenager for Warsaw to study in a *yeshiva*, a rabbinical academy. It was in Warsaw that he encountered missionaries to the Jews and became convinced of the Messiahship of Jesus. During the war years, Frydland made special efforts and even risked his life several times in order to meet other evangelical Christians, with whom he could pray or study the Bible. When all the Jews in his area were

³⁷ Ibid., 44

³⁸ Ibid., 61

³⁹ Ibid., 64

⁴⁰ Rachmiel Frydland, *Joy Cometh in the Morning* (Chattanooga, TN: Messianic Fellowship, 1972).

⁴¹ Rachmiel Frydland, *When Being Jewish Was a Crime* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1978).

being either killed or sent to concentration camps, Frydland went into hiding. He tried to find refuge in the homes of born-again Christians. The attitudes he encountered varied. Some people were helpful, some hesitant, whereas others flatly refused to offer shelter. Frydland puts much of the blame for such unbrotherly behavior on Christians considering it their duty to obey the laws of the state instead of resisting them when they manifested cruelty and disregard for other human beings.⁴² In his view, those Christians who did shelter Jews had no reason to regret their benevolent actions, because God protected them.⁴³

According to Frydland's account, God's guiding and sheltering hand was evident in what happened to Jews holding the Christian faith during the Holocaust years. Frydland tells the story of Stasiak, a Jewish Christian who "was deeply aware of God's presence and ability to save to the uttermost, physically and spiritually."⁴⁴ Stasiak was at one point condemned to death. He wrote on the wall of his cell the first verse of his favorite hymn, in which he was praising and thanking the Lord. The German officer in charge came in and demanded a translation of the Polish text on the wall. To the amazement of everyone who was there, Stasiak was released. "True Christian believers who were murdered by the Nazis remained faithful to the very end ..." Frydland declares. "...They died without hate, in full reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ."⁴⁵ True Christian believers, Frydland asserts, are always safe. "First we have to believe in Him; then no matter what may happen to us, we will be safe in Him."⁴⁶

Frydland follows the view expressed in other such memoirs, that if the Jews had accepted Jesus as their Savior, their death would not have occurred.

If my people had known the things that pertain to their salvation, namely, to believe in the Lord Jesus and to proclaim Him to the people in Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe, this disaster would never have happened.⁴⁷

In his understanding, the pains and losses of the Holocaust had been overcome by the rebirth of the nation of Israel. "Yet there was fruit from the blood of the Jewish martyrs. There was the national and physical

⁴² Ibid., 147.

⁴³ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 142-143.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 155.

revival of Israel ...”⁴⁸ His interpretation is in line with the evangelical premillennialist understanding of the establishment of the State of Israel as the fulfillment of prophecy. He quotes biblical passages that speak of Israel’s return to its borders and concludes “perhaps God is now dealing with Israel ... first by severity and sufferings and now by His goodness.”⁴⁹

While acquainting the evangelical community with the history of the Nazi period and the suffering it brought about, evangelical memoirs and biographies of people who had undergone the horrors of that time have a distinct educational evangelistic mission. The biographies promote the acceptance of Jesus as a personal Savior as well as some other elements of evangelical Christianity such as the role of Israel in God’s plans for humanity. The behavior of evangelical Christians throughout the war years is presented as proof that the acceptance of Christianity guarantees correct moral behavior and promotes the impression that evangelical Christians faced the years of terror with courage and dignity and they survived the horrors morally and spiritually. The memoirs are also meant to promote the Christian postulate of forgiveness, and reconciliation. The victims must forgive their repentant persecutors and accept them as fellow Christians. The destructiveness of Nazism should not work against the higher values of Christian love, and unity. Evangelical writers would continue to promote such ideas and values utilizing different literary means of capturing the attention of readers. Novels entailing adventure and romance would come to teach evangelicals about the Nazi regime and its relationship to Jews.

Persecution and Romance: Representation of the Holocaust in Evangelical Novels

Evangelical novels on the Nazi persecution of the Jews make for exciting reading. One becomes privy to semi-fictional, suspenseful historical scenes. Hitler conspires at his headquarters with his cronies, exploring schemes to harass the Jews and deceive the world. Young, loving Jews are planning their emigration, hoping to reunite in new locales. Nazi secret services plot the killing of a German diplomat in France, and blaming Jews for the murder, moving forward to plan the November 1938 attack on the Jews of Germany. Intrigued and captivated, the readers watch the development with suspense as if they are in the movies. They follow the plots, gratified that justice prevails at the end and at least some of the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 116, 136.

protagonists survive and re-unite. The hearts and minds are with the attractive and on the whole innocent, Jews and non-Jews who have stood on their side.⁵⁰

By the 1990s the evangelical representation of the Holocaust shifted considerably. Instead of well-edited autobiographies of Holocaust survivors who converted to Christianity, the evangelical community moved to learn about the events of the Nazi era through a different medium: historical novels. Previously, evangelical writers adopted real life stories of born-again Christians, edited them according to their understanding of the meaning of the suffering of Jews and others under the Nazis and its relation to the Christian drama of salvation. By the 1990s many of the older heroes of the evangelical Holocaust memoirs, including Corrie ten-Boom, Rachmiel Frydland, and Rose Warmer, were dead. They ceased being available for interviews or lecture tours. In addition, the evangelical literary tastes and means of disseminating and transmitting theological perceptions and cultural values have changed considerably. In the 1990s-2000s, the Holocaust and the moral and theological issues it has raised have found a new venue. Evangelical Christian writers moved more and more toward writing novels, not only for teenagers, but for adults. They have created fictional characters, events, dialogues, and emotions, which come to teach readers about historical events, social concerns, normative Christian behavior, the transforming and healing powers of the Savior, and the challenges and travails that the future will bring with it. During the 1990s, novels, including historical ones, became a preferred genre within the evangelical milieu.⁵¹ Novels have come to replace theological tracts and social-political manifestoes that had previously been popular among evangelicals. In the 1970s, for example, the theological-political tract, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, became the evangelical bestseller par excellence, selling tens of millions of copies, all around the globe. Promoting a conservative evangelical critique of culture and society, coupled with premillennialist interpretation of history and current world events, books such as *The Late Great Planet Earth*, represented the predominant genre among evangelical Christians.⁵²

Evangelical literary tastes have changed, and popular novels have replaced the previous genre as the readings of choice of evangelical

⁵⁰ See for example: Bodie and Brock Thoene, *The Zion Covenant* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2005). The series was originally published by Bethany House publishers, Grand Rapids, MI.

⁵¹ Cf. Lynn Neal, *Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁵² Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

Christians. Authors have come to promote evangelical values while placing them within colorful and attractive literary garbs. These novel series often have two creators, one responsible for researching the historical background or setting the theological perceptions and, an actual “writer”, who uses his or her literary and artistic skills to construct a compelling plot. The novels utilize fashionable means of captivating the readers’ attention, offering engaging plots, romance, and heroism, not to mention colorful sceneries and moments of suspense. Those well-written books have reached not only convinced evangelicals but non-evangelical readers as well. Many of the readers have been acquainted through the attractive plots, with the evangelical doctrines of faith, including the anticipation of the imminent arrival of the messianic times and a premillennialist understanding of the course of world history. One of the outstanding best-selling novel series in America, during the 1990s-2000s, has been *Left Behind*. This series, which deals with the events of the End Times, come to tell readers what to expect when the Rapture takes place and the truly converted are snatched from Earth. Jews and Israel loom large in the *Left Behind* novels, as they do in evangelical premillennialist theology in general, but this future-oriented series does not concentrate on the Holocaust.⁵³ Some prominent evangelical novelists did however relate to the Nazis and Jewish suffering, and confronted theological and moral questions that other novel series related to only marginally.

Evangelical Christian writers have not been the first to write historical novels on the Holocaust.⁵⁴ Such books, which often included descriptions of the post war Jewish struggles in Palestine, were, for example, a popular genre in Hebrew and Jewish-American writings. Perhaps the most noted Jewish historical novel on the Holocaust and the Jewish struggle for Palestine of the 1950s-1960s had been Leon Uris’ *Exodus*.⁵⁵ The bestseller enjoyed not only a large readership but also an appreciative audience when it was produced as a movie, with the young, handsome Paul Newman playing the fictional Israeli hero Ari Ben Canaan. Leading a ship of Holocaust survivors from Europe to Palestine, in defiance of British policy, Ben Canaan goes on to fight for the independence of a Jewish state. *Exodus* prefigured some of the Evangelical dramas of the turn of the 21st century, which have also tended to connect the Holocaust and the

⁵³ Yaakov Ariel “Jews and Israel in the *Left Behind* series.” In *Rapture, Revelation, and The End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*, edited by Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 131-166.

⁵⁴ Efrain Sicher, *The Holocaust Novel* (New York: Routledge, 2005)

⁵⁵ Leon Uris, *Exodus* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958).

Jewish struggle for Palestine. Evangelical novelists, too, moved to create semi-fictional sceneries placed within the historical settings of Europe and Palestine of the 1930s and 1940s. These novels have weaved together moments of Jewish, European, and Middle-Eastern history with evangelical premillennialist moral codes and biblical exegeses, taped with romance and suspense. *Exodus* carried a secular Jewish pro-Zionist point of view, devoid of Christian sensitivities and the need to explain the events of the 1930s-1940s from a Christian perspective. Uris wrote primarily for a Jewish audience, who, as a rule, during the 1950s-1960s, shared his outlook.⁵⁶ Yet, amazingly evangelical novels relating to the Holocaust and the struggle over Palestine are reminiscent of *Exodus*. Ironically, today Evangelical Christian writers produce books and dramas that resemble popular Jewish books of an earlier period, promoting views on the situation in the Middle East from a pro-Zionist perspective.

While not as famous as Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, the authors of *Left Behind*, Bodie and Brock Thoene, have been among the most diligent and popular evangelical writers of historical novels at the turn of the 21st century. Their elaborate projects include a series of historical dramas on the Holocaust and another on the Jewish struggle for a Jewish state in Palestine. These two themes are interwoven throughout these series of novels. The Thoenes, husband and wife, have worked as a team, with Bodie being the writer and Brock, a professional historian by training, researching and providing the historical setting for the books. The Thoenes have worked well together, with the novels' mostly fictitious plots meshing with the historical realities of the times and places in which they are supposed to take place. The Thoenes have constructed fictional personalities placing them alongside real historical figures and have combined imaginary situations with historical ones, adding dramatic elements to make the stories more compelling.

Authors of the most widely read evangelical series of the Nazi treatment of the Jews, *The Zion Covenant*, the Thoenes are highly committed evangelicals and premillennialists. Their website openly promotes an evangelical theological outlook and cultural agenda. The Thoenes have sponsored a missionary agency, "Shiloh Light Foundation" intended for spreading of the Gospel among prisoners and other disadvantaged persons.⁵⁷ Their books include study guides, which come to promote evangelical morality and interpretation of scriptures. The guides include a list of biblical passages for those who "wish to investigate more about

⁵⁶ Cf. Deborah Dash-Moore, *To the Golden Cities* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 243, 248-60.

⁵⁷ <http://www.thoenebooks.com/foundation.asp>

Jesus.” *The Zion Covenant* series views the developments in the life of the Jewish people, and other nations as well, from a premillennialist evangelical point of view, using the occasion to promote the premillennialist faith in the imminent coming of Jesus. The books anticipate the Second Coming of Jesus to Earth, to heal all, and to bring peace and prosperity to humanity.⁵⁸

The Zion Covenant takes readers through the history of the Nazi removal of Jews from normal life, first in Germany and then in the wake of the Nazi takeover of some of Germany’s European neighbors, like Austria and Czechoslovakia, and the dire situation of Jews and others under a deceitful and murderous regime. The novel series is not a college textbook on the history of the Holocaust and is often selective in its choice of events, and developments. Like Leon Uris, the Thoenes wished to tell “the whole story,” but the novel series does not include “everything.” Unlike *Exodus* and many other Jewish novels on the Holocaust, the gruesome details of the mass annihilation of the Jews are pointedly missing from *The Zion Covenant* novels. The series starts with the period after the Nazi rise to power and the implementation of some discriminating measures against the Jews, and ends before the actual genocidal policies of the Nazis are set into motion. The Thoenes have taken a very different approach than that of many writers, Christians and Jews who wrote about the Jewish fate under the Nazi regime. Unconventionally but purposefully, *The Zion Covenant* series relates to the persecution and harassment of Jews, but stops short of describing their annihilation. This has not been for lack of space in a series composed of nine books. The authors’ choice corresponds to the nature of the series and their construction of the Jewish protagonists and the scenes in which they are involved. Amazingly and pointedly *The Zion Covenant* volumes do not depict the Jews as helpless and passive victims, but rather as active lively persons full of ingenuity, courage, and plans for the future. The Thoenes show admiration for Jews facing the challenge of the murderous Nazi regime as people rather than pity. The series relates to a people with a special mission in history, “the Chosen People,” and while they convey compassion towards their suffering under persecution, they are still alive and energized.

In the midst of the Jewish saga of Nazi persecution there is “an interlude”⁵⁹ and the plot moves, at least partially, from various European cities to Palestine, during the time of the Arab revolt. In addition to major

⁵⁸ For example, Bodie and Brock Thoene, *The Zion Covenant Book 4: Jerusalem Interlude* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2005), 422.

⁵⁹ Bodie and Brock Thoene, *The Zion Covenant Book 4: Jerusalem Interlude*.

protagonists of the larger series, with whose travails and struggles in Europe the readers are already familiar, the novel *Jerusalem Interlude* presents an additional gallery of characters. This volume introduces the readers to the realities of Palestine during the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, which correspond to the years of the Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia and Austria before the actual outbreak of WWII. The series in general, and this novel in particular, draw parallels and connections between the Nazis and Muslim Palestinians. The Thoenes make a sharp parallel between the Nazi regime in Europe and the Arab hostilities against Jews in Palestine. The Nazis had backed and supported the Mufti of Jerusalem and provided the militant Palestinians with money and arms. The book equates the militant Palestinian stands with Moslems radicalism.⁶⁰ The readers also learn about British restrictions on immigration to Palestine, Christian friends of the Zionist endeavor, and about Arab hostility, which made life difficult for those who did manage to arrive in the Holy Land. Europe and Palestine, the Nazis and the Palestinians, survival and struggle for independence, it is no coincidence that the Thoenes have called the series, dedicated to the Jewish saga under the Nazi regime in 1930s Europe, *The Zion Covenant*. Another book series dedicated to the story of the Jewish struggle for Palestine, *The Zion Legacy*, follows in the footsteps of *The Zion Covenant* and continues the saga in Palestine during the Israeli War for Independence. The Holocaust looms in the background of the second series with some of the protagonists who participate in the Jewish struggle for Palestine being Holocaust survivors and also veterans of the previous series.⁶¹

Conclusion

Evangelical autobiographies and novels relating to the suffering of Jews under the Nazi regime in Germany and other European nations present the Holocaust as embodying a much deeper meaning than persecution and annihilation. It is a period in human history of supreme moral failure accompanied by spiritual triumph. The Nazi regime and occupation were a trial, which true Christians, as well as Jews, passed triumphantly, having maintained their moral integrity and adherence to basic human principles. True Christians were protected and saved spiritually, if not physically, even in the harshest of circumstances. They might have suffered physical

⁶⁰ For example, *Ibid.*, 410-413.

⁶¹ For example, Bodie and Brock Thoene, *Thunder from Jerusalem: A Novel of the Struggle for Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Putman, 2001).

harassment, and even death, but such death was martyrdom, and their eternal life had been guaranteed. Jews were saved because they were predestined to play a role in history in the rejuvenation of the Land and people of Israel. Some of them were also called to accept their true Savior, and bear witness to the Christian and Jewish communities on the saving power of Christ.

The suffering, misery, and mass murder that characterized the Jewish experience under the Nazis, did not derive, in the interpretation offered in evangelical literature, from brutal antisemitism instigated by various historical, sociological, psychological, and theological factors. It is rather, the outcome of a rebellion against God. Some segments of human society have gone astray, offering short-lived triumph to the forces of darkness, while true Christians carried forth with their values intact.

According to this evangelical logic, the Holocaust is ultimately a chapter in the Jewish and non-Jewish encounter with Christ. Nazism manifested an alienation from the knowledge of God, a shortsightedness that many of the Jewish victims shared. The remedy to the Nazi horrors is the evangelization of both Jews and Gentiles. The more people who accept Christianity, the less chance there will be of such brutalities repeating themselves. Evangelical biographies and novels convey an awareness of and sensitivity toward Jewish suffering and look upon the Jews amicably as heirs to the biblical covenant between God and Israel. The horrors they experienced during the Holocaust are seen as footsteps in their collective spiritual pilgrimage towards their national rebirth and the eventual recognition of the true message of God. Amazingly, evangelical novels and biographies do not pity the Jews and do not treat Jews who had suffered or been killed during the Holocaust as dead victims or persons who have become disabled. As a rule, they are either live heroes or martyrs: people who have fulfilled a role in God's divine plans of salvation.

Evangelical writers have viewed the birth of the State of Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecies that speak about the return of the Jews to their land. The national rebirth serves as collective compensation to the Jews for their suffering and loss. It is further a proof that God has not abandoned the Jewish people, that he has not forgotten his ancient promises to that nation and that the Jews are still the "Chosen People." The novels and biographies convey the message that born-again Christians relate to Jews with good will and kindness. Evangelical writings on the Holocaust at the turn of the 21st century differ sharply in their depiction of Jews from evangelical writings of previous generations. Jews as individuals are not mystified, vilified, or "othered." In fact, on the personal

level they are very much like their Christian friends and neighbors. In the novels, the Holocaust era, as well as the years of struggle for the birth of Israel, is a time when righteous Christians and fine Jews stand together against enemies of God and humanity, struggling together for the same causes. The evangelical literature on the Holocaust has come about in the wake of the 1967 war and the peak of evangelical enchantment with Israel, thereby revolutionizing evangelical literature about Jews and their history. They portray heroic Jews facing the challenges of the Holocaust and novels promise healing, reconciliation, and rejuvenation. At the same time, the novels and biographies promote the union of all true believers and the overcoming, forgiving, and healing of ethnic differences and historical grudges. This will ultimately fully take place at the End Times, when the Jews and the rest of humanity will recognize their true Savior, Jesus will return and the Messianic Age will begin its course.

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**Advance reviews for *Re-examining the Holocaust through Literature*,
edited by Aukje Kluge and Benn E. Williams (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009):**

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-John K. Roth

Edward J. Sexton Professor Emeritus of Philosophy

Founding Director, Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights
Claremont McKenna College

Author, editor, and co-editor of over forty books on ethics, genocide, and the Holocaust;
most recently, editor of *Holocaust Literature*, 2 vols. (Salem Press, 2008)

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-Simon Kitson

Director of Research at the University of London Institute in Paris

Author of *The Hunt for Nazi Spies* (University of Chicago Press, 2008)

“Re-examining the Holocaust through Literature is an impressive collection offering new perspectives on representations of the Holocaust by the next generation of Holocaust scholars. The essays cover work ranging from Elie Wiesel to Art Spiegelman passing by way of Peter Weiss and Samuel Fuller; the 140 page International Bibliography of the Holocaust is a wonderful resource.”

- Kenneth Mouré

Chair, Department of History, University of California at Santa Barbara