THE LAUGH OF MERLIN IN REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST: FICTION, FILM AND TELEVISION

PETRA NEWMAN

PHD

JULY 2001

THE LAUGH OF MERLIN IN REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST: FICTION, FILM AND TELEVISION

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ART

ENGLISH

Doctor of Philosophy

THE LAUGH OF MERLIN IN REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST: FICTION, FILM AND TELEVISION.

by Petra Charlotte Newman

This thesis explores a narrative strategy employed by many survivor writers in their Holocaust narratives, building on the work of Lawrence Langer and Michael André Bernstein concerning the nature of contemporary responses to the Holocaust. I argue that this strategy creates a textual moment of confrontation, which I refer to as the Laugh of Merlin, that challenges the contemporary assumptions brought to the text by the reader. Although this narrative strategy is related to a wide range of genres within the thesis, I have focused on fictional narratives which provide a comparative context for the variety of texts discussed. The Laugh of Merlin therefore acts as a basis for an examination of survivor and non-survivor fictions, film and television texts.

Chapter one examines survivor fictions such as The Cattle Truck, and A Scrap of Time, pinpointing and exploring the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh and arguing that the narrative strategy that creates the Laugh can be used as a blueprint for all narratives concerning the Holocaust. This reading aims to bring together survivor and non-survivor narratives and functions as a pro-active tool that makes explicit the interdependent nature of all Holocaust representations. Wolfgang Iser's reader response theory is used to illuminate the terms of the narrative strategy and to outline the potential effects of the Laugh of Merlin on the reader. The synthesis of critical and creative texts is continued in chapter two which discusses non-survivor narratives such as The Reader. This chapter also argues that Holocaust narratives are evolutionary, rather than revolutionary in their nature and provides a precis of the docu-drama genre as well as an examination of Beach Music, a more popular, commercialised text. To contextualise Merlin's Laugh these narratives are examined with reference to the contemporary theoretical studies of Gillian Rose, Sue Vice and Homi Bhabha.

I discuss each medium within the terms of their differing production values. The film and television chapters use the work of writers such as Robert Rosenstone and John Fiske to provide a critical framework for investigating the possibilities of enacting Merlin's Laugh in visual media. Some of the distinctive features of visual media, for example silence, are examined within the context of the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh and the structure of visual texts is also interrogated in relation to Holocaust appropriation. The on-going, evolutionary nature of these texts is particularly relevant to television, a medium in continual production and presentation. Texts considered include Schindler's List, and Holocaust. The conclusion discusses the Laugh of Merlin in the light of the Fragments scandal. It explores the terms of Holocaust memory and the role of Merlin's Laugh in the continuing work of redefining contemporary conceptualisations of the event.

CONTENTS

This thesis is, in its entirety, my own work. Where I have quoted or referred to the works of others, they have been clearly acknowledged and sourced.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Bryan Cheyette for his advice and constant encouragement in his role as my advisor. Special thanks and appreciation must go to Janet Davies and Delyth Roberts for their time and for their enthusiasm for my work. The ongoing support of all my friends, in particular Jo Evans, has also been invaluable. My greatest debt however is to Peter and Ann Newman, Valerie Thomas, Sadie Newman, 'my family', and finally, to Guto Brychan, without whom this work would not have been undertaken or completed.

Introduction

The Laugh of Merlin and Holocaust Representation: Survivor Writings as a Blueprint for the Future.

> Humankind has very curiously and subtly, very ingeniously and systematically, prevented itself from reaching out to new types of reality. This is partly because we defend ourselves against a bolder type of extension of knowledge . . . man is forever at work trying to keep vast areas of unwelcome reality out of his view, trying especially to suppress knowledge of his own nature
> (Rosenberg and Myers 1988: p. 379).

> We want to remember. But remember what? And what for? Does anyone know the answer to this? (Langer 1975: p. 79)

In today's multimedia society there is undoubtedly a proliferation of Holocaust representations. In literature, on film and on television, the diversity of these representations is clearly recognizable. However, regardless of the medium, the challenge the Holocaust presents to all who represent it can be seen as connecting the variety of individual narratives. The terms of this challenge are exemplified by an extract of trial testimony concerning the death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Russian prosecutor Smirnov cross-examined a Polish guard with regards to the workings of the camp:

> SMIRNOV: How am I to understand this? Did they throw them [the children] into the fire alive or did they kill them first?
>
> WITNESS: They threw them in alive. Their screams could be heard at the camp. It is difficult to say how many were destroyed this way.
>
> SMIRNOV: Why did they do this?
>
> WITNESS: It's difficult to say. We don't know whether they wanted to economise on gas, or if it was that there was not enough room in the gas chambers (cited by Rosenberg and Myers 1988: p. 95/6).

There can be little doubt that this exchange represents a deeply traumatic encounter. The horror of the deaths described is overwhelming, confronting the imagination with a reality which, as Smirnov's opening statement exemplifies, seems almost beyond understanding, almost beyond belief. Although the guard's testimony under

oath bears witness to the mass murder of children, his answer to the question of why they died is insubstantial. Even as the horror of his previous statement cries out for an explanation, his words appear overwhelmed by the events he describes. Thus while the guard's response transmitted factual information, it could not give evidence of what Jorge Semprun described as "the other kind of understanding, the essential truth of the experience "(Semprun 1998: p. 125).

It is this challenge that all who give testimony to the experience of the Holocaust, or appropriate it, encounter:

> To create a language and imagery that will transform mere knowledge into vision and bear the reader beyond the realm of familiar imagining into the bizarre limbo of atrocity (Langer 1982: p. 12).

Langer's argument, when read in conjunction with the extract of trial testimony, illuminates the difficulties inherent in the challenge of leading an uninitiated reader (1), a reader who has not experienced the Holocaust and for whom its landscape is alien, into the history described. As Smirnov's opening comment exemplifies, the very nature of the experience that the guard describes not only discourages but actively resists full interpretation and understanding. The guard's words provide little that a contemporary reader could (or would want to) connect with. I would argue that the reader's response to the description of the Holocaust is therefore conditioned at a basic level by a desire to turn away (2), by the distance that exists between the reality described and the reader's imaginative conception of the event.

This distance conditions the exchange between the reader (whether of a written or a visual narrative) and the Holocaust text. Sara Horowitz has endorsed this argument, commenting:

> The problem lies not only in the survivors' inability to speak the unspeakable, it lies also in our inability – as non-participants – to imagine the unimaginable (cited by Hartman 1994: p. 45).

Thus the extract and the experience of reading it can be understood as a microcosm of the difficulties inherent in both the creation and the reception of Holocaust texts. As a result the genesis of this thesis is an examination of the difficulties inherent in this complex exchange and the identification and discussion of a narrative strategy that challenges the reader's desire for distance in relation to the Holocaust text.

For this reason this work begins with the landscape of memory contained within Holocaust survivor narratives. In these texts the human devastation enacted by the Shoah appears especially unconnected to both the experience of contemporary subjects and to

their imaginative life. The resulting resistance of readers to the realities of Holocaust history, a type of knowing yet not knowing, implicitly influences their reception of the Holocaust (3). It can range from an immediate desire (engendered by the horror of the Holocaust) to suppress awareness of these events, to a wilful denial of them (as in revisionist histories). As a result, the reader's relationship to the Holocaust text is coloured by an implicit store of hopes and idealisations, of a desire for redemption or relief, which functions even on a linguistic level:

> When we . . . regard being gassed as a pattern for dying with dignity or evoke the redemptive rather than grievous power of memory we draw on an arsenal of words that urges us to build verbal fences between the atrocities of the camps . . . and what we are mentally willing – or able – to face
> (Langer 1996: p. 6).

This desire for self-preservation, for a disassociation of contemporary life from the horrors of the past, has been a feature of post-war, non-survivor Holocaust memory since liberation. It is exemplified by the experience of Primo Levi, who commented:

> People did not want to hear [about the camps], they wanted other things, to dance, to party, to bring children into the world. A book like mine and many others that came after were almost like a discourtesy, like spoiling a party. (cited by Gordon 1999: p. 52)

Levi's experience of the post-war response to the horrors of the past illuminates the genesis of a resistance to the Holocaust that continues to subtly shape contemporary responses. Although the passage of time has inevitably opened up the Holocaust to scrutiny and discussion, it is possible to argue that the contemporary subject's desire for distance from the implications of this history's legacy continues to exist, but in differing, perhaps more complex, forms (4).

This wider context, which shadows Levi's experience, is endorsed by Saul Friedlander:

> Individual common memory, as well as collective memory, tends to restore or establish coherence, closure, and possibly a redemptive stance, notwithstanding the resistance of deep memory at an individual level
> (cited by Hartman 1994: p. 254).

Thus, within contemporary consciousness, Holocaust memory appears as a potent symbol of the twentieth century. Yet it remains by and large just that, a symbol, retaining its own specific language, mythology and recognisable iconography, for example the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gates of Auschwitz (5). The often fragmentary nature of this public memory, of

memorial days and the occasional blockbuster movie, influences the ways in which we understand the Holocaust, as it in turn conditions the texts non-survivor writers create to represent it.

Friedlander described the complex relation between contemporary common memory and the history of the Holocaust as imaginatively and cognitively distanced from the event. This relation immediately complicated the act of testimony. Even as survivors engaged with the difficulties of writing about an experience that appeared to defy language and imagination (6) and produced texts that documented and described their experience, they encountered this resistance within their reading audience. The degree to which this response conditioned the reception of survivor narratives moved Elie Wiesel to comment: "We wrote the words. We made the books. And we failed" (cited by Friedman 1993: p. xxvi).

Wiesel's comments illuminate the degree to which survivor writers perceived their experiences and the texts they produced to document them as an instrument of change, a safeguard against future genocides (7). Yet the failure that Wiesel ascribed to these texts is, I would argue, reflective not only of the problematic nature of translating Holocaust history into narrative but also of the degree of resistance present in contemporary society. The effect of this resistance within the terms of the texts produced, Lawrence Langer argues, is that "every narrative about the death camps includes an encounter between . . . persuasive horror and the will to disbelieve" (Langer 1982: p. 4).

However, in spite of the failure that Wiesel perceived, the works of survivors represent the initial encounter with the challenges inherent in writing about the experience of the Holocaust for an audience distanced imaginatively from the event described. It is in these texts that it is possible to find a narrative strategy that creates textual moments that challenge the reader's hopes and idealisations and confront them with the 'essential truth' (Semprun 1998: p. 125) of the experience. "Do you know how one says 'never' in camp slang? 'Morgen fruh', tomorrow morning" (Levi 1996: p. 139). For the readers, the conditions of life within the camp, a perpetual dying, are beyond their experience. What becomes apparent from the confrontational aspect of Levi's words is the way in which they redefine the imaginative engagement of the reader with Holocaust history. This type of textual moment is the result of a narrative strategy which is designed to challenge and remake, through the experience of reading, the reader's preconceived ideals or stereotypes and to provide them with an experience of the "essential truth" (Semprun 1998: p. 125). The impact and effect of this narrative strategy is embodied in a confrontational textual moment, exemplified by Levi's commentary, which I have named the Laugh of Merlin.

The concept of the Laugh of Merlin originates in Arthurian legend. However, the terms of the narrative strategy that create the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh are clarified through a reading of this aspect of the myth, described by Robertson Davies in his novel *World of Wonders*:

> The magician Merlin had a strange laugh, and it was heard when no one else was laughing . . . he laughed at the foppish young man who was making a great fuss about choosing a pair of shoes . . . he laughed because he knew that the pernickety man would be stabbed in a quarrel before the soles of his new shoes were soiled. *He laughed because he knew what was coming next* (Davies 1983: p. 689).

The Laugh, in the terms that Davies described it, can be seen as revealing, for those listening, a level of insight that is Merlin's alone. It is not necessary for Merlin to explain the significance of his Laugh and the young man can continue in ignorance of its purpose or intent. Yet the Laugh remains, to shape irrevocably both the one laughing and those trying to understand its meaning.

This reading of the Laugh of Merlin provides an analogy to the survivor's narratives discussed in this work. Like Merlin, the survivor writer brings to the creation of the text an understanding, borne of experience, that shapes and conditions the narrative. In their relation to survivor narratives, uninitiated readers can therefore be seen as in an analogous position to the young man. They cannot share the "inside" (Semprun 1993: p. 21) perspective that experience gives the survivor. As a result the text can lead the reader to a confrontation with the realities of camp life through the narrative. It is the variance in understanding, the implicit distance between the reader and the world of the narrative (8), which the textual moment of the Laugh makes explicit. Thus, like the "pernickety man" (Davies 1983: p. 689) who hears Merlin laugh, the reader's perception of Holocaust history is irrevocably altered by the experience of reading the textual moment of the Laugh.

Central to the enactment of the Merlin's Laugh is the effect of what I have described as the survivor's narrational future knowledge (9). It conditioned the writer's engagement with the experience in memory and the narrative produced. In these terms, survivors used the memory of the experience, the narrational future knowledge, as part of their narrative strategy to question and confront the reader's contemporary sensibilities.

The dual perspective of the survivor, who has experienced both the Holocaust and post-Holocaust life, is also vital to the enactment of the Laugh. The understanding of the uninitiated reader's hopes and idealisations in relation to Holocaust, that the survivor's dual

perspective enables, can therefore be used as a part of the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh. As a result of this combination, of the survivor's narrational future knowledge and their dual perspective, survivor narratives challenge the reader's contemporary perception of the event so as to bring about a new and varied level of comprehension. Merlin's Laugh is therefore used as a means of pinpointing the textual moments that illuminate the realities of Holocaust history and that the reader is forced to confront on its own terms. "When one is dying one is much to busy to think about death" (Levi 1998: p. 57). It is the extremity of Levi's commentary, an example of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, which confronts the readers and challenges them to redefine their concept of the terms under which life functioned in the camps.

The Merlin myth was also referred to by Jung in his work, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, where he used the term "*le cri de Merlin*" (Jung 1968: p. 255). These terms have been used to identify similar aspects of the Merlin myth. However, while Davies' reading of Merlin's Laugh referred to Merlin's life prior to his exile, Jung related *le cri* to the period after his banishment (10). Thus, in its application to Holocaust literature, the relationship between *le cri* and the textual moment of the Laugh also mirrors these elements of the Merlin myth and can be seen as separate yet interlinked. This differentiation clarifies the preconditions of the narrative strategy that creates the enactment of Merlin's Laugh.

Jung defined his reading of "*le cri de Merlin*" (Jung 1968: p. 255) in a passage describing a stone on which he inscribed important personal symbols and references. The stone, standing outside Jung's tower, was a representation of its owner and was recognisable as such to the passers-by. Yet the recognition of ownership could not communicate to the passer-by the stone's meaning or intent. The stone is the story of the owner. The terms of comprehension for those who see it are partial and rely upon interpretative processes, even as the stone identifies itself as representative of its maker.

Jung's interpretation of *le cri* also provides an analogy to the writers discussed in this work. Like Jung's stone, writers create a work of art that is separate from themselves and yet, at the same moment, representative of them and their experience. In survivor narratives, this relationship between author and text is explicit, shaped irrevocably by the "inside" (Semprun 1993: p. 21) perspective of the experience of the Holocaust. To understand the symbols and figures of the book/stone requires the kind of knowledge that only the author possesses. The reader is therefore left to follow and interpret the signs that the book/stone provides.

However for Jung, the figure of Merlin, at large yet vanished from the world, his cries echoing through the forest, impossible to communicate or replicate, also provided a secondary reading: embodied by the stone, but also a parallel to the call of the unconscious. He writes:

> In the twelfth century, when the legend arose, there were as yet no premises by which his intrinsic meaning could be understood. Hence *he ended up in exile*, and hence *'le cri de Merlin'*, which still sounded from the forest after his death. This cry that no one could understand implies that he lives on in an unredeemed form. His story is not yet finished and he still walks abroad (Jung 1968: p. 255).

Thus in its application to Holocaust narratives *le cri de Merlin*, while embodied by the text, can also be seen as analogous to the powerful echo of the millions of nameless deaths that the Holocaust enacted, an echo which continues to be heard. It is in the crucible of the imagination that the physical loss of the Holocaust, described time and again as the true motivation for testimony (11), encounters the uncertainties of survival and narrative. As Primo Levi commented, it is the dead who are the "true witnesses" (12) and it is in response to their now silenced cries that writers find the genesis for the creation of their narratives. This cry is irredeemable, impossible to understand or recreate; we can only bear witness to its happening.

Survivor writers therefore responded to the deaths of innocents, *le cri*, in the texts they produced. This cry shapes and influences their narratives. The result, within the narrative is exemplified by Elie Wiesel who argued, "what I have tried to do is not replace silence with words but . . . to surround the words with silence . . . I . . . communicate a silence within my words" (cited by Lewis 1984: p. 167). As Wiesel's comments illustrate, the act of bearing witness to *le cri*, the encounter with the victim's silence, is engaged with and transformed in narrative. This transformation, from memory into narrative, as in the Merlin myth, reflects the interlinked yet separate nature of the Laugh and *le cri*. It illuminates the duality of a textual moment created in narrative but also shadowed by the incalculable loss engendered by the Holocaust. Thus in Holocaust narratives, the enactment of Merlin's Laugh can confront the reader with the echo of the dead, even as its presence attests to the essentially untranslatable imprint left by their loss.

Jung's multifaceted reading of the myth of Merlin also provides an analogy to the role of the reader and the inherent difficulties of reading Holocaust texts. He notes:

> Merlin was taken up again in my psychology of the unconscious and remains uncomprehended to this day . . . That is because most people find it quite

> impossible to live on close terms with the unconscious. Again and again I have had to learn how hard this is for people (Jung 1968: p. 255).

The survivor's deep memory, *le cri*, as it is translated in narrative, can also be read as paralleling the unconscious. For the generations that have inherited Holocaust history, undertaking the kind of closeness required to examine the Shoah presents a profound challenge. For the readers, the difficulties they confront within the Holocaust texts and within themselves are many. Interpretation, through the journey into the landscape of Holocaust experience that the text enacts, can prove too difficult. As Lawrence Langer argues:

> Common memory urges us to regard the Auschwitz ordeal as part of a chronology, a dismal event in the past that the very fact of survival helps us to redeem . . . Deep memory . . . reminds us that the Auschwitz past is not really past and never will be (cited by Delbo 1995: p. xi).

Thus the reader's experience of the Holocaust text is conditioned by a confrontation with the 'deep memory' of the survivor which can result in a recognition of the implications that the Holocaust holds for contemporary life (13). It is this revelation of the "essential truth" (Semprun 1998: p. 125), the deep memory of Holocaust experience, which underpins the enactment of the Laugh.

The concept of Merlin's Laugh therefore works as both a narrational strategy (as exemplified by Levi's words quoted earlier) and on a structural level. The text as a whole can be read as being representative of *le cri*, its very visible presence offered as a sign of something that will never be completely translatable, but that through its existence subverts the silencing mechanisms of death. The narrative, like *le cri*, echoes on after the author's physical death. The textual moment that I have described as Merlin's Laugh reveals the effect, in narrative, of *le cri*. Its enactment illuminates the ways in which the narrative strategy that creates it is constructed to achieve, in the textual moment, that which is represented by the text as a whole: the translation of the survivor's memory of the experience of the Holocaust.

The term Merlin's Laugh is therefore applied to survivor texts as a means of identifying and discussing the narrative strategy that creates textual moments wherein the reader's "knowledge of history is not denied but displaced" (Lang 1988: p. 221) by the expression of the "essential truth" (Semprun 1998: p. 125) of Holocaust experience. In essence, it is a means of identifying and understanding both the terms of the creation of survivor narratives and their effect on their uninitiated readership. The confrontation in narrative of the survivor's experience with the contemporary reading subject's

preconceived idealisations and hopes, the Laugh, can therefore be seen as providing a site of resistance, subverting the "crushing terms" (Lang 1988: p. 220) of the Holocaust and the ever-present shadow of silence (14).

The textual moment of Merlin's Laugh and its effect upon the reader also illuminate the ways in which the narrative is conditioned, as Irving Howe argues, by:

> A strength of remembrance that leads the writer into despair and then perhaps a little beyond it, so that he does not flinch from anything, neither shame nor degradation, yet refuses to indulge in those outbursts of self-pity
> (cited by Lang 1988: p. 185).

Thus, as Howe's comments indicate, the confrontational aspect of the experience of reading the enactment of Merlin's Laugh can only exist within the terms of the author's refusal to 'look away' or spare the reader. As a result, I would argue that the genesis of Merlin's Laugh is not a comic sensibility, but rather "a laughter which trails off finally into a profound awareness of the deformity of life as it is" (Insdorf 1989: p. 77).

However the survivor texts by Tadeusz Borowski, Ida Fink and Jorge Semprun, examined in the next chapter, highlight the possibilities of literal laughter as a feature of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. Laughter is in itself a subversive act, a perspective of liberation in its broadest terms (15). Laughter, both literally and as a term for the textual confrontation enacted by the survivor, can therefore be seen as reflecting the ways in which survivor narratives consistently challenge the certainties of the individual and their relation to the past. The contribution that literal laughter makes to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh is often reinforced by a bitter irony. "The Jews travel in much worse conditions you know. So what do you have to brag about?" (Borowski 1976: p. 127).
Irony within the terms of Merlin's Laugh reinforces the confrontational aspect of this textual moment as it illuminates the gulf that exists between what the author knows to be the truth of Holocaust experience and what the reader believes or desires. It forces readers to recognise this space and the inadequacy of their own understanding, as it reveals the actuality of Holocaust experience. As Terrence Des Pres comments in his essay 'Holocaust Laughter?':

> Laughter is hostile to the world it depicts and subverts the respect on which representation depends (cited by Lang 1988: p. 219).

The role that both literal laughter and irony play in the enactment of the Laugh will be discussed further throughout this thesis.

For the reader, experiencing the enactment of Merlin's Laugh is personal and humbling. It requires a full recognition, not of the writer's alienation from the world, but

of their own. As Lawrence Langer argues, Holocaust literature's "unsettling contours help us to face the estrangement of the world in which we live from the one we wish to inhabit – or the one we nostalgically yearn to regain" (Langer 1995: p. 7). Thus the readers find themselves beset consistently throughout survivor texts with the desecration of their store of implicit hopes and beliefs concerning the nature of the world in which they live. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh explicitly confronts these beliefs and deprives the reader of a coherent sense of self or understanding in relation to the text. The language of the commonplace is undone and remade for the reader, giving an added dimension to their experience of reading the text. As a result, the preconceptions that condition the reader's understanding of concepts like 'hope', 'survival' and 'suffering' in relation to Holocaust memory can be forever changed by the experience of reading the moment of the Laugh.

For survivors like Jorge Semprun, fiction provided a space of mediation between their experiences and the narratives they created to give expression to their memories and enabled them to undertake the revision of the contemporary reader's preconceptions as an integral part of the narrative. For Semprun, the translation of the "essential truth" of his experience could "only be imparted through literary writing . . . through the artifice of a work of art "(Semprun 1998: p. 125).

Fiction can therefore be seen as providing a more controlled space, at times impersonal and yet not distinctly separate from the survivor writer, which allows the narrative to stand without being overwhelmed by the controlling 'I' of autobiographical testimony. It also enabled writers to occupy a more interpretative relationship to their own experience, to relate the "inside" (Semprun 1993: p. 21) of the concentration camp mentality to that of the world at large. In this way *l'univers concentrationaire* can no longer be seen as another planet (16) that is in some way separate from the world. Thus, for Semprun, the camps embodied a heart of darkness at the centre of society which irrevocably altered the survivor's experience and understanding of the world, as their representation in turn alters that of the reader (17).

Fictional narratives enabled survivor authors to use their narrational future knowledge, the prior knowledge and understanding of both the Holocaust and its problematic relationship to contemporary society, to effect, shape and ultimately educate the reader. The basic narrational statement, 'I was here and I witnessed', was transformed into a reflective and often disturbing rendition of experience, which influences the terms of readership and the resultant response to the text. It is exemplified, in Jorge Semprun's novel *The Cattle Truck*, in a description of his friend Julien. The narrator comments:

> I won't tell you how Julien died . . . Anyway I still don't know that Julien died...You'll be dead before this voyage is over (Semprun 1993: p. 15).

In these terms, the "essential truth" (Semprun 1998: p.125) also enabled the survivor's text to reflect the texture and contours of the memory that foregrounds the fictional narrative. Although the generic term of fiction suggests an element of story-making and artifice, the term, and by extension the reader's relationship to the text, is conditioned by the fact that these stories represent a historical reality. While the fictional stories the survivors recount may not 'belong' to them, there is no doubt of the 'truth' (18) of the stories. They are part of Holocaust history told by the first generation of Holocaust writers, survivors who committed them to paper as a record of their happening.

The defining effect of the controlled space that fiction provided the survivor writers discussed in the next chapter, that greatly influenced the construction of the narrative, is the relationship between author and reader in a fictional text. While testimony includes and depends upon the reader, without whom the testimony ceases to function as such (19), in a fictional text the reader is not simply a listener to a story, a witness to testimony. As the Semprun quotation referred to earlier exemplifies, the narrating 'I', rather than being a guide through the experience of the narrative, can function as a presence that implicitly acknowledges the reader's distanced relation to the text. In these terms, the reader represents a figure who journeys alone into the landscape of the stories told and can be manipulated to experience the full force of the dislocation that the journey demands. The narrative, no longer defined by the need to convince the reader of its accuracy or authenticity (20) as a historical document, allows the reality described to be experienced imaginatively through the construction of the text, testing and re-defining the limits of the reader's uninitiated understanding.

The dual perspective of the survivor writer can therefore be seen as central to the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of the Laugh, as it enabled the elements of contemporary memory, which must be confronted and altered if the reader is to begin to understand the "essential truth" (Semprun 1998: p. 125) of Holocaust history, to be an implicit feature of the narrative's construction. This created an immediacy which was conditioned, not simply in the horror of description, but also by the ways in which the narratives revealed the inadequacy of the preconceptions and idealised hopes of uninitiated readers through the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh.

Survivor narratives can therefore be seen as not attempting to convince the reader of their authenticity but rather they encourage the reader to recognise the Holocaust on its own terms. The textual moment of the Laugh enables the reader to experience the distance

between their own understanding and that of the survivor, as that distance enables the Laugh's enactment. In these terms, the Laugh of Merlin endorses and builds upon the work of Lawrence Langer, cited earlier, concerning the terms of contemporary memory, the "verbal fences" (Langer 1996: p. 6) and preconceptions of the reader.

Thus the confrontation enacted in survivor narratives is marked by the recognition that, while we are able to identify Merlin's Laugh, its genesis in the survivor's experience of the Holocaust means that we will never be able to pre-determine its shape or simply replicate it. However, I would argue that it is possible to use this textual moment and the narrative strategy that creates it as a guideline for future texts concerning the Holocaust. Survivor narratives contain a blueprint for effectively representing the uncertainty that the Holocaust engenders (21). They serve a dual purpose; illuminating the challenges of narrative translation as their texts, in turn, expose the limits of contemporary comprehension. Survivor writings, in these terms, represent a model of what can be achieved in narrative.

Fiction as a site of representation also represents a primary parallel between the stories and novels of survivors and those of authors not related to the event by experience. The complexities of language in relation to the Holocaust, the relationship between reader, author and text, the construction of narrative and 'the need to tell' are also features of survivors' stories that bear significant corollaries to the work of contemporary writers who appropriate this history. As a result, it is the fictional work of survivors like Borowski and Semprun that provides the focus for the subsequent chapter.

However, non-survivor fictional texts concerning the Holocaust continue to encounter a critical resistance that is innately linked to the perception of 'truth' and its importance in relation to Holocaust history. The perceived unimaginability of such traumatic history and the necessity of bearing witness, which survivors continue to comment on, also appears discordant with the stylistic devices that characterise the basic tools of fiction (22). The passage of time has done little to alter this expectation. As Sue Vice notes:

> Critical preference for testimony over fiction has become such a truism that it is hard to find any voices dissenting from it (Vice 2000: p. 5).

The perception of Holocaust fiction, that art seemingly endangers the truth, presents a significant challenge to all non-survivor writers and filmmakers. The perceived difficulties presented by creative as opposed to purely representative narratives are exemplified by the words of Michael Wyschgrod, who argued:

> I firmly believe that art is not appropriate to the Holocaust. Art takes the sting out of suffering . . . it is therefore forbidden to make fiction out of the Holocaust . . . Any attempt to transform the Holocaust into art demeans the Holocaust and must result in poor art (cited by Rosenfeld 1988: p. 14).

However, it is possible to argue that Wyschgrod's position reflects a more complex question than the perceived inability of art to represent the Holocaust. The achievement of survivor writers like Ida Fink and Tadeusz Borowski, who wrote fictional stories about their experience, presents a primary rebuttal to this position. Thus the resistance to artistic renderings, of which Wyschgrod's comments are indicative, may be reflective of the difficulties that the Holocaust presents to all narratives and the possibility of misrepresentation that shadows the work of all writers, regardless of their relationship to the event. This is a subtle yet vital difference, which opens up possibilities rather than invalidating artistic non-survivor fictional texts as an adequate site of representation for Holocaust history.

The question of the acceptability of art in relation to the Holocaust is also linked to the question of language and the role of survivor narratives as primarily offering a testimony to the event. When language no longer seems adequate to the task of bearing accurate witness, then the manipulation of that language, through the tools of fiction, can appear to undo or undermine the efficacy of that testimony. While this argument can be read as another prohibition concerning the exploitation of Holocaust history, it also ignores a deceptively simple yet fundamental recognition. Testimony is not purely an assertion of historical fact, but rather the transmission of memory through narrative. This subtle difference is essential as remembrance is a private act, testimony a public one, and each has its own criteria, which collide and correlate in narrative. The text is inevitably conditioned by the powerful voice of the survivor and is, "in its own way, an exercise in world making" (Friedlander 1992: p. 79). This activity is vital to all Holocaust representations if they are to overcome the reader's desire for mental self-preservation in relation to the text. To ignore the role of the tools of language in this exercise is ultimately to preclude the act of testimony and, by extension, contemporary representation altogether.

If the prohibition articulated by Wyschgrod were to be taken to its ultimate conclusion, Holocaust memory would remain seperate from the linguistic tools, the "pre-Holocaust terms and concepts" (Braham 1983: p. 107), albeit imperfect, to which both survivors and contemporary writers find themselves returning when they come to describe this history. What was a paradox that informed Holocaust writings now becomes a limitation as to what can be achieved by both the survivor and future generations of

writers (23). This limitation, which continues to haunt Holocaust representations, ultimately returns both reader and writer to a point of silence, enforcing a primary objective of the Nazi genocide: to prevent any knowledge or understanding of the mass murder they perpetrated.

Rejection of the orthodox position endorsed by Wyschgrod concerning artistic representations of Holocaust memory also illuminates the inherent relationship between representation and meaning:

> Rather than looking for the Holocaust outside of metaphor . . . we find it in metaphor, in the countless ways it has been figured, coloured, distorted and ultimately cast as a figure for other events (Young 1990: p. 89).

Young's defence of metaphor reinforces the corollaries that exist between the projects of survivor and non-survivor writers and illuminates the necessity for the components of an imaginative rendering, metaphor and simile, in the "world making" (Friedlander 1992 : p. 79) undertaken in narrative. Meaning, in the context outlined by Young, is derived through the collision of the imaginative work of both the writer and the reader. Though the paradox concerning the use of language that cannot convey adequate meaning or understanding remains, it actually informs the writing rather than leading to a prohibition that ultimately results in silence. Narrative, whether generically classified as fictional or factual, cannot ultimately exist without the forms and shapes that define it as narrative. As E.M. Grombrich argues:

> Even the greatest artist . . . needs an idiom to work in . . . He can refashion this imagery . . . and change it beyond recognition but he can no more do without the pre-existing stock of acquired images than he can paint it without the pre-existing colours which he must have on his palette
> (cited by Steiner 1975: p. 461).

Thus the perceived divide between testimony and the imaginative rendering of history, in which both survivor and non-survivor writers engage, collapses and allows for differing narratives that effect the reader in widely differing ways. Remembrance in narrative, whether written by a survivor or a non-survivor writer is not, in these terms, subsumed by art but finds fulfilment within the wider variety of narrative. It is therefore possible to recognise the paradox concerning language and the tools of fiction as part of the inherent structure of all Holocaust representation. As a result accurate world-making, on the part of both the survivor and those who appropriate this history, may indeed include both art and truth, enclosing one within the other, in an attempt to give the reader the

possibility of an understanding that extends beyond that which is imaginable on the basis of the facts alone.

However the terms of the survivor's narrational future knowledge, a central feature of the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh, presents another challenge to all non-survivor texts. Although this knowledge cannot be replicated, the experience of reading Merlin's Laugh illuminates the terms of the uninitiated subject's preconceptions and idealisations. It can reveal elements of the contemporary conception of Holocaust history that can form the basis of non-survivor narrational future knowledge and that can then be challenged and interrogated by writers unrelated to the event by experience. For if survivors drew their narrational future knowledge from the experience of living through the Holocaust then, for non-survivor writers and filmmakers, the terms of their contemporary narrational future knowledge are radically different. I would therefore argue that this feature of the non-survivor text must be tied not to a writer's ability to recreate or represent the event itself but to the experience of living in a post-Holocaust world; to inheriting as opposed to experiencing the Holocaust.

In these terms, the authenticity of non-survivor texts is not dependent on their ability to create knowledge about the event (24). They can be seen as continuing the work, begun by survivors, of challenging the limitations of contemporary understanding. Thus non-survivor writers' narrational future knowledge, forged in the shadow of the event, offers the possibility of creating a text that could illuminate the terms of contemporary memory of the Holocaust as it questions its problematic nature. The confrontational aspect of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context could continue to confront the reader's idealisations from a contemporary perspective. It could be conditioned by an investigation of the Holocaust's legacy that challenges the reader to recognise the elements of this history which still influence and affect the individual. This may enable the non-survivor writer or filmmaker to recognise and interrogate the type of meanings we, as readers and writers, 'the generation after', ascribe to Holocaust history and the complex and contradictory relationship that exists between the actuality of the Shoah and contemporary life.

The development of survivor literature, from the creation of factual, historical knowledge, a re-telling of experience (25), to a more reflective or interpretative relationship also illuminates the ways in which Holocaust texts inform and create meaning. Although Stefan Maechler argues that the primary function of survivor narratives is to enable "the public . . . to know how they [the survivors] experienced life as a victim and how they interpret it today" (Maechler 2001: p. 303), the survivors' on-going

interrogation of their memory and its effect, reflected in the texts produced, reveals the importance and value of an interdependent relationship between survivor and non-survivor narratives.

An example of the ways in which this relationship can inform the production of non-survivor texts can be found in Jorge Semprun's work *Literature or Life* (26). Semprun described the difference between the right and wrong questions he was asked in the period following his liberation. He argued that the wrong question was "a question that went nowhere, that even precluded any further questioning, through an answer that was inevitable . . . but led to nothing" (Semprun 1998: p. 118). Semprun's words illuminate the ways in which survivor narratives can provide an example of the narrative strategy that enabled survivor writers to meet the challenges of representation that all who appropriate this history face. For non-survivor writers, the value of defining and asking the "right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123), both of the Holocaust and of the contemporary subject, can therefore provide a starting point from which Merlin's Laugh can be adapted within a non-survivor text.

Thus the task of authentically appropriating the Holocaust from a position "outside" (Semprun 1993: p. 21) the event becomes more complex and challenging than a re-creation or replication of survivor narratives. Merlin's Laugh, enacted within a non-survivor context, can therefore be seen as conditioned by a recognition of the questions raised by the existence of the Laugh's original form in survivor writings. The humbling experience of reading survivor narratives, the encounter with Merlin's Laugh in its blueprint form, provides a means of shaping the fictions of non-survivor writers without overwhelming the contemporary perspective that these texts embody. The experience of reading Merlin's Laugh can illuminate aspects of the non-survivor writer or filmmakers' narrational future knowledge that can result in an authenticity borne not from appropriation but from an interrogation of this legacy. The narrative strategy that creates the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh can also be used as a blueprint that enables a non-survivor narrative to challenge and confront its readers. In these terms, survivor writings can truly function as a foundation from which contemporary writers can create their own unique narratives.

Using the lessons contained within survivor narratives as a blueprint may also enable contemporary writers to remain on close terms with the ambiguities of the Holocaust, with the "dark places" (27), without attempting to create a false sense of closure through memorialisation or the overlaying of a redemptive reading. Thus, for the non-survivor writer, the work of confronting the pre-packaging and kitsch, the idealised

hopes that continue to function as a powerful feature of contemporary Holocaust memory, provides an analogy to the ways in which survivor writers engaged with the challenges inherent in representing the Holocaust in their own texts. This work can be seen as central to all non-survivor representations and to the possibility of creating Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context. As Michael André Bernstein argues:

> A work of fiction can combine an absolute respect for the historical facts with a sense of the need for new narrative models within which to understand and articulate those facts (Bernstein 1994: p. 123).

Bernstein's own 'narrative model', "sideshadowing" (28), discussed in chapter two, represents the type of engagement with history he discusses. It is within these terms that Merlin's Laugh can also be applied to non-survivor texts.

However, contemporary appropriation of the Holocaust as a signifying trope goes beyond a literary enterprise, incorporating both the cinematic and the televisual media as sites of representation. Contemporary audiences' understanding of Holocaust history is perhaps more likely to be forged through the cinema or TV screen than by the words of survivors. The visual text, whether film or television, represents not simply a new and varied form of production but also, in terms of the shaping of public consciousness, one of the most accessible and wide reaching (29). The broadcast of the mini-series *Holocaust* in 1979 and the release of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* in 1993 represented landmarks in the transition of Holocaust memory from the literary into the visual realm and, by extension, the popular sphere. These texts reached audiences in vast numbers and their effect on the imaginative life of Holocaust memory cannot be underestimated.

Yet, as with other fictional interpretations created by non-survivor authors, cinematic and, in particular, televisual texts are, with a few notable exceptions, overlooked or dismissed. As Jeffrey Shandler argues:

> Scholars . . . tend to hold Holocaust television in lower esteem than most other genres of Holocaust memory culture (Shandler 1999: p. xvi).

It is possible to argue that the resistance to visual renderings of Holocaust history finds its genesis in the debate concerning fictional representations discussed previously. If the linguistic tools of fiction are seen as endangering the truth of Holocaust memory, then, according to this argument, the attempt to recreate this period visually threatens to overlay the realities of the Holocaust with a manufactured past. The explicitly commercial nature of both film and television has also problematised the reception of these texts. These features of cinema and television present a profound challenge to the uninitiated director and scriptwriter.

However, while visual appropriations of Holocaust history function within the terms of a cinematic or televisual medium, they do share features with their literary counterparts. It is these similarities that enable the application of Merlin's Laugh, as a blueprint, to a cinematic or televisual text that appropriates the Holocaust. As recent film and television studies argue, visual, fictional texts are also narratives (30), which in their own way undertake the "world making" described previously by Saul Friedlander (Friedlander1992: p. 79). It is this fundamental similarity – a narrative constructed about the Holocaust, which the viewer or spectator follows – that enables the application of Merlin's Laugh to visual texts.

The contemporary nature of these texts provides another parallel between the non-survivor writer and the film or television programme maker. The non-survivor author of a visual text also shares the uninitiated perspective of all unrelated to the event by experience and, as previously discussed, the limitations of this perspective are revealed and challenged through the experience of reading Merlin's Laugh. This can enable the non-survivor filmmaker to use the understanding gained from reading survivor texts as part of their narrational future knowledge to condition the visual narratives they create. Thus the work of identifying and asking the "right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) is as applicable to the visual text as it is to the literary one.

This feature of non-survivor narrational future knowledge is central to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context and illuminates the validity and value of the interdependent relationship between all narratives concerning the Holocaust. Survivor narratives represent the initial engagement of memory and language, recreating the unimaginable within a narrative framework. The remaking of the reader's understanding through the experience of reading survivor narratives provides an example for all who appropriate the Holocaust. The experience of reading Merlin's Laugh in survivor narratives and a recognition and understanding of the narrative strategy that creates it can therefore be used as a blueprint for challenging the perceived representational limits of the televisual and cinematic text, within the terms of the individual medium.

The contemporary and on-going production of visual texts also makes explicit the evolutionary, as opposed to revolutionary, nature of Holocaust representation. Television in particular, with its perpetual production and presentation (31), illuminates the ways in which each text contributes and influences, in both a positive and a negative way, the production of future texts. This reading of the changing face of televisual texts endorses the interdependent relationship of all Holocaust representation, but also enables a

recognition of the unique possibilities and potential of each of the media examined that may as yet be untapped within the terms of their Holocaust appropriations.

The application of Merlin's Laugh to visual media is therefore reflective of the ability of television and cinema to communicate, reveal and interrogate the past from a contemporary perspective. It also illuminates the possibilities and achievements inherent in visual texts and exemplified in works like Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and the TV mini-series *War and Remembrance*. As Robert Rosenstone argues:

> The past they [films] create is not the same as the past provided by traditional history, but it certainly should be called history – if by that word we mean a serious encounter with the lingering meaning of the past
> (Rosenstone 1995b: p. 5).

Thus applying Merlin's Laugh within a visual context requires a recognition of the differences between visual and literary signs and the ways in which this difference can be used to create a textual moment that challenges and confronts the spectator or viewer in ways similar to the blueprint found in survivor narratives.

One example, discussed in detail in the film and television chapters, is the use of silence as a feature of Merlin's Laugh enacted within a visual context. Silence, a characteristic that is unique to visual texts, can be used as part of the visual narrative strategy to reveal the overwhelming nature of the Holocaust, heightening the impact of the moment of Merlin's Laugh and encouraging the spectator or viewer to reflect upon the representation they have witnessed. This feature of the visual text provides one example of the ways in which the unique differences inherent in television and film can be used to express elements of Holocaust history that find their genesis in the words of survivors.

Understanding the possibilities of Merlin's Laugh within the differing contexts examined in this work requires that all Holocaust representations are examined on their own terms, investigating the complexities and potential that visual signs hold and recognising their differing production methods and values. Adopting Merlin's Laugh in relation to non-survivor texts therefore functions as a means of identifying possibilities for future representations. This type of broad reading of a wide variety of representations requires a synthesis of critical and textual readings. These readings illuminate the terms of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh and the narrative strategy that creates it as a means of continuing to interrogate the Holocaust and its legacy. Merlin's Laugh therefore functions in a non-generic way linked to the representation of Holocaust history, rather than to a specific medium. This work also illuminates the way in which each generation of

narratives in turn influences and shapes our store of knowledge and the future of Holocaust memory (32).

Throughout the chapters concerning non-survivor representations I have chosen to examine a variety of primary texts. In the non-survivor fiction chapter they include *Sophie's Choice*, *Beach Music*, *Eve's Tattoo*, and *The Reader*. These texts reflect a wide range of perspectives, each with a differing audience appeal. *Beach Music*, in particular, is seen as a commercialised, popular text with a diverse readership that, I would argue, differs significantly from some of the other novels examined. This broad selection of texts is central to the film chapter, where I have also examined a range of films that includes *Schindler's List*, *Music Box* and *Life is Beautiful* alongside Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*. The television chapter contains texts that reflect both the mini-series and TV movie genres. It includes *Holocaust* and *War and Remembrance*, as well as lesser known movies like *I Captured Eichmann* and *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*. This choice of texts represents a variety of accessible material which, although often dismissed critically, reflects the types of narratives, both literary and visual, which people read or watch and engage with. For, as Dominick La Capra argues:

> We in the academy may be rewarded for saying the most radical things insofar as they remain intellectually inaccessible to most people (La Capra 1994: p. 8).

The application of Merlin's Laugh to these types of texts may therefore reveal aspects of contemporary popular culture that could be used to create the confrontational moment of the Laugh, in a setting where its presence is least expected and where it can be experienced by a large, mainstream audience. This argument is particularly relevant to televisual texts like TV movies.

The genesis for using the Laugh of Merlin in relation to survivor texts was essentially to find a way of conceptualising and discussing the narrative strategy that makes reading Holocaust literature a challenging and confrontational experience. It is also a means of interrogating the perceived variance between these texts and those created by non-survivors. Merlin's Laugh, in these terms, can be seen as a filter through which this variety of texts can be examined without privileging survivor texts as the only authentic site of Holocaust representation. It enables a clearer understanding of the complex and interdependent relationship between contemporary conceptualisations, the narratives that non-survivor writers and filmmakers create about the Holocaust, both accurate and inaccurate, and survivor texts. For as Bernstein argues:

> The task for us . . . as individuals who learn to understand ourselves and our world through the stories we tell and are told *is how we construct the meanings we require in our personal and collective narratives*
> (Berstein 1994: p. 124/125).

In today's media-saturated world there have been calls for "quiet" (33) in relation to Holocaust history. However, this position ignores the fact that the lessons of the Holocaust are yet to be fully incorporated into contemporary life (34). Holocaust narratives, by both survivors and non-survivors, continue to provide a primary site of representation and interrogation. For if, as Leo Baeck commented, "nothing is so sad as silence" (cited by Bauman 1989: p. i), then the Laugh of Merlin provides a framework for exploring the possibilities the future holds for the continued translation of Holocaust memory.

Endnotes For Introduction

1. The definition of an uninitiated reader as one who has not experienced the Holocaust first hand and is not a primary witness is central to this work. Within the terms of the film and television chapters, this definition also applies to the spectator and the viewer who are likewise uninitiated in relation to their experience of the event. Whenever the reader, spectator or viewer is referred to, it is within these terms.

2. The words of Mr. W., a radio operator, commenting in September 1944 are still resonant today:

> I tell myself however little I think of these things they have entered too deeply my heart's core for me to be in danger of really forgetting them. I hope I am not mistaken. For they appear to make very little impression on most people . . . Perhaps this is one of the greatest of problems for civilised life: how is one to combine a sense of universal responsibility with ordinary day to day sanity?
> (Cited by D. Cesarani, ed., *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994), p. 259.

The words of the Mr. W. are endorsed by H.L. Menken, who argues, "the human mind always tries to expunge the intolerable from memory just as it tries to conceal it while current "(cited by O. Sacks, *Awakenings* (Picador, London, 1991), p. 13).

The effect of this desire to turn away from the facts of the Holocaust is, as Feldman and Laub argue, that "the Holocaust still functions as a cultural secret, a secret which

essentially we are keeping from ourselves "(S. Feldman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992), p. xix).

3. Elie Wiesel has discussed the effects of the desire for mental self-preservation as a negative influence in relation to Holocaust memory:

> They are being blamed, these corpses, for having acted as they did: they should have played their roles differently, if only to reassure the living who might thus go on believing in the nobility of man (cited by L. Langer, ed., *Art From The Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology* (New York and London, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 148).

4. Z. Bauman, *Modernity and The Holocaust* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989).

> The Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilisation and at the peak of human cultural achievement and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilisation and culture (ibid., p. x).

Bauman's position is also endorsed, in a study of the recent genocide in Rwanda, by Philip Gourevitch, who argues:

> The West's post-Holocaust pledge that genocide would never again be tolerated proved to be hollow, and for all the fine sentiments inspired by the memory of Auschwitz, the problem remains that denouncing evil is a far cry from doing good (P. Gourevich, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda* (London, Picador, 1999), p. 170).

5. Another example of the iconic imagery of the Holocaust can be seen in the photograph of a young boy being rounded up in the Warsaw Ghetto (G. Schoenberner, *The Yellow Star: The Persecution of the Jews In Europe 1933–1945* (London, Transworld and Courage Books, 1969), p. 171–2). This image has also been appropriated by the artist Samuel Bak in a work entitled *Self Portrait* (cited by L. Langer, *Pre-empting The Holocaust* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1998), p. 110–11).

6. Lawrence Langer has commented on the necessity to redefine language in relation to the Holocaust:

> We should at least be prepared to redefine the terminology of transcendence – 'dignity', 'choice', 'suffering', 'spirit' – so that it conforms more closely to the way of being in places like Auschwitz (cited by A. Rosenberg and G. E. Myers, eds., *Echoes From The Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections On A Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press,1988), p. 126).

Although Langer sees this as an issue primarily concerning the reader, there can be little doubt that the survivors' understanding of the variance between their experience of suffering and the meaning assigned by the reader to this sign must inevitably condition the construction of their texts. This is exemplified in the testimony of Isabella Leitner who wrote, "Summer and Winter we have but one type of clothing. Its name is rag" (I. Leitner, *Fragments Of Isabella* (London, New English Library, 1980), p. 1).

7. George M. Kren, commenting on the effects of Holocaust memory, argues:

> Those who have experienced the Holocaust, those who have studied it, whatever their different interpretations, perceived it as having fundamentally altered the human condition. Yet they are unable to share their vision with the rest of the human community, for which the Holocaust has been only a historical condition (cited by A. Rosenberg and G. E. Myers, eds., *Echoes From The Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections On A Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press,1988), p. 42).

8. The survivor's recognition of the variance in understanding that exists between them and their uninitiated audience is exemplified by Charlotte Delbo, who wrote:

> The survivor must undertake to regain his memory; regain what he possessed before . . . if you are unable to gauge the effort this necessitates in no way can I attempt to convey it (C. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995), p. 225).

9. Narrational future knowledge as a concept functions throughout this work as the term for the knowledge that the writer brings to the text and that creates the textual confrontation defined as Merlin's Laugh. It is used in a non-generic way and is applied equally to visual and literary narratives.

10. *C. Jung, The Collected Works: The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Vol. 9, Part 1 (Routledge and Kegan Paul., London, 1968), p. 255.

A further detailed analysis of the Merlin myth in Jungian psychoanalysis can be found in J. Granrose, *The Archetype of the Magician* (C.G. Jung Institute, Zurich, 1996) http://www.phil.hga.edu/faculty/granrose/granrose.htlm).

11. According to Elie Wiesel, "this sentiment moves all survivors: they owe nothing to anyone but everything to the dead " (cited by S. Feldman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992), p. 116)

12. P. Levi, *The Drowned and The Saved* (London, Abacus Books, 1998), p. 63.

13. Raul Hilberg argues persuasively for a recognition of the implications the Holocaust holds for contemporary life. He comments:

> The machinery of destruction then was no different from organised German society as a whole; the difference was one of function . . . From this moment fundamental assumptions about our civilisation have no longer stood unchallenged, for while the occurrence is past the phenomenon remains
> (R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York and London, Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 640 –760).

14. Silence as a feature of Holocaust memory is commented on by Feldman and Laub, who argue:

> The speaker about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to – and of listening to themselves. That while silence is defeat it serves them both as a sanctuary and as a place of bondage. Silence is for them a fated exile, yet also a home, a destination and a binding oath. To not return from this silence is the rule rather than the exception (S. Feldman and D. Laub, (*Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992), p. 58).

Their analysis makes clear the complex and contradictory role silence plays in a survivor's memory. Although silence overwhelms testimony, it can also be seen as a refuge and a choice.

15. This reading of laughter is taken from S. Lipman, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humour During The Holocaust* New Jersey and London, Books International Inc., 1991), p. 16. Lipman's text is primarily a collection of contemporary humour and jokes of the Holocaust and it is his introductory comments that are referenced in the text.

16. I. Leitner, *Fragments Of Isabella* (London, New English Library, 1980), p. 24.

17. J. Semprun, *The Cattle Truck* (London, Serif, 1993), p. 161.

18. The *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* defines "truth" as "accuracy of representation", and it is in these terms that I apply the word to Holocaust texts. (F. G. and H. W. Fowler, *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 904).

19. Feldman and Laub also discuss the importance, even though implicit, of the figure of the reader in the construction of survivor testimony. They argue:

> The absence of an empathetic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other . . . annihilates the story (S. Feldman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992), p. 68)

20. The *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* defines "authentic" as "trustworthy, entitled to acceptance; genuine, not forged", and it is in these terms that I am applying the word to Holocaust texts (F. G. and H. W. Fowler, *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 47).

21. The concept of uncertainty was discussed in a panel debate that included the author Martin Amis and Bryan Cheyette. Cheyette argued that, although uncertainty is a central feature of Holocaust memory that is made explicit in survivor narratives, it is yet to be fully interrogated or engaged with in non-survivor fiction. He argues:

> The agony all writers go through isn't necessarily in the text: the agony is outside the text. I want to contrast this sense of certainty with the uncertainty of Holocaust survivors who knew . . . that their words actually betray their experiences (B. Cheyette, 'Writing the Unwritable: A Debate on Holocaust Fiction', *Jewish Quarterly*, 170 (Summer 1998), p. 13).

Sue Vice has responded that the question of uncertainty in relation to non-survivor texts, while reflective of the "suspicion of novelistic language", is also another way of "saying survivor testimony is better" (S. Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 6). I argue that the terms of uncertainty reflect more than the challenge of finding a language that can adequately convey the experience of the Holocaust. This is illustrated by the words of Elie Wiesel, "you think I have truth? I do not. You think I have an answer? I do not. All I can ask is for humility" (cited by S. Lewis, *Art Out of Agony: The Holocaust Theme in Literature, Sculpture and Film* (Toronto, CBC Enterprises, 1984), p. 166). In these terms, uncertainty is an inherent part of all Holocaust representation, and for non-survivor writers it is reflected in the complexities of the role of Holocaust history in contemporary society.

22. This argument finds its genesis in the catechism of unimaginability that has been applied to the Holocaust. Unimaginability conditions the challenge that this history presents to those who appropriate it. As Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi argues:

> The imagination loses credibility and resources where reality exceeds even the darkest fantasies of the human mind; even realism flounders before such a reality (S. D. Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 3).

For a discussion of Adorno's famous dictum, "it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz", and his subsequent reappraisal, *see* Leonard Olschner's essay *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, in S. L. Gilman and J. Zipes, eds., *Yale Companion To Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1997), pp. 691–96.

23. As James Young has argued:

> To remove the Holocaust from the realm of the imagination . . . is to risk excluding it altogether from public consciousness . . . Better abused memory in this case which might be critically qualified than no memory at all (J.Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interperation* (Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 33).

In these terms, it is clear that the unimaginable label attached to the Holocaust is still relevant within the terms of the abused memory Young describes. However, as Young argues, unimaginability cannot simply function as a reason not to write Holocaust

narratives. Within the terms of a non-survivor enactment of the Laugh, this unimaginability can be examined, challenged and incorporated into the narrative.

24. As Sue Vice has noted:

> The two issues which are most central to the negative reception of much Holocaust fiction . . . are the philosophical issues of authenticity and accuracy (S. Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London, Routledge, 2000), pp. 161–2).

There can be little doubt that these issues are as relevant to survivor writers as to the non-survivor fictional texts that Vice examines. However, critical appraisal of non-survivor texts is inevitably harsher, as accuracy and authenticity in these terms relies totally on imaginative renderings as opposed to recalled experience. Thus it is possible to argue that the terms of authenticity, for a non-survivor writer, maybe based upon the experience of inheriting the Holocaust rather than in an attempt to replicate it.

25. The changing face of survivor writings is exemplified by the writings of Primo Levi. His first work, *If This Is A Man* (1958; London, Abacus Books, 1996) recounts his internment and survival. His last work, *The Drowned And The Saved* (London, Abacus Books, 1998) is a series of essays and reflections on the meanings and aftermath of the Holocaust.

26. J. Semprun, *Literature and Life* (New York, Penguin, 1998). Semprun's text also reflects the changing face of Holocaust fiction. It can be read as a companion piece to his previously published fictional text, *The Cattle Truck*, and is discussed in the first chapter of this work.

27. G. Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture* (London, Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 32.

28. M. A. Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1994), pp. 95-120.

29. As Robert Rosenstone argues:

> A century after the invention of motion pictures, the visual media have arguably become the chief carrier of historical messages in our culture (R.

Rosenstone, ed., *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995b), p. 3).

His comments about the effect of cinema are paralleled, in a discussion of television, by Ien Ang:

> In less than fifty years, television has become a massive cultural institution whose impact can be felt in almost all aspects of public and private life (I. Ang, *Desperately Seeking The Audience* (London and New York, Routledge, 1991), p. 2).

This type of vast audience reinforces the necessity of examining representations of the Holocaust within the cinematic and televisual context.

30. D. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 12–33.

31. I. Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London and New York, Routledge, 1991), p. 34.

32. The importance of the relationship between contemporary Holocaust representations and future texts can be seen in the work of James Young, who argues persuasively for the impossibility of knowing the event 'outside of the ways they are passed to us'. He argues:

> What is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends, in turn, on the texts now giving them form (J. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 1).

Young's comments in these terms also endorse the value of returning to survivor narratives and using them as a blueprint and guideline.

33. J. Freedland, 'Let's Close The Book', *Guardian* 12 April 2000, p. 21. Freedland's article cites the novelist William Styron's call for quiet and comments "our collective interest in it is getting unhealthy".

34. In a recent documentary, *Battle For The Holocaust*, produced and directed by Paul Yule and shown on Channel 4 on the Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January 2001), Charles Maier commented,

> What are the lessons of the Holocaust? Don't elect Hitler? . . . Don't murder six million Jews? These are pretty banal lessons.

However, this position ignores the work of Zygmunt Bauman (cited above) concerning the relationship between contemporary society and the structures of the Holocaust, as well as the more personal effect of reading Holocaust literature.

Chapter One

The Laugh of Merlin: Survivor Writings as a Breakthrough for the Imagination.

> The secret source of humour itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humour in heaven (Lipman 1991: p. 3).

> Through laughter we achieve a provisional stance, outside belief and disbelief, in the face of the horrible. We also laugh as part of an automatic recoil into life (Granrose 1996: p. 12).

> The wit you can have only when you consider death very plainly, when you consider what a human being really is (Bellow 1965: p. 285).

In a review of one of the many historical texts written concerning the Holocaust, Tadeusz Borowski commented on what he believed to be a central tenet of Holocaust representation, a belief that had contributed to the creation of his own stories:

> It is impossible to write about Auschwitz impersonally . . . The first duty of Auschwitzers is to make clear just what a camp is . . . But let them not forget that the reader will unfailingly ask: But how did it happen that you survived? Tell them . . . write that you, you were the ones who did this. That a portion of the sad fame of Auschwitz belongs to you as well (Borowski 1976: p. 22).

The stories in *This Way for The Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* reflect the type of engagement with memory that Borowski described. His work, I would argue, is characterised by the unflinching honesty that he discussed and that conditions the examples of Merlin's Laugh that can be found in abundance in his text. Reading Borowski's stories in the light of his comments quoted above, it is possible to argue that, for Borowski, the choice of fiction was central to the translation of his Holocaust experiences into narrative. Without the controlled space that fiction provides for the writer, that differentiates it from 'pure' testimony, Borowski would perhaps have been unable to tell his own sad portion of fame.

Writing his stories as fiction also allowed Borowski to use his memories as a feature of the narrative strategy that enabled him to address the distance that exists between survivors and their uninitiated readership. This distance, I would argue, is embodied in the question "how did it happen that you survived?" (Borowski 1976: p. 22) As previously discussed, within the terms of Holocaust narratives the uninitiated reader is

characterised as being unrelated to the event by experience. This delineation refers to the variance in understanding that exists between the survivor and the reader as a result of the experience of the event, not to a basic recognition of Holocaust history. Borowski's acknowledgement of this variance is clear from the way in which he ascribed the question concerning survival within Auschwitz to the reader. Thus, without the intimate imaginative connection between reader and narrative, that fiction as a genre implies, Borowski would perhaps have been less equipped to confront the reader with the horrors he experienced and the terms of his own survival (1).

However the use of fiction as a site of representation for Holocaust memory has, as discussed in the introduction, proved contentious. The creative, imaginative properties of fiction, its artistic as opposed to documentary style, appear to threaten the 'truth' of memory that is so often posited as a defining feature of Holocaust testimony. As Elie Wiesel has famously asserted:

> A novel about Auschwitz is not a novel, or else it is not about Auschwitz. The very attempt to write such a novel is blasphemy (cited by Lewis 1984: p. 155).

The fictions of survivors like Borowski, Jorge Semprun and Ida Fink stand as a rebuttal to this assertion and provide examples of the immense possibilities that fiction, as a genre, offers to all writers. Their texts illuminate the unique perspective that fiction can provide as a conduit for authentic representation. The honesty described by Borowski, "the essential truth of the experience" (Semprun 1998: p. 125), functions as a governing precept within survivor's fictional texts. It reflects the truth of survivor memory which, in turn, conditioned the narratives they produced. The imaginative element of fiction, in these terms, is defined not by what is being described, the realities of Holocaust history, but by the ways in which it is translated within the narrative.

This position is endorsed by Jorge Semprun, for whom an accurate rendering of his experience in Buchenwald concentration camp could exist only through "the artifice of a masterly narrative" (Semprun 1998: p. 13). The representation of truth in these terms demanded something more than the documenting of events. To authentically represent the 'substance' of the Holocaust experience, "its density" (Semprun 1998: p. 13), to make imaginable that which is perceived as unimaginable, required both the perspective and the artistry which, for Semprun, only a fictional text could provide. Thus authentic translation of memory is achievable for "those able to shape their evidence into an artistic object, a space of creation" (Semprun 1998: p. 13).

Semprun's words, I would argue, defined the work of all survivor writers who used fiction as a conduit for memory. Fiction provided a site of translation that ultimately

refuted the ineffability and unimaginability of the Holocaust; terms that have been seen as conditioning the reader's engagement with this history and that are a central feature of canonical Holocaust discourse (2). Fiction enabled a rendering of experience that encountered and laid bare the "density" (Semprun 1998: p. 13) of the event. This encounter, in narrative, is central to the enactment of the Laugh of Merlin and its effect on the reader in survivor texts. Fiction enabled the survivor to structure the telling of their experience in such a way as to confront and implicate the reader through a collision between their preconceived idealisations and hopes and the actuality of the event. The result is a glimpse of the "inside" (Semprun 1993: p. 21) of the survivor's camp mentality that is reflected back upon the contemporary subject.

The narrative context for the experience of reading Merlin's Laugh is illuminated by the work of theorist Wolfgang Iser, entitled *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. His text clarifies the relationship between the reader and the narrative and it provides a backdrop for understanding both the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh and the effect of this textual moment on the reader. Iser's description of fiction, as "a form of communication, since it brings into the world something which is not already there"(Iser 1978: p. 229), offers a parallel to the position of Jorge Semprun. Thus the creation of something that is not already present, within the terms of Holocaust history, could be described as the revelation of "essential truth" (Semprun 1998: p. 125), which Semprun felt could only be achieved through fiction and could not be communicated by the statistics alone. The element of creative transmission that Iser described also illuminates the ways in which literature produces meaning and response within the imagination of the reader as it reveals the possibilities of fiction as a site for future translation of Holocaust memory.

Central to Iser's theoretical position is an examination of the relationship between author, reader and text. In Iser's schema, the production of meaning does not reside wholly in the domain of the author, or of the reader, but is rather "an interaction of the two" (Iser 1978: p. 21). This relationship is dynamic in nature and although it is based upon and, to a certain extent, influenced by the imaginative connection between the reader and the text, it is not wholly conditioned by it. Iser argues:

> The reader's reception of the text is not based on identifying two different experiences (old versus new) but on the interaction between the two
> (Iser 1978: p. 132).

In survivor texts, this interaction constitutes the collision of the survivor's memory with the contemporary imagination of the uninitiated reader. This imaginative connection

means that although the reader is "outside" (Semprun 1993: p. 21) Holocaust experience, they "are situated inside the literary text" (Iser 1978: p. 109): the described world of the survivor's narrative. Where this inside/outside perspective threatens to overwhelm the reader, both as a feature of the text and of the process of reading, they continue to perform what Iser describes as "consistent interpretation or gestalt" (Iser 1978: p. 119).

Gestalt works with and in spite of the text. Each sign contains within it the possibility of more than one dominant meaning, as it is translated within the reader's imagination. Each sign must therefore be joined, linked together, to sustain consistency. This process of ensuring consistency within the imagination of the reader is on-going and is continually influenced by the familiar. Although the reader's inherent belief system is relegated to the past by the presence of the text and the act of reading, that same belief system will play a major role in determining the significance of each sign and by extension the gestalt of the reading experience. As Iser argues:

> The role proscribed by the text will be stronger, but the reader's own disposition will never disappear totally . . . even though we lose awareness of these experiences while we read, we are still guided by them unconsciously (Iser 1978: p. 37).

The role these belief systems play in determining the reader's response to the text is crucial to the meaning assigined to the narrative. Iser argues:

> They [the reader's belief systems] will influence the gestalt we form and we will tend to leave out of account a number of other possibilities which our selective decisions have helped to formulate but have left on the fringes (Iser 1978: p. 126).

Within the terms of a Holocaust text the readers' preconceived idealisations and store of implicit hopes and desires can therefore be seen as playing a central role in relation to the act of reading, influencing their gestalt at a basic level as they progress through the text.

However at each stage of the reading process, Iser argues, there exists an indeterminacy that relies upon the dualities of ascribed meaning, influenced by the reader's own belief systems, and the inside/outside position of the reader in relation to the text. Thus:

> The meaning of a literary work remains related to what the printed text says, but requires the creative imagination of the reader to put it all together (Iser 1978: p. 142).

Once the active participation of the reader in the assignment of meaning is recognised, then the narrative strategy of the survivor's text can be seen as able to encouraging the

readers' gestalt while, at the same time, being able to react against it. A confrontation between the readers' expectations or desires and the survivors' experience can therefore be enacted. As Iser comments:

> They [narrative strategies] can be devised in such a way that the range of virtual possibilities . . . will be eclipsed during the process of the text (Iser 1978: p. 127).

In Iser's schema meaning is therefore not simply inscribed by the text, but rather the narrative creates a series of manipulations and guiding symbols that can conform to or contradict the influence of the reader's expectations, hopes and desires in the ongoing process of gestalt.

The relationship between the reader and the fictional Holocaust text is conditioned by the narrational future knowledge, both of the experience and of the contemporary perception of it, that the survivor's dual perspective brings to the creation of the text. This knowledge shapes the construction of the text, functioning as part of the writer's narrative strategy, and enables the confrontation between the reader's sensibilities and the representation of Holocaust memory. It is in these terms that survivors create the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh. The impact of this moment cannot be underestimated as meaning is internalised and personalised within the imagination of the reader. The fact that this confrontation is enacted within the mind of the reader is vital for, as Iser argues, there is no escape from one's own imagination (3) and the result is a textual presence that exists beyond the physical act of reading.

Within the terms of Iser's theoretical reading, the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh can be therefore seen as the result of a narrative strategy designed specifically to interrupt and, in its extreme incarnations, undo the gestalten process undertaken by the reader. Its enactment is made possible by the manipulation of the figure of the reader, consciously undertaken by the survivor, within the terms of the narrative. It alters irrevocably the reader's understanding of what is given and what is 'hidden' within the text, and the ways in which contemporary assumptions or preconceived ideals influence the choices inherent in the act of creating a consistent gestalten. The creation of meaning in these terms becomes a twofold enterprise, structured by the text but produced and experienced by the reader. The blanks and negations (4) of a text, metaphor and simile, the artistic tools of fiction, all work to create and redefine meaning within the crucible that the imagination and pre-existing belief system of the reader provide.

Thus an examination of the narrative strategy of Merlin's Laugh enables a better understanding of the possibilities inherent in fictional narratives, to effect change and to

create alternative meanings to those presupposed by the uninitiated reader. Within the terms of a fictional text, Iser's work also illuminates the enactment of Merlin's Laugh as being tied not simply to factual knowledge but also to imaginative experience. As Alan Rosenberg argues:

> Facts can be absorbed without their having any impact on the way in which we understand the world we live in. Facts in themselves do not make a difference; it is the understanding of them that makes the difference
> (Rosenberg and Myers 1988: p. 382).

The enactment of Merlin's Laugh in survivor fiction therefore alters the terms of the readers' understanding of themselves and their world, as it stands in the shadow of Holocaust history. Its enactment can result in the redefinition of the reader's imaginative conceptualisation of the event, as this narrative strategy actively engages and confronts their preconceptions and idealisations. The experience of reading Merlin's Laugh challenges readers to radically reconstitute their gestalt, the meaning they ascribe to the text and the expression of that meaning within their imagination. As Iser argues:

> Suddenly we find ourselves detached from our own world, to which we are inextricably tied, and able to perceive it as an object. And even if this detachment is only momentary, it may enable us to apply the knowledge we have gained . . . so that we can view our own world as a thing 'freshly understood' (Iser 1978: p. 140).

I have referred to Iser's work in detail, as it provides a theoretical framework in which both the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh and its effect on the reader can be clearly seen. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh can expose the reader to the limits of meaning and significance as they are experienced in relation to Holocaust texts. Iser's work, in these terms, illuminates the power and clarity of survivor fictions as it provides a framework through which the experience of reading Merlin's Laugh and the terms of its creation can be understood. Its application to survivor fictions is exemplified in the stories of Tadeusz Borowski in *This Way For The Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*.

Borowski's tales of Auschwitz life are now appreciated as some of the finest in the canon of Holocaust literature (5). They are "one of the cruellest of testimonies to what men did to men, and a pitiless verdict that anything can be done to a human being" (Borowski 1976: p. 12).

His stories represent an engagement with both the memory of the experience of Auschwitz and the problematic nature of contemporary understanding which, as Borowski's

comments cited earlier indicate, are a central feature of his text. It is the confrontation between the reader's preconceived idealisations and the reality that Borowski described that conditions the enactment of Merlin's Laugh and defines the reading experience.

The title story begins:

> All of us walked around naked. The delousing is finally over, and our striped suits are back from the tanks of Cyclone B solution, an efficient killer of lice in clothing and of men in gas chambers (Borowski 1976: p. 29).

For the reader the sense of dislocation is immediate, created by the initial example of Merlin's Laugh, which is enacted by the irony of Borowski's commentary. Described matter-of-factly by the narrating voice of Kapo Tadek, the scene is given no framing reference, no historical location. Readers are given no introduction to life in Auschwitz but are rather thrust into it, left to fend for themselves, in a place depicted with a detachment that appears incongruous within the terms of the horror being described. This positioning of the reader is immediate, at the point of contact between reader and text, and is continually reinforced throughout the narrative. Thus:

> The reader becomes his [Borowski's] material, a sensibility whose premises about character and conduct will be disorganised by the experience of reading and reformulating after absorbing the substance of the artist's unorthodox vision (Langer 1982: p. 105).

The manipulation of the readers' contemporary sensibilities and, by extension their gestalt, is used to great effect within the first story. Cinematic in its scope, it describes Tadek's attempt to 'organise' new shoes for himself by joining a Canada detail, who were charged with the responsibility of clearing the cattle trucks of the new arrivals and their belongings. As the transports roll in, the narrative pace draws the reader in, as Tadek becomes increasingly tired, until finally he is hurrying the victims to their deaths. The reader experiences the action solely from the perspective of a character involved in the selection process, an inversion of the narrative structure of the descriptions of arrival at Auschwitz inherent in first person testimonial accounts (6). The full force of the depersonalisation of the victims is therefore experienced by the readers through their imaginative connection with Kapo Tadek and the profound lack of human empathy that defines the Canada detail's engagement with those about to die. "I feel no pity. I am not sorry they are going to the gas chamber. Damn them all!" (Borowski 1976: p. 40).

There is no acclimatisation, no relief from the horrific banality with which the scene is described:

> Several other men are carrying a small girl with only one leg . . .They throw her on the truck on top of the corpses. She will burn alive along with them (Borowski 1976: p. 46).

It is in this passage, in the description of the little girl and the emotions that it provokes in the reader, that the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh can be seen. As the reader responds to the plight of the child emotionally and intellectually a tension is created between the desire for relief from the horror of the scene, the possibility of rescue for the child, which the reader hopes for and expects regardless of their knowledge of Holocaust history and the actuality of the girl's death. These desires, recognised by the survivor writer, can therefore be seen as influencing the reader's response to the scene. This recognition functions as part of the narrative strategy that then irrevocably alters the readers' gestalten, conditioned by their emotional response, through the description of the reality that Borowski experienced. The reader is confronted with the reality of the Holocaust in the textual moment of the Laugh: the description of the girl's death.

Borowski's description of the selection process elicits both hope and pity from the reader. However, this emotional response to the scene is implicitly questioned and denied through a textual confrontation with an existence which inverted meaning and understanding and which challenges the readers' understanding of these concepts. The detachment with which the child's death is depicted illuminates the normality of such an event within the terms of life in Auschwitz. It is the readers' experience of Merlin's Laugh that alters the value and assignment of meaning as it violates the possibility (which conditions the readers' gestalt) of an idealised alternative outcome for the little girl. The readers' relationship to Kapo Tadek, their reliance upon the narrator as a guide, increases the impact of this confrontational moment, as they are tied to the perspective of one implicated by the crime which he witnesses (7). Thus for the reader, the essential poverty of concepts like 'hope' and 'humanity' when applied to Auschwitz can be imaginatively experienced as well as described in narrative.

In these terms, the effect of narrational future knowledge on the construction of the text and the enactment of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh can be clearly seen. The shock, the dislocation of the reader's sensibilities, define the break between narrator and reading subject. For Kapo Tadek, the death of the child is commonplace, for the reader it is traumatic. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh, in these terms, creates a moment of clarity within the narrative that is designed, conversely, to achieve within the reader a point of total confusion. Every emotional investment made by the reader, their contemporary

"disposition" (Iser 1978: p. 37) is overwhelmed by the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. The reader is therefore left in a state of vulnerability and without a textual anchor:

> 'What's the trouble, Moise?' I said . . . I've got some new pictures of my family.' 'That's good!' . . . 'Good? Hell! I've sent my own father to the oven! . . . Now tell me what's so good about my having the pictures?' We laughed. (Borowski 1976: p. 128).

The devastation of Moise's family and his ironic response to the photographs he finds underpin the enactment of the Laugh. The incongruity of his response, within the terms of post-Holocaust life, devastates the readers' perceived understanding of the text and their relationship to it. The irony of the commentary is not related to a comic sensibility and it is not written primarily to make the reader laugh. Rather the irony confronts the reader with the distance that exists between the contemporary conceptualisation of Holocaust history and the survivors' experience of it. It reveals the radically different terms of life as it was experienced in a death camp. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh forces the reader's consciousness into a confrontation with the reality of Holocaust memory. It is a confrontation that conditions the reader's relationship to the narrator and, by extension, Holocaust history.

The use of literal laughter and irony as features of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh is significant. The act of laughter functions explicitly in all the texts discussed as an inversion of the terms of humour and the reader's understanding of it. As with Moise's response to the discovery of family photographs, irony can illuminate the disparity between the reader's conceptualisation of the Holocaust and the survivor's experience of it through an inversion of the concept and accepted norms of humour. The extremity and unexpectedness of irony within the terms of the Holocaust landscape condition its use within the narrative construction of Merlin's Laugh. Thus when literal laughter underpins Merlin's Laugh, it also illuminates the conditions of life during the Holocaust and the effect upon the survivor through the extreme variance between what the reader understands as laughable and what the characters finds amusing:

> You snicker, amused at the sight of a man in such a big hurry to get to the gas chamber (Borowski 1976: p. 95).

As Terrence Des Pres argues:

> It is not that his [Borowski's] laughter is comic, but that an elementary human response is out of place, has become ridiculous and wild
> (cited by Lang 1988: p. 219).

The use of literal laughter and irony, their role in survivor texts and in the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, does not imply a simple recognition of the horror or humour, but rather underpins the type of challenge to the contemporary reading subject's preconceived ideals and perceived understanding that the experience of reading Merlin's Laugh creates. The disparity between the reader's implicit desire for redemption or relief and the reality of Holocaust life, as depicted by the survivor, enabled the wrtiter to exploit this disparity as a feature of their narrative strategy. It is then used to expose readers to their own limits of tolerable understanding, re-investing language and the experience described with the meanings assigned to them during the Holocaust.

This effect in Borowski's stories is reinforced, as James Young argues, by the way in which they remain tied to the language of the camps, even when, as in the story 'The January Offensive', the narrative describes a time after liberation. Young argues:

> Camp referential . . . metaphors keep both the writer's and the reader's mind fenced into the camp (Young 1990: p. 104).

Thus as language, metaphor and analogy tie the reader inexorably to the camp mentality, reflected in the narrating persona of Kapo Tadek, the enactment of the Laugh of Merlin makes the variance between post-Holocaust life and the realities of the camp explicit. It illuminates the perceived break between the contemporary consciousness and the survivor's memory and experience of the Holocaust and uses it to radically alter the reader's gestalt. The narrator that Borowski created therefore represents "a consciousness that in itself has become subject to the norms of the camp" (Young 1990: p. 104). Through the identification of the reader with this consciousness, Borowski implicitly questions the reader's understanding of the experience of camp life and its effects. This imaginative connection also enabled Borowski to examine and reflect upon, for the reader, the conditions that created the mentality he depicted.

Although this representation of the survivor has a profound effect on the reader, there remains a distance between them that cannot be bridged simply by the imagination. Thus the enactment of Merlin's Laugh is located in the moment where the distance between the survivor and the reader, an implicit feature of their narrative strategy, is made explicit. The reader's expectation is heightened and in need of an outcome other than the history that the survivor then recounts. The manipulation of this distance is made possible by the survivor's narrational future knowledge. The enactment of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh therefore challenges every normative moral or emotional response that they may formulate. To make a judgement on any of the participants in the scenes Borowski describes becomes impossible. Thus:

> In the absence of a guide through this region of moral ambiguity, the distinction between the degraded and the inhuman remains subtle and elusive (Ezrahi 1980: p. 56).

One example of this stripping away of any moral criteria of judgement can be seen in the story 'Auschwitz, Our Home (A Letter)'. The letter, a fictional note to Tadeusz's fiancée, who was imprisoned in the women's camp, stands as a central address within the text as a whole. In these terms, the fictional aspects of Borowski's stories enabled him to discuss the philosophical questions that underpin the entire collection. The letter therefore exemplifies the power of fiction as a space of mediation between the survivor as writer and the experience as memory, which provided the genesis of the tales. The structure of the letter, a stylised, formal address made intimate by the nature of the relationship between the writer and his loved one, also allows for a discursive rendition of experience that reconnects the events described to a world outside the camp, now tainted by its existence. This story therefore defines the variance between the post-Holocaust sensibility which the readers, as Borowski the author implicitly acknowledged, brings to the narrative as they read, and the effect of camp life upon the survivors. As a result, Borrowski revealed for the reader the spiritual void that was not only enforced by the system of life within the camp but was also a necessary condition of survival. "We remain as numb as trees when they are cut down, or stones as they are being crushed" (Borowski 1976: p. 138).

Borowski's words echo those of another survivor writer, Primo Levi, who described this condition in his work *The Periodic Table*:

> I must have developed a strange callousness if I then managed not only to survive but also to think, to register the world around me . . . in an environment infected by the daily presence of death (Levi 1996: p. 139).

For Borowski, callousness was both a condition of life from the forever altered perception of a Holocaust survivor (7) and a vital part of the narrative. The callousness, exemplified by the detached narrational tone, does not allow the reader any faith in conventional belief systems that protect and define humanity.

In 'Auschwitz, Our Home', Borowski established the vista of Holocaust experience and then interrogated it, altering irrevocably the testimonial element within the stories. Thus no part of Borowski's experience was left unchanged. Each story, each question, redefined the inquiry as it created new meaning from the collision between testimony and imaginative rendering. The story can be read as representing, in microcosm, the underlying project of the text as it expresses the artist's personal interrogation of his

experience. It is perhaps only in this way that Borowski was able to tell his own portion of the sad fame that is Auschwitz history.

For Borowski, as for other survivors, one effect of the "concentration-camp mentality" (Borowski 1976: p. 176) was that many human responses and emotions were stripped bare and revealed to be fraudulent. This realisation is reinforced for the readers throughout the stories and it is central to the moments of Merlin's Laugh. The duality of concepts like 'hope', which function as an idealisation that enabled survival as it paradoxically appeared to curb the possibility of resistance, is therefore made explicit within the narrative. This is exemplified by Tadek's comments to his fiancée:

> We were never taught to give up hope and that is why today we perish in the gas chambers (Borowski 1976: p. 122).

This statement challenges the readers, for whom hope functions as a feature of their own preconceived beliefs, to glimpse for a moment the workings of the Holocaust mentality. Their partial understanding is exemplified textually through the duality that exists between the ways in which they conceptualise terms like 'hope' and 'survival' and the experience of these concepts within the landscape of a Holocaust narrative. This revision, not of language but of meaning, is one of the most powerful features of Borowski's text, illuminating the "density" of experience described previously by Semprun (Semprun 1998: p. 13). Thus, when Borowski comments, "I suspect, though, I will be marked for life" (Borowski 1976: p. 122), the words contain a clear analogy to the effects of reading his narrative and of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh. The clarity with which Borowski described life in Auschwitz and his ability to implicate the reader in a place defined by death results in a text that has the power to mark and confront the reader, as the experience marked the writer.

For Borowski, a Polish resistance fighter not threatened with immediate death in the gas chamber (8), bearing witness was complicated by the innate relationship between one man's survival and another man's death as it was enacted in Auschwitz. The relationship is made clear throughout the text. This aspect of Auschwitz existence is imaginatively experienced by the reader and influenced by the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. The impact of this moment is often conditioned by the imaginative implication of the reader, through the identification with a narrator who is presented as implicated in the crimes he witnessed. The narrative is also unflinching in its portrayal of the duality of death in Auschwitz, not as something that can be mourned but as a prerequisite of individual survival. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh can therefore reflect the confrontation of the partial understanding of the contemporary reader with this irony:

> For several days the entire camp will live off this transport . . . 'Sosnowiec-Bedzin' was a good, rich transport . . . The 'Sosnowiec-Bedzin' transport is already burning (Borowski 1976: p. 49).

Auschwitz in these terms implicates the entire world through the figure of the survivor who traversed the perceived divide between the world of the camps and the rest of society. Borowski's stories move between the past and the future of his Auschwitz present. It is this feature of the narrative strategy, the survivor's dual perspective that connects past, present and future, which also influences the creation of the narrating persona of Kapo Tadek, who was both victim and victimiser. It ensures that any drama, any sense of Tadek's loss of humanity, is fostered within the contemporary response of the reader. The reader's contemporary belief systems are therefore continuously at odds with the necessary callousness that Borowski required to survive the camp. It is the constant tensions between these two forces, the reader's 'normal' response and that of the survivor, that emanated from an experience in extremis, that enabled the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. It creates an awareness, within the reader, of a sense of loss; not only of human life but also of human dignity.

The closing sections of 'Auschwitz, Our Home' provide another powerful example of the Laugh of Merlin. In a conversation with a fellow inmate, Borowski exposed the way in which this history could overwhelm the subject at any moment, reflected back on the narrator, its impact doubled for the reader. In the exchange between Tadek and Abbie, a member of the Sonderkommando, readers finds in microcosm their own relationship to the narrator:

> 'We've figured out a new way to burn people. Want to hear about it?' . . . 'Congratulations', I said dryly and with very little enthusiasm. He burst out laughing and with a strange expression looked right into my eyes. 'Listen doctor, here in Auschwitz we must entertain ourselves in every way we can. Otherwise who could stand it?' (Borowski 1976: p. 142).

This portion of the story embodies the aspects of fiction, of artistry, which Borowski employed and which enabled his testimony, his 'truth', to be woven into the narrative. The scene is rendered without drama, as a moment of commonplace in daily camp life and is both stark and brutal in its telling. However the final comment made by Abbie to justify his laughter illuminates the type of confrontation, which defines the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, as a feature of the historical actuality, enacted in the variance between the attitudes of Tadek and Abbie. Thus the enactment of the Laugh seems unacceptable to the contemporary reader, enforced by the irony that conditions it.

For the reader, Abbie's words, and their position in the text, embody the uncertainty that reading Holocaust narratives engenders. Regardless of everything the reader has already encountered, the horrific nature of events described as commonplace throughout the stories, the shocked reaction of Kapo Tadek reinforces the effect of Abbie's words on the reader (while illuminating the extremity of human experience in Auschwitz). The exchange exemplifies Borowski's refusal to imbue any of his stories with a redemptive or noble stance, with any normative and therefore recognisable response, which ultimately could not exist within the death camp. As Lawrence Langer argues, "Holocaust memory redeems only when it falsifies" (Langer 1996: p. 35). In these terms Borowski's refusal to allow any redemptive feature into his narrative illuminates the reality of Holocaust experience.

It is also at this point that the story, as fiction, breaks down, revealing, through a violent meta-commentary, the "monstrous lie" (Borowski 1976: p. 142) that conditioned the exchange between the two men, Auschwitz and Borowski's forever changed view of the world. Borowski's nihilism (9), so often a feature of the detached narration, could not be sustained and and his commentary reveals the utter desolation of the self that was an inherent part of Holocaust experience. Thus "in the literature of atrocity no fiction can ever be completely that – a fiction" (Langer 1975: p. 91). In these terms, Abbie's response also provides a profound illustration of the shadow of untold horror that surrounds these stories; the echo of *le cri*.

The authenticity of Borowski's stories has led to some debate concerning the tales' generic classification as a fictional and therefore constructed text. Irving Howe notably argued that the detailed accuracy of the stories is such that the artistry of Borowski's work is almost unrecognisable to the reader and as a result the tales function, for the most part, as 'pure' testimony (10). Although it is possible to understand the position adopted by Howe, it is difficult to sustain such an argument in light of the contribution made by Borowski's art to the construction of the narrative and its effect upon the reader. It is exemplified by the many textual moments of Merlin's Laugh present in the text:

> 'Listen Henry are we good people?' . . . 'It is natural, predictable, calculated. The ramp exhausts you, you rebel – and the easiest way to relieve your hate is to turn against someone weaker. Why I'd even call it healthy'
> (Borowski 1976: p. 40).

Henry's words provide another example of Merlin's Laugh. The irony of using the term 'healthy' in relation to camp inmates challenges the reader to recognise the inversion of 'normal' values and ideals in Auschwitz and confronts them with the realities of survival.

The fictional dimension of Borowski's stories, his craft and artistry as a writer, conditioned both the narrative and the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh. As a result the imprint of *le cri*, of the nameless deaths of the Holocaust, is tangible in Borowski's stories. Thus, when irony is a feature of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, it is never at the expense of the dead but rather of the reader. Memory is therefore not recalled but relived, not past tense but present, heightening for the reader the confrontational aspect of the moment of the Laugh. As Alvin Rosenfeld argues:

> Much of the literature is painful and upsetting: at times it is disorientating; always when it is authentic, it is humbling (Rosenfeld 1988: p. 9).

Borowski's narrative tone, impersonal and detached, exemplifies just how ordinary the murder of innocents became for those within the camp system, even as he offered a fractured memorial to their existence. The normality of death in Auschwitz is reinforced, for the reader, by Borowski's pastoral descriptions, the implication of himself through the persona of Kapo Tadek, and the unceasing representation of normalised horror. This contributes to a narrative where death in Auschwitz is made explicit through its mundaneness, its everydayness. The positioning of the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh also illuminate the inherent lack of drama in the regime:

> Between two throw-ins in a soccer game, right behind my back, three thousand people had been put to death (Borowski 1976: p. 84).

Borowski's fiction was conditioned by a mentality which, once learned, could never be unlearned. He depicted the experience and the individual as stripped of all features that could provide any relief for the contemporary reader. It is a testament to his art that at no time does his reader become numb to the experiences he described. The positioning of Merlin's Laugh within the narrative ensures that the gestalt process of the reader is constantly being redefined. The narrative strategy that creates these textual moments therefore encourages a dialogue between the reader's post-Holocaust idealisations and the history described, implicating and challenging each assumption or response, as they are in turn revealed to be insubstantial (11).

While Borowski's stories remained tied to the camp experience and offer a detailed portrait of life in Auschwitz, fiction provided other writers with the space to reveal and describe the edges of the experience, the moments that led up to and surrounded the entrance into the camp. These texts offer examples of the way in which the uncertainty of translating Holocaust experience into narrative can be encountered and challenged through an examination of the 'smaller' details of experience that were often subsumed by the horror of the camps. Works like those of Ida Fink and Jorge Semprun illuminate the ways

in which Merlin's Laugh can also be enacted within narratives that focus on the daily experiences of inhumanity that define the Holocaust.

In her collection of stories, published in 1985 and entitled *A Scrap of Time and other Stories* Ida Fink drew the substance of her narratives from the unguarded, often forgotten instances of human response to the actuality of the Nazi threat. Fink's narrative implicitly constructs the terms of her readership as aware of the historical reality of the Holocaust and her stories function in the shadow of this knowledge, both her own and the reader's. As previously noted, the distance between the survivor writer and the uninitiated reader is not defined by an awareness of the actuality of the Holocaust but by the experience of living through it. It is this variance that conditions the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in all survivor texts, including Fink's, even as her stories function within the terms of the reader's awareness of the event. Although the stories provide a contrast to the explicit brutality of Borowski's narrative, they are as powerful; creating examples of Merlin's Laugh in a different yet equally effective way.

Unlike Borowski, Fink's stories are not defined by one narrating voice. Each story is individual, employing numerous characters. Each offers testimony to the event from a variety of unique perspectives such as a crippled woman exposed to the persecution of the Jews through the stories of her maid, or a ghetto inhabitant awaiting transportation. The chorus of voices and the pre- and post-Holocaust time frames employed by Fink provide the narrative with a structure that represents Holocaust memory through the 'hidden' stories that populate the fringes of experience and that would otherwise be lost to history. The fictional dimension of these stories, the imaginative element, enabled their reconstruction, as it provided a framework through which the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh could be enacted. The governing precepts of fiction as a generic classification, the element of imagination as opposed to re-creation that is necessary to reproduce these stories, do not undermine the efficacy of Fink's text (12). Whether they were drawn from personal remembrance or from the writer's imagination, the stories "constitute a roll-call of voices and dispel the anonymity of victimage" (Friedlander 1992: p. 325).

Perhaps one of the most powerful examples of this feature of Fink's text can be found in the story entitled 'A Spring Morning'. The story is conditioned by the variety of perspectives employed to recount a family's experience of persecution. Framed by an omniscient narrator, the multi-layered narration provides an insight not only into the final hours of the family but also into the validity of fiction as a means of translating these stories.

From the outset the reader is made aware that the narrative represents the final contact between the world and those selected to die. The arbitrary nature of their deaths is experienced by the reader through the ironic enactment of Merlin's Laugh. It is communicated through a description of the death march told by a local of the town who, "as the possessor of an Aryan grandmother . . . could stand there calmly and watch them in peace" (Fink 1987: p. 39). It is his presence that introduces a second narrative strand, which frames the highly personalised and devastating family story as an aside to the continuation of life. Thus Merlin's Laugh is a feature of the narration from the outset, explicitly drawing attention to the realities that shadow the story through the juxtaposition of the experience of witness and the victim. The necessity of the bystander's essentially dismissive commentary is therefore made clear through the omniscient narration:

> Thanks to him . . . there have survived to this day shreds of sentences, echoes of final laments (Fink 1987: p. 39).

The irony of the role of the disinterested bystander, as a witness to the final moments of one Jewish family's life, haunts the story, even as it draws attention to the necessity of fiction in telling their story. As the narration shifts its focus and time frame, moving backwards to the hours prior to the family's final march, the reader witnesses their preparations, in a sense eavesdropping on the private conversation of the husband and wife as they contemplate their child and their immediate future. The dialogue between the parents through the cipher of the omniscient narration offers a testimony to the inadequacy of language. This feature of the text and the historical experience is illustrated by the "if only . . ." (Fink 1987: p. 42) questions they both ask of each other. The tangible sense of fear and its impact on the family is also evoked through the words of the child, who immediately recognises the reality that confronts them.

The reader's intensely personal identification with the family, encouraged by the omniscient narrator, creates a tension that the contemporary reader's idealisations, reinforced through the desperate words of the father to his child, can do little to dissipate. As the father makes a final attempt to secure his child's safety, the reader shares his hope in this possibility, however intangible:

> It was only a few steps to the churchyard gate; the crush of people was greatest there and salvation most likely . . . He walked on, whispering a kind of prayer, beseeching God and man (Fink 1987: p. 46).

The reader's intimate identification with the family irrevocably influences the gestalt process and conditions the confrontational aspect of the Laugh. As the father sets the child down, encouraging her to walk towards the church, the reader is drawn into the

web of a heroic narrative wherein at the last moment the father may find some consolation. Yet this denouement, while implicitly offered as a possibility through the words of the father, does not reflect the reality of Holocaust experience and the reader experiences the enactment of Merlin's Laugh as the narrative bears witness to the murder of the child. Its enactment is tied to the moment when the reader's expectations and the desire for the Holocaust to be something other than needless death is confronted by the reality of the past.

Fink's implicit recognition and manipulation of hope and desire within the reader affect both the tale and its telling. Metaphor and simile double the impact of the child's death, so that the reader imaginatively 'hears' the shot as well as reads it:

> He was still whispering when the sound of a shot cracked like a stone hitting water . . . At the edge of the sidewalk lay a small bloody rag
> (Fink 1987: p. 46).

The naturalism of tone and description ensure that, while the reader does not follow the man to his death, this in no way detracts from the horror of the piece. As the father carries his dead child, the reader is once again deserted by the omniscient narrating voice, left to face the dualities and tragedies explored by the story alone:

> He answered loud and clear . . . and then softly to her 'forgive me'. 'Don't be afraid, I'll carry you', he whispered. The procession moved on like a gloomy grey river flowing out to sea (Fink 1987: p. 47).

The drama and the emotional response the story provokes lie in the explicit mundaneness of the deaths of innocents. The father's guilt concerning his own hopes for his child's survival reinforces the horrifying banality, in the introduction of the story, of the Aryan villager who, safe from persecution, finds madness in the words of the man condemned to die, as he, in turn, finds madness in a world that has condemned his family. Thus Fink's text exemplifies the ways in which enactment of the Laugh of Merlin makes explicit the moment when heroic memory is demythologised, undone: the undoing witnessed and imaginatively experienced through the narrative.

Fink's stories, like Borowski's, also bear witness to the strange callousness described by Primo Levi. The contribution that this aspect of the survivor's narrational future knowledge makes to the reader's experience of both the text and the Laugh of Merlin can be seen in two of Fink's stories, 'Behind The Hedge' and 'The Key Game'.

It is through the words of Agafia, maid and helpmeet to the crippled narrator in 'Behind The Hedge', that Fink encouraged the reader to recognise the callousness that Levi described as a prerequisite of memory and bearing witness. The desire for distance, a

central feature of post-Holocaust memory, is therefore mirrored in the bystander's response. This mirroring also provided the stories with a central theme, which links secondary characters like the villager in 'A Spring Morning' with the woman Agafia cares for. The juxtaposition between 'seeing' and 'witnessing', defined through the exchange between the two women, bears analogy to the role of the readers and their relationship to the Holocaust text:

> I can't listen to that, I'm sick. Spare me . . . Nowadays you have to have a tough tenderness. Tough, any other kind isn't worth shit (Fink 1987: p. 18).

Like Agafia, who witnesses the crimes of the Nazis at first hand, the readers are an integral part of the process of witnessing the narrative. They represent the "empathetic listener" (Feldman and Laub 1992: p. 68) without whom the story cannot exist (13). However, without the tough tenderness Agafia describes the reader, like Agafia's employer, maybe moved to turn away from the narrative.

It is only as Agafia's narration continues that the reader realises not only the necessity of the type of response she describes but also the way in which the desire for distance conflicts with the role of the witness. Her description of the scene of murder just outside the town reinforces and defines for the reader the horrific nature of death as enacted by the Nazis. "They didn't feel anything anymore. They were dead before they died" (Fink 1987: p. 19). Thus, when nothing remains of the victims, it is left to the tough tenderness of Agafia to testify to their presence. "Something kept me there and said to me: 'Watch. Don't shut your eyes' " (Fink 1987: p. 19). It is in Agafia's words that the reader finds the plea for remembrance which echoes through all survivor testimony, regardless of its genre.

It is through the process of echoing that the different narratives highlight, in a multiplicity of ways, central features of Holocaust experience. The themes of Fink's stories resonate throughout the collection. Each story contributes to and illuminates aspects of the others. This feature of the text as a whole creates a sense of unity and completeness that underpins the individual narratives and heightens the impact of the moments of Merlin's Laugh. Agafia's description of the dead and dying is echoed in the story 'The Key Game' where a father, rehearsing his son for the inevitable arrival of the Nazis, is confronted with his own death in the words of his child. Once again it is the commentary of the omniscient narrator that locates the enactment of Merlin's Laugh:

> 'And Papa?' . . . 'He's dead', the child answered and threw himself at his father, who was stood right beside him . . . but who was already long dead to the people who would really ring the bell (Fink 1987: p. 38).

Recognition by children of the reality of the Nazi enterprise is a recurrent leitmotif in Fink's stories. Their innocence defines the clash between the actuality of the event and the hope and denial that the adult characters display, to varying degrees, throughout the stories. The clarity of the child's perspective as a site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh heightens its impact, as it reveals to readers the influence of these desires in their own reading. Thus the father's hope is placed in relation to the overwhelming nature of the Shoah through the moment of Merlin's Laugh. The Laugh, enacted by the comments of the child, is then reinforced by the omniscient narrator and is clearly stated as the foregone conclusion of the Nazi genocide. The terms of survival are therefore experienced by the reader as having no links to a heroic myth or to any ordering logic, but as something that exists in the imagination of the unknowing father and the uninitiated reader.

For Fink, the echoes of self-deception as opposed to the tough tenderness required to recognise the truth were an ever-present feature of life for both the victims and those characters, like Agafia, who populate the edges of these stories. It was their very existence, their presence in the narrative, which defines and illuminates the highly individual stories that make up the whole. Fink used these secondary characters as part of her narrative strategy to invite that possibility of hope, of a redemptive urge, within the reader, that the enactment of Merlin's Laugh then reveals as essentially fraudulent. This is a central feature of Fink's vignettes and underpins the efficacy with which she was able to manipulate and then expose readers to the misconceptions that they bring to the act of reading. Fink's narrational future knowledge ensured that the essential 'truth' of her stories could counter contemporary revisioning, as the textual moment of the Laugh confronts and challenges the reader's gestalten.

This effect can be clearly seen in the story 'Traces'. The question of memory and its interpretation is exemplified through the anonymous woman's desire to testify to the bravery of children who denied a command by the SS to identify their parents. She agrees to tell her story, as a memorial to their courage. Once again Fink implicitly encouraged the reader's idealisations in relation to the story that the woman recounts. However, through the enactment of the Laugh of Merlin, embodied in the final line of commentary by the omniscient narrating voice, the narrative denies the possibility of redemption. The woman recognises that the act of courage she describes, so alive in her memory and vital to her testimony, resulted in the children's deaths, rather than their survival. Once again the reader's gestalt, conditioned by the text's depiction of innocence and courage, is derailed in the moment of Merlin's Laugh: "After the break she will tell them how they were all shot" (Fink 1987: p. 137). The enactment of the Laugh ensures that the woman's testimony does

not allow closure or any element of relief to invade the narrative. Its enactment is conditioned by the variance between the reality to which the woman testifies and the alternative conclusion that the reader may hope for and that the courage of the children, in settings other than the landscape of the Holocaust, might allow.

The dehumanisation of the victims of Nazi genocide is also a central feature of Fink's narratives. For the reader, this stripping away of humanity is revealed through the reconstruction of the experiences of the persecuted juxtaposed with those of the text's secondary characters. This juxtaposition creates an awareness of the victims' dignity and humanity that is often lost in the statistical evidence of the Holocaust (14) and implicitly questions any assumptions the reader may have concerning the genesis of the Holocaust. While Fink's secondary characters may not have participated actively in the killing, the reader is constantly made aware that, through their passive and even exploitative response to the event, they were inevitably implicated by it.

The restoration of the individual through an imaginative re-creation conditions the juxtaposition of persecutor and persecuted within the narrative. The divide between those who lived with the threat of extermination and those who witnessed it is implicit and is defined by the power relations at play within the stories. Interior monologues and the omniscient narration create an intimacy between the reader and the central characters, like the family in 'A Spring Morning', referred to earlier, which enables the full force of the horror of the depersonalisation of the victims to be translated through, for example, the variance between the humanity of the family and the inhumane condescension of the villager (15).

Fink's vignettes repeatedly illustrate that depersonalisation was not restricted to the death camp environment, but defined life as a whole for the victims during this period. The effect of Merlin's Laugh on the reader is conditioned, in these stories, by the way in which Fink's narrative demands that the reader recognise that the responsibility and inhumanity belonged entirely to those who enforced it. In 'Aryan Papers', a young woman is coerced into exchanging sex for Kennkarten for herself and her mother. The reader's understanding of the event is defined through the girl's 'thoughts', her desperate desire for the papers. The aftermath, a conversation between the man and his friend, exposes both the inadequacy of the contemporary reader's level of understanding or judgement in relation to the episode and the stain that this left, not on the victims, but on the perpetrators:

> 'Since when can't virgins be whores?' 'You're quite a philosopher', the other man said, and they both burst out laughing (Fink 1987: p. 68).

Reinforced by the taut narrative structure, the enactment of Merlin's Laugh is underpinned by the incongruity of the men's literal laughter. The reader is forced into a confrontation with this central feature of Holocaust history, the depersonalisation of the victims, even prior to their entry into the camps, and the collusion of the bystander in the enactment of the Holocaust.

Thus the reconstruction of memory, the scraps, the forgotten instances which are often overwhelmed by the horror, but which in themselves created and completed the experience, present the reader with moments of textual realisation throughout Fink's stories. Fink used fiction as a locus for a series of voices through which the burden of memory and of bearing witness could be addressed. She appropriated the stories which were a feature of the Holocaust landscape and yet go unrecognised in the statistical evidence of the crime. Her stories also represent an attempt, through the multiplicity of narrating presences, to give a voice to those who cannot bear witness for themselves. The reader's experience of the Laugh is therefore conditioned by this encounter with the lost voices that are characterised within the narrative by the layering and shadowing inherent in Fink's text.

Like the witness in her story, Fink and her fellow survivor writers could tell these stories and construct their narratives in this way precisely because they survived. Fiction as a space of mediation provided the survivor author with a means of re-investing the lives of the victims with meaning. Thus the stories create knowledge and in their own way bear witness. Yet it is a type of knowledge that must be experienced imaginatively, encountered from a variety of angles, if understanding is to be possible. For the reader, the reception and assignment of meaning in these terms becomes more complex and can no longer be defined simply by their inherent desire for distance from the text. The textual moments of Merlin's Laugh in the stories challenge and redefine the gestalt of the reader. The reader's experience of the stories is therefore conditioned by the uncertainty and partial understanding that the stories both expose and engender. The result, as Lawrence Langer argues, is "an art that is rich in its unsparing demands on our sacred beliefs" (Langer 1995: p. 7).

The actual death of the Jewish people and the concentration camp experience acts in Fink's stories as an underlying trope, figuring the stories but not overshadowing the horror that each fragment offers. In this way the trace of *le cri*, the untranslatable cry of the dead, surrounds each story without overwhelming the essentially individual nature of the characters and events described.

Jorge Semprun's text *The Cattle Truck* also characterised the camp experience as a 'heart of darkness' which structured the novel without overwhelming it. The novel, published originally in France in 1963 (16), is in essence the story of Semprun's journey to Buchenwald and his friendship with the guy from Semur. The text echoes, in its themes, the works previously discussed. However, this novel offers another unique perspective, illuminating the ways in which fiction as a genre can provide survivors with the breakthrough of imagination necessary to an authentic depiction of their experience.

Semprun's narrative progresses in a non-sequential, non-chronological order, including stories of partisan life and loss, imprisonment in Buchenwald and liberation. The essentially modernist structure of the text constantly inverts a linear narrative and "deliberately violates normal sequence without substituting any definable, alternative temporal scheme" (Langer 1975: p. 285). As a result, Semprun's narrative constantly draws attention to itself as a construction and makes explicit a central theme of the text: how to shape and reform memory in narrative to illuminate the "density" (Semprun 1998: p. 13) of his experience.

Semprun's absolute endorsement of fiction as a conduit for his memory was made explicit in his autobiography *Literature or Life*, published in 1998. The text detailed many of the same incidents recalled in *The Cattle Truck* and employed a similar narrative tone and movement. The text can be read as a companion piece to the original work and it reveals the extent to which Semprun's imaginative engagement with his own history and his understanding of the contemporary reader's sensibilities functioned as primary features of the narrative strategy. Thus the central relationship of the narrative, between Gerard and the guy from Semur, was, in reality, a fictional construct:

> I invented the guy from Semur to keep me company . . . I invented our conversations: reality often needs some make-believe, to become real . . . to be made believable. To win the heart and mind of the reader
> (Semprun 1998: p. 262).

The paradox of Semprun's text, the necessity of artifice, of imagination, to confront the reader with the truth of experience and memory, cuts to the heart of the issues of authentic representation that are a feature of the reception of all Holocaust texts. *Literature or Life* makes clear that, for Semprun, fictionalising his story, re-imagining it through the filter that fiction provided, was the only way to authentically translate his memory for his uninitiated audience.

Like Borowski, fiction allowed Semprun the distance necessary to confront his memories. This feature of the text is made explicit through his re-characterisation of

himself within the terms of the narrative. However, the reader is also made aware, through the layering of stories within the narrative, that the narrating presence provides a location for the conjoining of many other stories and individuals. Like Fink's female survivor in the story 'Traces', Semprun's narrative exists not only to detail personal experience, but also to leave traces of those who did not survive, their stories, of necessity, becoming his. Thus the journey and the friendship with the man from Semur stand in contrast to the post-Holocaust vision of the narrator.

The journey therefore reflects the assembling of human contact which is then juxtaposed within the narrative to reveal the effect of the Holocaust as literally removing the product of that contact; leaving the guy from Semur forever nameless. Fiction enabled Semprun to make this ambivalence, the pre- and post- Holocaust understanding of the survivor, a central feature of the narrative. In this way he was able to give the dead witness, in this case embodied by the fictional guy from Semur, a voice. As Semprun argues, "the returning ghosts must sometimes speak for those who have disappeared" (Semprun 1998: p. 136).

Although Semprun, a Spanish resistance fighter, was 'outside' Jewish experience of the Holocaust, his fictional narrative provided him with a means of describing the experience of those who lived under the constant threat of death. The characterisation of Hans, a German Jewish partisan, who Semprun makes clear in *Literature or Life* was also a fictional composite (17), allowed him to integrate Jewish experience into his narrative. This feature of the narrative is reinforced by Semprun's explicit positioning of himself as witness to the Jewish tragedy. One of the most powerful examples in the text can be seen in the deaths of Jewish children, which he recounts:

> Not as a story that has happened to me especially, but above all one that happened to the Jewish children from Poland (Semprun 1993: p. 163).

Semprun's Holocaust memory, and by extension the text he created, was also influenced by his communist and partisan affiliations. The theme of brotherhood, defined by his relationship with the guy from Semur and the partisan exploits that Semprun recounted, is reinforced for the reader through a recognition of the fractured brotherhood that survival created (18). This sense of a shared understanding that is the survivors alone is made explicit through the juxtaposition of the normalcy of the camp, as seen through the eyes of Gerard, with the incomprehension of those outside. This juxtaposition provides an analogy to the experience of the uninitiated reader who, while aware of the Holocaust, likewise remains outside the experience. The historical variance between those who did

not experience the Holocaust and the survivor underpins many of the moments of Merlin's Laugh present in Semprun's narrative:

> I have to get these young ladies from Passy out of here . . . I sympathise with them, it can't be much fun to arrive in a beautiful car . . . and stumble onto this pile of hardly presentable corpses (Semprun 1993: p. 75).

Literal laughter and irony also feature as an explicit act of defiance within the terms of Semprun's narrative. This confrontational feature of the text contributes to the enactment of the Laugh of Merlin and heightens its effect. From the opening pages, the narrator's irony and laughter function as a defining element of his experience and understanding and is a key feature of the enactment of the Laugh of Merlin within the text (19). The opening description immediately forces the reader into a confrontation with the perspective that Semprun occupied:

> Advancing towards the motionless corpses we are destined to be. I burst out laughing (Semprun 1993: p. 1).

Like Borowski's first story, the beginning of the text is given no framing reference. Semprun's use of laughter is immediate and harshly ironic, providing an added dimension to the confrontational enactment of Merlin's Laugh and conditioning, from the outset, the reader's gestalten.

For Semprun, as for Borowski and Fink, the textual moments I have described as the Laugh of Merlin were central to the expression and representation of the conclusions he drew concerning his experience. Yet conclusions, and the comprehensive rendering of experience that the term suggests, often appear to be an undoing, a point at which the juxtaposition of memory-as-order, and experience-as-disorder is encompassed in one moment. As Langer argues:

> One motive behind the unique structure of Semprun's novel is to suggest that the voyage to Buchenwald and the experience within the camp has severed past from future . . . The mind radiates and returns without discovering any coherent form to connect these disparate realms of time (Langer 1975: p. 285).

Semprun used fiction to make explicit the difficulties that bearing witness engendered and the extremity of this experience is central to the structure of the narrative. Thus the variance between the survivor's experience and the reader's imaginative construction of the event is made explicit through this constantly shifting narrative focus. It is the explicit enunciation of this tension that often conditions the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in Semprun's text.

One example can be found in a long passage describing the execution of a Russian soldier, who is led to believe that he is being taken for a shower and given soap and a towel as proof of this. Semprun comments:

> When you have understood the simulacrum of the shower and the piece of soap, you will have understood the SS mentality (Semprun 1993: p. 71).

Yet, contained within this moment of understanding, there is also a rupture, recognisable only to the survivor. Once again the reader is forced to confront the reality of Holocaust history in the textual enactment of Merlin's Laugh, as Semprun juxtaposes his insight with the words, "but there's no point trying to understand the SS; it suffices to exterminate them" (Semprun 1993: p. 71). For Semprun, there existed a fundamental opposition between the mentality of the SS and the human consciousness and it is this variance that conditions the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. As his insight into the SS character appears to offer the reader a point of clarity or understanding, his subsequent words undermine this apparent coherence.

The opposition that Semprun identified marked the difference between murderer and victim and is seen in stark contrast later in the narrative when, in the hours after liberation, two young partisans capture an SS guard. Their decision not to kill him, although diametrically opposed to that of Semprun, provides the narrator with a brief moment of hope. Yet, in spite of this moment, the underlying theme of Semprun's narrative is one of devastation without resolution. Even as the young partisans seem able to escape with their humanity, for Gerard, "a veteran of the future" (Semprun 1993: p. 81), understanding the death experience and its effect on the individual provided little that could resolve the rupture between past and present inhabited by the survivor.

Semprun's narrative exemplifies the fact that understanding the effects of camp life provides little that could offer closure in memory. After describing the two extremes of behaviour that the camp elicited the narrator notes:

> Actually we didn't need the camps to understand that man is a being capable of the most noble as well as the most basest acts. How banal can you get! (Semprun 1993: p. 60)

The narrative, in both content and structure, is conditioned by Semprun's realisation quoted above. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh confronts the reader with the truth of his experience; that the Holocaust cannot be seen in terms other than pointless waste. If, for Borowski, the victims died because they could not give up their hope, then for Semprun the bitter irony was that these deaths provided proof on a huge scale of a side of human nature that was already known. The textual moment of Merlin's Laugh – the pointed

recognition. "How banal can you get" (Semprun 1993: p. 60) – conditions the reader's understanding of the Semprun's Holocaust experience and ensures that the reader is left no doubt of the reality of Holocaust history.

Semprun's narrative functions as an act of memory in progress. The alteration of time and space that occurs without warning throughout the text means that the journey to Buchenwald becomes woven into the fabric of the novel. In the final chapter arrival and entry is therefore symbolised by a break from the narrating 'I'. For Semprun, the heart of darkness could only be approached in the third person, reinforcing the distance that the fictional structure of the narrative provided. As a result, Lawrence Langer argues:

> The central event of his novel finally seems to occur in a fourth and independent dimension of time, displacing or fusing the other three and asserting itself with a primacy that dramatises its uniqueness within familiar contexts of temporal reality (Langer 1975: p. 252).

Thus while Gerard's entrance into Buchenwald remains in some way separate from the rest of the narrative, signified by the change in the narrating voice, it is also interwoven into the narrative, juxtaposing at every turn the relationship between the individual and the world before and after the experience.

This feature of the experience is constantly reinscribed throughout the text and as a result Semprun's explicit use of his narrational future knowledge provided a retrospective insight into the tales the narrator tells:

> All right, I'm going. It's over. I'm leaving. I hope Hans and Michael are alive. I don't know that Hans is dead. I hope that Julien is alive. I don't know that Julien is dead (Semprun 1993: p. 76).

This overlapping of past and present makes explicit the dual perspective that the survivor inhabits and that enabled Semprun's narration to evoke the sense of dislocation necessary to examine the inexorable relation between the world of the camp and the world outside. In many of the linear, testimonial narratives of survivors, the moment of liberation marks a moment of relief for the reader (20), who is released from the descriptions of desolation and desecration that the testimony contains. Semprun, however, enmeshed this liberation in a recognition of loss, creating a tension wherein the reader's understanding of the terms of survival are irrevocably altered. His textual liberation is only ever glimpsed at throughout the narrative. It never overwhelms the fundamental trope of the journey. It is a journey that Semprun continuously returned to, re-made in his imagination. The narrative links that Semprun forged, between the inside of camp life and the outside world, ensured that the liberation of the textual self, the moment that offers the reader most hope of

achieving some form of mental comfort, is never available. The narrative structure and the moments of Merlin's Laugh, are therefore able to juxtapose the reader's emotional investment in the moment of liberation with the jarring reality of post-Holocaust life upon which all survivors comment: the continual presence of death and its memory (21):

> I used to run, in desperation, toward this quiet cozy place, but just as I got there . . . a sharp cry risen from the very depths of terror, unremittingly, seized me again, pulled me back, returned me to the reality of the nightmare of this voyage (Semprun 1993: p. 204).

The relationship between victim and oppressor, the necessity of the outside to create the inside of camp experience, is also examined in Semprun's text as the narrator argues:

> This village was not the outside, it was simply another aspect, another inner aspect of the society that had given birth to the German camps
> (Semprun 1993: p. 161).

In this moment Semprun used the radically altered sensibilities of the survivor, the result of his experience, to make a vital point of connection between the event and the society that fostered it. It is a society which contained, as does the reader, many of the human sensibilities that were lost to the individual in his struggle for survival. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh, in relation to this feature of the text, is conditioned by the fact that the camp, the inner aspect of society, had to overcome those same human sensibilities to function. The separation of the concentration camp from society was, for Semprun, a myth; it was simply that, in the camp, this loss of humanity was explicit.

This realisation is graphically illustrated when the narrator visits a house that overlooked the camp and questions the woman householder. When the narrator threatens to make the woman's silent acceptance of Nazi genocide explicit, she becomes afraid. She is able to offer only the death of her own sons as a means of deflecting the narrator's implicit accusation. The relationship between the survivor and the perpetrator is both forged and dissolved in this moment. Semprun comments, "No corpse of the German army will ever weigh as much as the smoke of one of my dead companions" (Semprun 1993: p. 155).

The woman's behaviour can be read as an analogy to the desire for distance that conditions the reader's journey through the narrative. Semprun, like Fink and Borowski, implicitly acknowledged this feature of the uninitiated reader's understanding as part of their narrative strategy and never allowed this desire to go unchallenged. His words therefore embody the confrontational aspect of Merlin's Laugh. The reader cannot turn

away from the hypocrisy of the woman; it is exposed through the juxtaposition of her explicit desire for distance from the reality that Gerard as a survivor represents. Victory and Gerard's liberation cannot account for or negate the extent of the loss, both physical and psychological, that Holocaust experience engendered. Thus the survivor, who is never truly liberated from an experience that is in excess of his understanding, remains "inside" (Semprun 1993: p. 21). Thus, "Semprun never ceases to emphasise that the nightmare . . . is reality itself "(Ezrahi 1980: p. 169). This feature of the narrative underpins the reader's experience of Merlin's Laugh, remaking their gestalt in the shadow of Holocaust history, which, the narrative demands, is recognised as part of contemporary life.

Semprun's narrative strategy, like that of Borowski and Fink, was designed to undermine any sense of coherence and safety in relation to Holocaust history that the reader may desire. The recurrent leitmotif of the duality of camp experience and remembrance are combined with the continual juxtaposition of secondary characters, like the girls from Passy, with the survivor narrator. This juxtaposition enables the narrative to implicitly encourage and then explicitly question and challenge the reader's ability to comprehend the stories told:

> Semprun thus gradually interjects a scepticism into his narrative . . . about the possibility of creating an audience for his tale, about the necessity and inability of that audience to validate his story (Langer 1975: p. 292).

In *Literature or Life*, Semprun reinforced this point through a series of questions, designed specifically to unsettle and disturb the gestalt process of the reader. "Can people hear everything, imagine everything . . . I begin to doubt it" (Semprun 1998: p. 14).

If, as I have argued, the reader's experience of the text is conditioned implicitly by post-Holocaust hopes and idealisations, then survivor writers countered this through an implicit recognition of the reader's position in relation to the narrative that is then challenged and confronted. This variance, between the reader's contemporary conceptualisation of the event and the reality as experienced by the survivor, therefore functions as a part of the narrative strategy which enabled the manipulation of the reader to recognise both the actuality of Holocaust history and the nature of their understanding of it. It is this dynamic that defines both the creation of the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh and the experience of reading them. Readers, in these terms, are not simply witnesses to the narrative, they are also implicated by it. As David Patterson argues:

> Holocaust novels disturb . . . because they draw the reader into a position of responsibility, a position of vulnerability (Patterson 1992: p. 17).

For survivor writers, fiction provided a space where the implicit presence of the reader can be interrogated, forced into an engagement with the type of dislocation that the Holocaust as experience caused. However brief this moment, confined as it is to the reading experience, its effect cannot be underestimated. As Iser's work exemplifies, the effects of reading the moments of the Laugh are produced and personalised within the imagination. As a result, the enactment of the Laugh can implicate and question the reader's fundamental assumptions and the desire for distance that condition the reading. Thus, as Iser argues:

> There will always be something which is never given in the world and which only a work of art provides; it enables us to transcend that which we are otherwise so inextricably entangled in – our own lives in the midst of the real world (Iser 1978: p. 230).

The texts examined reveal the way in which the line between fact and fiction is essentially blurred, appearing at times to be totally indistinct (22). For the writers discussed, the deeper truths of memory, the "density" (Semprun 1998: p. 13) of experience, could only be expressed through the distance that a fictional narrative provided. This reading is supported by Sara Horowitz who argues, "some events become knowable through their fictions" (Horowitz 1991: p. 9). In these terms authenticity, even in relation to survivor texts, need not be defined simply by the re-creation of the Holocaust experience but can be created through a rendering of its experience that revealed its deeper resonances.

In the act of reading autobiographical, linear testimony, readers embark on a journey guided by the voice of the survivor. Their textual liberation guarantees the readers' imaginative liberation from the world created in the narrative. In fiction, the security embodied by the survivor's textual liberation can be constantly threatened and undermined. The result is that much of the readers' gestalt process is defined by the experience of solitude, of a confrontation with oneself. Imaginative liberation in these terms does not provide the reader with closure or a release. The texts haunt the imagination and provide a powerful illustration of Iser's definition of fiction, referred to previously, as a dynamic act of communication that can imaginatively outlive the act of reading.

In achieving this imaginative communication, survivor fiction narratives are expressive of a level of insight that must be recognised as being theirs alone. The artistry of these texts lies in the ways in which this knowledge functioned as a pro-active part of their narrative strategy, illuminating the distance that continues to exist between the

Holocaust as memory and the contemporary perception of the reader. The reader's desire for distance is therefore engaged with directly and implicitly recognised as a powerful weapon against memory. The survivors' narratives examined in this work therefore characterise the Holocaust as a feature of the present, a shadow that cannot be denied or displaced. Their texts represent a powerful indictment of both the Nazi regime and the society that allowed it.

The experience of reading the textual moments that I have called Merlin's Laugh are conditioned by the survivor's explicit revelation of the humbling nature of Holocaust history. Holocaust writers use their fictions to answer the question asked by Smirnov, the Russian prosecutor cited in the introduction, "how am I to understand this?" (23), by turning it back upon their readers and challenging them to recognise the limitations of their preconceived ideals and partial knowledge. Understanding may only be achievable through experience but the imaginative connection forged in narrative between the reader and Holocaust memory continuously creates a tangible awareness of the limits of understanding that define the reader's encounter with Merlin's Laugh. As a result, this textual moment and the narrative strategy that creates it pushes the reader to a new level of comprehension as it reveals the influence of preconceptions and idealisations over the reader's reception of Holocaust history. Thus, as Lawrence Langer argues, these texts ensure that "we must confront it [the Holocaust] on its own terms not ours" (Langer 1996: p. 90).

It is within these terms that Holocaust narratives can be truly recognised as art and as truthful in their representation as they are creative. They embody Erich Kahler's definition of art:

> An act of conquest, the discovery of a new sphere of human consciousness and thereby a new reality. It lifts into the light of a conscious state of affairs, a layer of existence that was dormant in the depths of our unconscious, that was buried under obsolete forms, conventions, habits of thought and experience. And by showing this latent reality as a new sphere of our conscious life. There is no true art without this quality, without this frontier venture
> (cited by Langer 1975: p. 74).

Kahler's argument, that art is a revelation of a latent reality, provides yet another example of the power of narrative to encourage, provoke and engage the reader. As these texts bear witness to the deep memory of the Holocaust, *le cri*, they reflect the shadow that these deaths cast over both the readers and the world in which they live. In this way the

narratives bring to light the 'latent reality' of the Holocaust, which influences and implicates the contemporary subject.

The texts in this chapter therefore provide a foundation from which the works of non-survivor writers who appropriate this history can be examined. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh in their texts functions, in these terms, as a blueprint. It is the result of a narrative strategy that can be adopted by non-survivor writers. It also enables non-survivor writers, through the experience of reading, to recognise features of the legacy of the Holocaust that can be engaged with and the elements of contemporary idealisation that can be challenged within a contemporary text. In these terms appropriating the Holocaust can be conditioned by a re-imagining of our own subjectivity in the light of that past. The continued translation of Holocaust memory, an authentic representation by a non-survivor author, I would argue, requires nothing less.

What has become apparent through this investigation of survivor fiction is that creating Holocaust art is a truly frontier venture that cannot in itself offer redemption or closure. Survivor narratives are a powerful and potent body of work which bind together past, present and future in the shadow of the Shoah. The survivor writers leave this legacy for those who appropriate the Holocaust. As Elie Wiesel, so often the voice of caution, commented:

> The Holocaust defied words, language, imagination, knowledge. For many years we believed this. We still believe it, except now we accept it a little less (cited by Lewis 1984: p. 154).

Endnotes For Chapter One

1. As Lawrence Langer notes:

> Borowski's strategy is to fuse techniques of fiction with details of fact in a way that obliterates usual sources of tension in literature and introduces us to the atmosphere of what I have called the world of choiceless choice (L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (New York, State University of New York, 1982), p. 103).

2. Elie Wiesel has repeatedly commented on the unimaginability of the Holocaust:

> I am afraid that the horror of that period was so dark that people are incapable of understanding, incapable of listening (cited by A. Rosenberg and G. E.

Myers, eds., *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988), p. 174).

He has also commented, "whoever has not lived through it can never know it" (cited by A. Rosenberg and G. E. Myers, eds., *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988), p. 386).

However Semprun himself challenges the application of ineffability to the Holocaust. He agues that it is "only an alibi. Or a sign of laziness. You can always say everything: language contains everything" (J. Semprun, *Literature or Life*, New York and London, Penguin Books, 1998), p. 13).

3. W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 131.

4. Iser describes blanks and negations as "essential conditions for communication, for they set in motion the interaction that takes place between the text and the reader" (W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 182).

He continues:

> They [blanks] indicate that the different segments of the text are to be connected even though the text itself does not say so. They are the unseen joints of the text and as they mark off schemata and textual perspectives from one another, they simultaneously trigger acts of ideation on the reader's part (ibid., p. 183).

For a further discussion of primary and secondary negations *see* ibid., pp. 182–228.

5. Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi has argued, "Borowski is the writer with whom, in a sense, Holocaust literature begins and ends" (S. D. Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago and London, Chicago University Press, 1980), p. 52).

Her comments are endorsed by Jan Kott in the introduction to Borowski's tales. He comments:

> Borowski's Auschwitz stories, however, are not only a masterpiece of Polish – and of world – literature. Among the tens of thousands of pages written about the Holocaust . . . Borowski's slender book continues to occupy . . . a place apart (T. Borowski, *This Way for The Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (London and New York, Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 11–12).

6. The variance between the way in which Borowski introduces the reader to Auschwitz and the renderings given in more testimonial narratives can be seen through comparative readings: *see* E. Wiesel, *Night* (London, Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 39–44; K. Hart, *Return To Auschwitz* (London, Panther Books, 1984), pp. 77-80; F. Fenelon, *Playing For Time: The Musicians Of Auschwitz* (London, Sphere Books, 1981), pp. 27–29.

7. Callousness, described by Levi, is a feature, both implicit and explicit, of much Holocaust literature. It is both a product of the system and a necessity of survival. It is recognised even in the fragments of texts left by those who did not survive the Shoah. This quote, taken from a diary unearthed in Auschwitz in 1962 and written by Salmen Lewental, a member of the Sonderkommando, provides an example of the way in which this callousness was a central feature of the concentration camp experience:

> They [the commandos] simply forgot what they were doing . . . and with time they got used to it so that it was even strange [that one wanted] to weep and complain . . . that such normal, average . . . simple and unassuming men . . . of necessity, got used to everything so that these happenings make no more impression on them. Day after day they stand and look on how tens of thousands of people are perishing and [do] nothing (cited by A. Rosenberg and G. E. Myers, eds., *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988), p. 125).

Lewenthal's words are echoed in one of Borowski's stories, 'The January Offensive':

> We said that there was no crime a man would not commit in order to save himself. And, having saved himself, he will commit crimes for increasingly trivial reasons; he will commit them first out of duty, then from habit and finally - for pleasure (T. Borowski, *This Way for The Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (London and New York, Penguin Books, 1976), p. 168).

8. Borowski arrived in Auschwitz in April 1942. As Jan Kott notes in his introduction to *This Way for The Gas, Ladies And Gentlemen*:

> Three weeks earlier 'Aryans' had stopped being sent to the gas chambers – except for special cases. From then on only Jews were gassed en masse (T. Borowski, *This Way for The Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (London and New York, Penguin Books, 1976), p. 15).

9. For a discussion of Borowski's nihilism, *see* Czeslaw Milosz, cited by Lawrence Langer in *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1975), p. 72.

10. B. Lang, ed., *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York and London, Holmes and Meyer Ltd., 1988) p. 192.

11. Lawrence Langer has commented:

> His [Borowski's] stories continually lead us from 'sight' into insight into the tenuous bond that joins normal civilisation after Auschwitz with these moments that still disrupts our efforts to believe in order after such chaos (L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and Human Spirit* (New York, State University of New York, 1982), p. 117).

12. The 'truth' that underpins all survivor writings, including their fictional texts, has been commented on by Lawrence Langer, who noted:

> However extraordinary the imaginative efforts of the writer to disguise his theme with the garments of literary invention . . . he can never totally conceal the relationship between . . . the actual scars of the Holocaust and the creative salves that often only intensify the pain (L. Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1975), p. 90).

His comments support the reading of Fink's stories as part of the mosaic of Holocaust experience which, even though imagined, represent a form of Holocaust memory and truth.

13. The absence of an empathetic listener or, more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognise their realness, annihilates the story (S. Feldman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992), p. 68).

14. This argument concerning the survivor's text as a witness to the experiences of the Holocaust that can be lost in the statistics is supported by Ellen Fine:

> The documents of consciousness contributed by survivors translate abstract tatistics and figures into deeply felt human responses (cited by R. Braham, ed., *Perspectives on the Holocaust* (Boston, The Hague and London, Kluwer Nijhoff, 1983), p. 111).

15. I. Fink, *A Scrap of Time and other Stories* (New York, Schoken Books, 1987), pp. 39-47.

16. Semprun's text was originally published under the title *Le Grand Voyage* by Library Gallimard (J. Semprun, *The Cattle Truck* (London, Serif Publications, 1993), frontispiece).

17. J. Semprun, *Literature or Life* (New York and London, Penguin Books, 1988), p. 36.

18. Semprun writes, "Death was the substance of our brotherhood . . . Together we lived that experience of death" (J. Semprun, *Literature or Life* (New York and London, Penguin Books, 1988), p. 24); *see* also ibid., p. 40.

19. The genesis of Semprun's narrational future knowledge, of the essential difference between survivors and those of us not connected to the event through experience, is also graphically illustrated in *Literature or Life*. Semprun comments on meeting some soldiers after liberation:

> Perhaps I shouldn't have laughed . . . Judging from the expressions of the British officers, laughter doesn't much suit me at the moment (J. Semprun, *Literature or Life* (New York and London, Penguin Books, 1988), p. 10).

20. The liberation of the survivor in the testimonial narratives can be seen as a point of relief for the reader through the words of Henry Wermuth and Kitty Hart:

> That 5 May, the day of my rebirth . . . On 6 May 1945 I awoke to a world in which for the first time I was no longer a prisoner destined to die (H. Wermuth, *Breathe Deeply My Son* (London and Oregon, Valentine Mitchell, 1995), pp. 197–8)
>
> We were guests of honour at a ceremonial burning down of the entire concentration camp; and the sight finally convinced me that the days of horror were really gone forever (K.Hart, *Return To Auschwitz*, London, Panther Books, 1984), pp. 203-4).

Although many survivor testimonial narratives discuss the continued effects of Holocaust memory in their description of their post-war experiences, the moments referred to above signify for the reader an end to the descriptions of desecration and death that define the survivor's experience of the camps.

21. Elie Wiesel has commented on the relationship between the survivors' testimony and the victims of the Holocaust in "I plead for the dead" (cited by L.Langer, ed., *Art From The Ashes : A Holocaust Anthology* (London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 148). Primo Levi's commentary on his reasons for writing are slightly less equivocal than Elie Wiesel's but are nonetheless interesting concerning the nature of memory:

> I could not say whether we did so [write] or do so because of a kind of moral obligation towards those who were silenced or rather in order to free ourselves of their memory; certainly we do it because of a strong and durable impulse (P. Levi, *The Drowned and The Saved* (London, Abacus Books, 1998), p. 64).

22. J. Young, *Writing and Rewriting The Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 52).

23. The Smirnov quotation is cited by A. Rosenberg and G. E. Myers, eds., *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 95–6); *see* also my introduction.

Chapter Two

The Road Ahead: Non-Survivor Fiction and the Challenge of Applying Merlin's Laugh

> Self preservation cannot be achieved merely by following principles; it depends on the realization of human potentials, and these can only be brought to light by literature (Iser 1978: p. 76).

> I offer the comedy of absolute spirit as inaugurated mourning; the recognition of our failures of full mutual recognition of the law which has induced our proud and deadly dualisms . . . This comic approach – I cannot resist the provocation – would also offer a deeper and more drastic alternative to the current, sacralising, commercialising and elevating into a raison d'etat as well as providential anti-reason of the Holocaust in America and Israel (Rose 1996: p. 76).

During the last decade, the debate concerning whether or not the Holocaust should be available for appropriation by non-survivor writers has been largely an academic one (1). The perceived sanctity of Holocaust memory has ultimately been eroded over time by the large amount of fictional works produced by the generations that have inherited it. However the increased production of these texts has yet to satisfy the intense interest that exists concerning the Holocaust. As material for the imagination, it continues to fascinate and inspire:

> It remains the unconquered Everest of our time, its dark mysteries summoning the intrepid literary spirit to mount its unassailable summit (Langer 1975: p. 7).

The Holocaust, as a subject for contemporary narratives, encompasses the various genres of the literary spectrum, from 'blockbuster' novels through docu-drama and its appropriation of Holocaust testimony, to the more seriously considered (and in many cases recent) treatments. However, writing from a contemporary perspective, as inheritance as opposed to recalled experience, poses significant challenges for all writers who engage with the Holocaust. As a result, few contemporary texts have been seen as able to achieve the power and insight found in the fictional narratives of the survivors discussed in the previous chapter.

Even James Young (2), who has argued persuasively for the availability of Holocaust history to contemporary writers, has acknowledged that, while the exclusion of the Holocaust from the contemporary imagination could result in its exclusion from the

public consciousness, there is little guarantee that the texts produced can stand independently alongside their survivor counterparts:

> Better abused memory in this case, that can be critically qualified, than no memory at all (Young 1990: p. 133).

As Young's comments indicate, the continued production of non-survivor texts is vital to the transmission of Holocaust memory. The Holocaust has left a legacy (3) for contemporary society and fiction represents a valuable site of negotiation between the reading subject and the past. Thus the continued transmission of Holocaust history is dependent not only upon the survivor, but also on "the 'generation after', that struggles against as well as for Holocaust remembrance" (Hartman 1994: p. 8).

However, although the Holocaust is available as subject matter to non-survivor writers as part of a collective inheritance, its transmission in narrative is complicated by the inherent difficulties of addressing both the Holocaust and its implications for contemporary life. This complex relationship can contribute to the desire to re-inscribe the Holocaust with idealised myths of "uncontaminated heroic memory" (Hartman 1994: p. 75). This re-packaging (4), I would argue, stems from the implicit store of preconceptions, idealisations and the desire for distance that influences the contemporary subject's conceptualisation of Holocaust history. They are expressive, on a personal level, of the "various forms of communal . . . denial, of cultural reticence or of cultural canonisation" (Feldman & Laub 1992: p. xix) that condition the contemporary memory of the event. The public expression of these private idealisations can result in the inscription of a given "memory-place" (Hartman 1994: p. 15) that bounds and limits the translation of Holocaust history. Holocaust memorialisation can therefore exist as an act of remembrance in safety, symbolic of nothing outside of its own existence, that is not individually struggled for and is rooted in ritual.

The collusion between private and public forms of distance and idealisation and its influence on contemporary, fictional representations has been discussed by Gillian Rose. Rose argues that the inability to truly examine the legacy of the Holocaust finds its genesis in the inscription of ineffability. The application of ineffability in relation to the Holocaust she describes as "Holocaust piety" (Rose 1996: p. 43). Piety can also be seen as a public expression of the private desire for distance. It is fundamental to the process of placing the Holocaust beyond the limits of contemporary understanding, of a less troublesome memory place, that ultimately releases the non-survivor writer from the challenges inherent in the appropriation of Holocaust memory.

> To argue for silence, prayer, the banishment equally of poetry and knowledge . . . is to mystify something we dare not understand because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human all too human (Rose 1996: p. 43).

Thus the inscription of ineffability can assume the appearance of piety and act as a form of protection against the legacy that Holocaust history contains. Once a writer assumes the mantle of piety responses to the Shoah that could challenge these idealisations are precluded. The call for silence, a logical outcome of piety, also inhibits the texts produced. This type of text, Rose argues:

> Leaves the identity of the voyeur in tact, at a remove from the grievous event which she observes. Her self-defences remain untouched while she may feel exultant revulsion or infinite pity for those whose fate is displayed (Rose 1996: p. 54).

Protective mechanisms, exemplified by Rose's reading of Holocaust piety, are recognised by survivor writers in their uninitiated readership. As previously argued, these mechanisms are acknowledged implicitly as part of the survivor's narrative strategy. The textual moment of Merlin's Laugh, that this strategy creates, then confronts and redefines the preconceptions, hopes and desire for distance that can influence the reader's reception of the text.

As previously argued the reader's privileging of, for example, the idealisation of survival influences their gestalten (5), their journey through, and response to the text. The confrontation between the reader's contemporary sensibilities and the realities of Holocaust history, enacted by the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh, reveal the effects of self-preservation in relation to the narrative as it challenges the reader's preconceptions and idealisations. As a result a central feature of the narrative strategy that creates this moment is the active engagement with the distance between what the reader would like to believe and what the survivor knows. The text can therefore create a confrontation, the textual moment of the Laugh, not between itself and the reader but between the reader's current sensibilities and the newly enlarged dimension that the Holocaust narrative provides.

This type of confrontation cannot coexist with piety. As Rose argues, piety enables the reader to have an emotional response to the text. However piety precludes the possibility of questioning or confronting the reader's "exultant revulsion or infinite pity" (Rose 1996: p. 54). There can be no "crisis of identification" (Rose 1996: p. 53) because the emotional response of the reader is never challenged.

To use the texts of survivors as a blueprint, employing the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh within contemporary non-survivor texts, therefore presents the writer with a profound challenge. Non-survivor writers, like all readers of Holocaust texts, represent an uninitiated perspective and are subject to all the protective mechanisms that readers can employ to preserve imaginative and emotional safety in relation to the events described. The realities of camp life as experienced by the survivor can only ever be imagined by the non-survivor writer from a position that is constantly undermined by the lack of any collective understanding. Contemporary writers are also susceptible to the desire to render the Holocaust as ineffable or to provide it with a comprehensible framework or structure (6) that overwhelms the uncertainties of meaning and representation it engenders (7).

The possibility of enacting Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context, using the survivor text as a blueprint, is therefore reflective of the continuing need to reveal and challenge the influence of these type of desires. One example of the powerful effects of this self-preservation can be seen in the contemporary image of the Nazi. The figure of the Nazi provides a locus where the reader's will to understand Holocaust history confronts the desire to disbelieve that such a horror is possible and committed by men and women who are distanced from us only by one or two generations.

The contemporary image of the Nazi represents a vital moment of recognition and negotiation. Although the figure of the survivor has been repatriated into the contemporary world, 'seen' often in both literary and visual terms through testimony, the Nazi has stood still in time. They are identifiable but have no distinctive or personal features. They are contained by the past and, unlike the survivor, are not a part of the present. This inability to truly face the individual who became a Nazi, as a contemporary as well as an historical figure, is, I would argue, a result of a historicisation of the individual, wherein the concept of the Nazi subject embodies a stereotype. In these terms the Nazi can be seen as a tool of the destruction process rather than an active participant in it.

Homi Bhabha's work *The Location of Culture*, illuminates the way in which the stereotype can inhibit the contemporary subject's ability to adequately conceive of the historical individual as part of the present. Bhabha argues that the use of stereotyping is directly linked to ambivalence. As a result the stereotype represents "a form of knowledge that vacillates between what is already in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 1994: p. 88). Although an apparently rigid concept, the stereotype is in actuality amorphous (8), encompassing the variety of individuals whose identification as such can overwhelm the tolerable limits of understanding. The stereotype

and the distance that it places between 'them and us' is therefore equally available if the portrait of the Nazi is of a sadistic brute or of the glassy-eyed desk killer. As a result, the inscription of the distance, that the stereotype allows, can play a large part in conditioning the reader's response to the historical subject:

> The stereotype . . . is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference . . . constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject (Bhabha 1994: p. 75).

The stereotype is evoked in the moment of identification, binding both the subject and the reader or viewer to a fixed vision of the other, beyond which identification cannot proceed. It enables mental self-preservation to survive, even in the moment that its disruption is threatened, through a recognition, not of difference, but of similarity. As Bhabha argues:

> Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image . . . It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement over determination, guilt, aggressivity
> (Bhabha 1994: p. 82).

Bhabha's work illuminates the forms of mental self-preservation that the stereotype both embodies and employs. Contemporary stereotyping of the Nazi ensures that the reader/viewer is able to be concretely aware of the contradictions and problematic nature of individual Nazi behaviour, recognising the truth of events as they are relayed in the testimony of survivors, and yet remain distanced from them. Unlike the stereotypical iconography of race that Bhabha interrogates, recognition of the Nazi is not based on a singular unifying or recognisable feature. Rather the Nazi stereotype is directly linked to our historical imagination, conditioned by visual reference points like the uniform. In the contemporary world, Nazis cannot be recognised by these transitory symbols that define our imaginative vision of them and so they remain essentially elusive figures, tied absolutely to the historical moment they came into being.

What becomes apparent from this examination of the relationship between stereotyping and the image of the Nazi is the divide that exists between the historical event, the contemporary conception of it and the interplay between the two poles, that is conditioned by the reading subject's desire for distance. Stereotyping the Nazi can therefore be seen as reflective of an uncertainty, engendered by the Holocaust, within the uninitiated reader/writer that concerns both the nature of contemporary responses and more personally and perhaps importantly, the desire to give it. The inscription of this

distance conditions many non-survivor texts and I would argue underlies the abused memory that Young described.

However Bhabha's work also provides a framework that illuminates the possibilities of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context as it exemplifies the necessity of the confrontation the textual moment enacts and that relates specifically to the Holocaust as contemporary inheritance. The Nazi stereotype is one aspect of the Holocaust's legacy that, if challenged, could radically alter the terms of the contemporary relationship to the individuals who were part of this genocide. It could also reveal hidden truths that have a direct relevance to the reader and their understanding of Holocaust history.

Thus the confrontation between the realities of Holocaust history, its continued legacy and the contemporary reading subject can be seen as central to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in narrative, regardless of the author's relation to the event. A breakdown of the imaginative space between 'them' and 'us', a challenge to the stereotype, could therefore result in a contemporary narrative that enabled the reader to recognise the implications of the legacy of the historical event. This type of narrative could counter the effects of what Rose describes as the "fascism of representation" (Rose 1996: p. 50). She argues:

> A film . . . which follows the life story of a member of the S. S. in all its pathos, so that we empathise with him, identify with his hopes and fears, disappointments and rage, so that when it comes to killing, we put our hands on the trigger with him wanting him to get what he wants. We do this in all innocent enthusiasm . . . the vicarious enjoyment of violence may presuppose that the border between reality and fantasy is secure (Rose 1996: p. 50).

Although Rose's comments concern film, their analogy to a possible fictional narrative is clear. The power inherent in the confrontation she describes represents a parallel to the effect of reading Merlin's Laugh in survivor texts. It is in these terms that it is possible to envisage the narrative strategy that enacts the textual moment of the Laugh used within a contemporary non-survivor text.

The genesis for meeting this challenge lies in the work of survivor writers. Their narratives represent the initial engagement between the individual, the written text and Holocaust history. The uninitiated reader's experience of the Laugh in the works of survivors illuminates not only the "deep memory" (Hartman 1994: p. 254) of the Shoah, but also redefines the terms of their conceptualisation of it. Thus the textual confrontation

enacted by Merlin's Laugh, as discussed in the previous chapter, precludes piety through authentic representation and an authority born of experience.

However, for the non-survivor writer, authentic representation of an event that can only be experienced imaginatively is undoubtedly problematic. As Sue Vice comments:

> 'Authority' appears to be conferred on a writer if they can be shown to have a connection with the events they are describing (Vice 2000: p. 4).

Using the understanding gained from the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in survivor texts and applying its narrative strategy within a non-survivor context illuminates the possible terms of authority and authenticity within the contemporary novel. The authority of the non-survivor writer and the authenticity of their text can therefore be seen as not simply based on their ability to recreate the historical event, but on an interrogation of the legacy of the Holocaust, its implications and the ways in which idealisations influence and affect the contemporary perception of Holocaust history. This approach, within a contemporary narrative, can be seen as reflective of the ways in which survivor texts confront and challenge the reader. Its adoption in a non-survivor narrative could therefore enact the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh. It could provide the non-survivor text with an authenticity that, while connected to survivor testimony, is not dependent upon it for validation.

Central to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in a non-survivor context, I would argue, is the work of identifying what Jorge Semprun described as "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123). The space between Semprun's experience and those whom he met in its immediate aftermath was conditioned by the difference between the right and wrong questions he was asked. The wrong questions embodied the desire for distance, for closure that proscribed both memory and further interrogation of his experience (9). Semprun's experience of those "outside" (Semprun 1993: p. 13) the Holocaust can therefore be seen as illuminating the difficulties that confront all non-survivor writers as they define the alternative project, "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123), that appropriating this history entails.

Non-survivor narrational future knowledge can therefore be seen as based upon the store of information provided by the vast amount of documentary and imaginative work concerning the Holocaust. However it must also be conditioned by the interrogation of the contemporary subject in the light of "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123), that can be revealed, in part, through the experience of reading survivor texts. The redefinition of the reader's gestalten that is enacted in survivor narratives, can therefore provide the contemporary writer with an understanding not only of the reality of this history but also

of their own limitations in comprehending it. It reveals the shape and form of "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) that continue to challenge contemporary uninitiated readers. Thus a recognition of the complexities inherent in Holocaust history and an interrogation of the legacy that the Holocaust holds for contemporary society, I would argue, represents an authentic and authoritative position from which to approach this history.

Identifying the right questions and incorporating them into a contemporary narrative is perhaps the primary work of an author who writes about the Holocaust. This work is central to the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh and its application within a non-survivor context. It also represents a primary connection between the work of survivors and those that follow them but allows for the variance in experience and the nature of memory in contemporary society to influence the construction of the text and the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within the narrative. This is exemplified by the words of Jorge Semprun in conversation with fellow survivors just after liberation:

> 'We were trying to figure out how to talk about all this . . .' I nod: it's a good question. One of the right questions (Semprun 1998: p. 123).

The question Semprun's fellow survivor asked is still valid today. It is a question that reveals the nature of the event as it opens up the possibility of further interrogation. His question reflects another parallel that exists between the survivor writer and his non-survivor counterpart; the on-going need to question and interrogate the subject and their understanding of the Holocaust.

Thus the task facing non-survivor writers, of asking the "right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) of themselves and their audience, reflects the possibility of progression within narrative from imitation to interrogation. The insights found in testimony can then be used to question both the contemporary individual and the place of the Shoah within public consciousness and enact Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context. The exclusivity of experience that can be instantly recognised as emblematic of the survivor text can therefore be explored so that their experience can be examined or incorporated into the non-survivor text without overwhelming the contemporary nature of these narratives. In this way survivor writings can be seen as a blueprint for non-survivor texts, enabling the contemporary writer to identify and ask the right questions: not of the survivor but of ourselves.

Thus an understanding of the survivor's art and the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of the Laugh can inform the narratives non-survivor writers create.

Merlin's Laugh, enacted within non-survivor context, may therefore prove to be equally powerful, but conditioned by a desire to interrogate the legacy of the Holocaust: "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123). As Salman Rushdie argues:

> We cannot lay claim to Olympus, and are thus released to describe our worlds in the way in which all of us, whether writers or not, perceive it from day to day (Rushdie 1991: p. 12).

The terms of a non-survivor enactment of Merlin's Laugh, interrogation from the contemporary perspective, can present the writer with a point of entry into the maze of paradoxes and dualities that define Holocaust history. Its enactment may therefore illuminate the extent to which the contemporary conceptualisation of Holocaust history inhibits our ability to understand it. It may also enable a recognition of the pervasive elements of the Nazi ethos that are both explicit and implicit within society and within ourselves. Fiction may yet prove to be the most appropriate space available, where the author's distanced relationship to the event can be both expressed and challenged.

As each generation discovers the legacy of the Holocaust anew, their differing responses contribute to the evolutionary nature of the non-survivor text (10). Identifying this progression as evolutionary, as opposed to revolutionary, reflects both the imaginative freedom with which contemporary writers now approach the Holocaust and the new questions that arise with the passage of time. This on-going work inevitably informs narratives produced and provides the basis for an investigation of the changes that non-survivor texts have undergone in the last twenty to thirty years. It highlights the complexities that still need to be addressed if texts by non-survivor writers are to embody in narrative the right, as opposed to the wrong, questions that, in part, can motivate them to write. In these terms applying the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context functions as a proactive tool in re-evaluating the terms and conditions of contemporary memory, rather than a means of negative comparison to survivor texts.

One of the most popular strategies for appropriating Holocaust history has been the docu-drama novel. An early example of this genre is Anatoly Kuznetsov's text *Babi Yar*, which was first published in Great Britain in 1967. The story of the extermination site where the Nazis murdered approximately 200,000 people, the text proved to be influential and was used by D. M. Thomas as source material for his novel *The White Hotel* (11).

The basis of the docu-drama genre is illustrated by Kuznetsov's preface, 'A Necessary Explanation', which begins, "everything in this book is the truth" (Kuznetsov 1969: p. 11). While offering his residency within the area at the time of the atrocity as a

proof of a relation to the event. Kuznetsov's unease concerning the appropriateness of his authorship is immediately clear, exemplifying the problematic terms of authority discussed earlier. In a description of his history in Kurenevka, Kuznetsov includes a short explanation of his reasons for writing this story:

> When I told parts of this story to various people, they all said I ought to write a book . . . it was my duty (Kuznetsov 1969: p. 1).

The explanatory notes illuminate the terms of the relationship between the author and his material. Kuznetsov's struggle for authority is consistently undermined by the nature of the events he depicts. The conditions of authorship in these terms are shaped by emotive terms like 'duty', and 'documentary' (used in the novel's subtitle), evoking an image of the author as cipher for the facts as opposed to architect of a fictional text. Similarly for Thomas Keneally (12) writing more than ten years after Kuznetsov, it is vital that the role of the author is conceived of as a position of authority, placing the fictional narrative within the context of the source material that has provided the basis for his text. Often exemplified by a preface or endnotes, this information evokes "the rhetoric of fact" (Young 1990: p. 61) that enables the fictionalised narrative to stand in the shadow of the reality of the Holocaust.

The docu-drama genre became for a period the most accessible way for a writer to tackle Holocaust history. The difficulties that finding a suitable character or consciousness through which to filter the experience present to the author were, to a certain extent, effaced through the adoption of a historical character and the documentary nature of the text. As a result the relationship between the author and the material was altered. The product of the imagination was focused primarily on the central individual or group whose lives they recreated imaginatively, masking the author's distanced relationship to the Shoah. Behind their work stands the truth of that life, providing an authority that does not 'belong' to the text, but that nonetheless affects the author's and the reader's relationship to it.

This type of borrowed authority is problematic for the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context. It enables the author to alter the terms of his or her engagement with Holocaust memory and reflects the problems of imitation as opposed to the interrogation that are central to Merlin's Laugh. The structure of the docu-drama novel also provides the author with a manufactured authority that is not struggled for and that conditions the reader's experience of the text. As James Young argues:

> Allowing himself to be moved to the willing suspension of disbelief by the documentary novel's contrived historical authority, the reader risks becoming

> ensnared in the all-encompassing fiction of the discourse itself, mistaking the historical force of this discourse for the historical facts that it purports to document (Young 1990: p. 62).

In these terms the docu-drama novel poses considerable problems for the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in non-survivor writings. The structure of the novel and the manufactured authority that underpins it illuminate the distance that exists between the author (both as architect of the text and as an individual in a wider, uninitiated communal reading group) and the history appropriated within the narrative. The docu-drama genre formalised a narrative structure wherein this distance could be safely breached without necessarily being recognised as an inherent part of the narrative. It provided the imagination with a safety net, ensuring that the problematic nature of Holocaust history and its legacy, while emblematic of the creation of the narrative, was not, beyond a preface or author's note, engaged with directly. Thus the terms of Merlin's Laugh enacted within the terms of a non-survivor narrative, an authentic response to the legacy of the Holocaust and an authority issuing from the contemporary subject's relation to that history, are displaced as a result of the pseudo-authority that re-creation provides for the writer.

The duality of the position of author is vital to understanding the value of the confrontation inherent in the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh and its application within non-survivor texts. The contemporary writer is in an analogous position to that of the reader. They share an uninitiated perspective, in relation to the Holocaust, that conditions the struggle for any new understanding of the historical actuality. This perspective problematises the attempt to connect Holocaust history with contemporary life, shaping and altering the writer's relationship to his material as it influences the reader's relationship to the text.

Thus the perceived inadequacy of the contemporary imagination to represent the Shoah can be seen as not simply conditioned by the inscription of ineffability. Instead, I would argue, it reflects the challenge of incorporating the contemporary conceptualisation of the Holocaust (that is challenged by Merlin's Laugh in the survivor model) into the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context. This textual moment may then upset the idealisations and the aspects of self-preservation within the reader. If the will to disbelieve, the desire for distance, is continuously reinscribed through the structure of contemporary narrative, then the possibilities of Merlin's Laugh will remain beyond the remit of the text.

What becomes apparent from this brief examination of the docu-drama novel is that the texts were, to a certain extent, predicated upon a textual engagement rooted in

their use as an educative tool: their ability primarily to inform the reader about specific elements of the past. The grey area in which they reside, neither completely fictional nor wholly factual, represents a simple truth about Holocaust history: for a long time it has been easier simply to talk about it rather than interrogate it. However, it is possible to argue that, as a genre, the docu-drama represented an initial encounter with the challenges inherent in representing Holocaust experience and the perceived need for an authoritative voice through which to discuss its implications; an authentic centre for the text. The docu-drama novel can therefore be seen as central to the evolution of the non-survivor Holocaust text as they embody the initial tentative engagement with both the subject and the challenges that it contains.

Yet the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context requires more than re-creation, more than a manufactured authority, to create the kind of confrontation that conditions its enactment within survivor texts. The engagement with Holocaust history and the challenges of representation, signified by the structure and form of the docu-drama narrative, but never addressed textually, reveals its inadequacy as a site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh. The docu-drama narrative also illustrates the problematic nature of writing from a position outside of the experience. This aspect of appropriation conditions many non-survivor texts on both a thematic and structural level. To address Holocaust memory from a contemporary perspective, with the distance inherent in this perspective as both an explicit and implicit feature of the text, can therefore be seen as central to the non-survivor application of the narrative strategy which creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh. In these terms the enactment of the Laugh of Merlin could preclude a problematic feature of many contemporary texts, identified by Michael André Bernstein as 'backshadowing'. Bernstein argues:

> Backshadowing is a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by the narrator and the listener is used to judge the participants in these events as though they too should have known what was to come (Bernstein 1994: p. 16).

Backshadowing is based upon on a recognition of the cultural model of progression, of history as determinist and coherent (13). In Holocaust literature the influence of this belief system is somewhat altered but nonetheless recognisable. For if the Holocaust presents the contemporary consciousness with an undeniable rupture in progression, then a given text can counter this by exhibiting the duality of the confrontation between twentieth-century modernity and the destabilising violence of the Holocaust and attempting to unite the two opposing poles, often under some nebulous recognition of tragic drama:

> There is an almost irresistible pressure to interpret it as one would a tragedy, to regard it as simultaneously inconceivable and yet fore-ordained culmination of the entire brutal history of European anti-Semitism (Bernstein 1994: p. 10).

Bernstein argues that the effect of backshadowing in contemporary Holocaust literature can be seen in fictional narratives that appear as 'monuments of inevitability' (Bernstein 1994: p. 4). These texts fail to engage with the difficulties that survivors encountered turning their experience into narrative (14). They also problematise any examination of the on-going effects that the type of meaning or value assigned to the Holocaust in contemporary society have within narrative. Once the Holocaust is refashioned as, for example, the inevitable result of German racism, the possibility of interrogating its meaning from a contemporary perspective is precluded. Thus backshadowing offers another example of the affects of the contemporary writer's implicit desire for distance from the actuality of the Holocaust; a way of investing this history with alternative meanings that bear little relation to the historical reality or the questions it continues to raise for contemporary life.

This feature of contemporary idealisation is challenged through the survivor text by the experience of reading Merlin's Laugh. The inversion of the preconceived ideals of the reader, enacted in the moment of textual confrontation, inhibits dramatically the ability of the reader to see the Shoah in terms other than those experienced by the survivor. In the examples discussed in the previous chapter, the imaginative experience of Merlin's Laugh makes the "enormous condescension of posterity" (Bernstein 1994: p. 23) untenable.

Bernstein's counter to backshadowing, sideshadowing, predicated upon a recognition of the series of choices illuminated by the event, of history not as monolithic certainty but as infinite variety, offers an analogy to the potential of a non-survivor enactment of Merlin's Laugh. They are both the result of alternative narrative strategies that could be used to re-examine the contemporary response to Holocaust history. The narrative strategy of the non-survivor writer is, in this schema, not predicated upon a discourse of tragic overdeterminism or ineffability. Instead its genesis lies in a recognition of the complexities of contemporary Holocaust memory and the ways in which the series of choices, both public and private, that created the Holocaust are reflected in contemporary society. The result of the narrative strategy that enacts the textual moment of the Laugh could therefore be a confrontation between the legacy of Holocaust history, the questions it raises, and the preconceptions that shape the reader's journey through the text.

Merlin's Laugh, through the immediacy of the enactment of this confrontation within the imagination of the reader, implicitly acknowledges the Holocaust as continuum, reaching back into the past to the point of its multifaceted origin and forwards into the present day in the form of legacy. To see the past as predetermined, fixed within its own frame of reference, or as a means of passing moral or ethical judgements on those involved, diminishes the possibility of any interrogation of contemporary attitudes in the light of this history, and as a result precludes the possibility of creating Merlin's Laugh. However the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context need not be restricted to a narrative that forces the reader backwards into the world of the camps. For the non-survivor writer, narratives that reflect the ways in which the Shoah has breached the limits of its own time frame, bringing to bear a darker side of modernity that is inherent in the social and cultural make-up of contemporary life, can also provide an authentic site for the Laugh.

As the non-survivor text has evolved over time this alternative narrative strategy, of the Holocaust filtered through a consciousness unconnected to the event, has become more prevalent. This evolution in characterisation, from the re-creation of a historical persona in the docu-drama novel to a contemporary central character in more recent narratives, has proved to be fundamental in the process of interrogating the lessons that the Holocaust holds. It represents an alternative stand-point for a writer to assume and is reflective of their own relationship to Holocaust history. The non-survivor writer can then use this perspective to illuminate problematic aspects of contemporary memory. It also enables the survivor's texts to influence the creation of the contemporary narrative without overwhelming them or providing a source of manufactured authority. This contemporary viewpoint therefore enables an explicit engagement with the legacy of Holocaust history by an individual affected by it.

However this perspective, while providing the writer with a position of authority that is not manufactured through the shadow of testimony, is nonetheless challenging and complex. The terms of this challenge can be seen in an examination of William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* which was published in 1979. The impact and influence of this text can be seen by the wealth of critical work it continues to generate (15). It has also provided a reference point for other non-survivor writers highlighted, not as footnote but textually, in the work of Thomas Keneally and more recently by the writer Bernard Schlink in his novel *The Reader* (16). This referencing bears witness to the extent to which Styron's novel has become part of the imaginary 'database' that writers use in the construction of their narratives. The text, dealing with the life of a Polish Catholic Auschwitz survivor

(17), also provides a useful index of both the possibilities of a contemporary view point and the attendant pitfalls.

Central to Styron's narrative is Stingo, the young would-be writer whose narration of Sophie's story, and that of her lover Nathan, irrevocably shapes the reader's relationship to both the contemporary story and the meta-narrative of Sophie's experience in Auschwitz. The unreliability of Stingo's narration represents the most striking feature of Styron's text: his choice to present Stingo with all his flawed judgements, fixations and immaturities, not as the best cipher for Sophie's story, but rather as an illustration of Stingo's personal choice to pursue it. Stingo's role as a central consciousness, his limitations and lack of understanding, can therefore be seen as mirroring Styron's own preoccupations with his validity as author.

Styron's depiction of Stingo as an everyman also provides a parallel for the wandering consciousness of the everyman reader. Thus Stingo's filtering of Sophie's experience, his imaginative limitations, provide a framework through which the overwhelming nature of her story can be translated to the reader. Styron, through Stingo, tries to make the uncertainties of representation and the challenges of understanding the Holocaust more explicit; detailing Stingo's own research, and referencing books like Steiner's *Language and Silence* (18). The result is that Styron offers readers a consciousness that, in relation to Holocaust history, bears analogy to their own. Stingo's questioning, his shock, his limits of understanding, provide a point of collusion and identification between narrative persona and reader.

For Stingo, it is Sophie's physical presence that moves Holocaust history out of the abstract, out of the ritual and into his consciousness:

> I will always remember Sophie's tattoo. The nasty little excrescence, attached like a ridge of minute bruised toothbites to her forearm (Styron 1983: p. 503).

However this process is not undertaken in isolation. The intrusion of Stingo's 'life', sex, writing, money, into the process of uncovering Sophie's story offers an analogy to the duality of the history within contemporary life; jostling with the quotidian.

Yet Styron's characterisations, while illuminating the possibilities of adopting a contemporary narrator, also highlight a central difficulty that non-survivor authors face. Nathan, Sophie's insane Jewish lover, has been described as "an embodiment of anti-semitic fantasy" (Vice 2000: p. 118) and the text is littered with examples of his verbal and physical abuse (19). His relationship with Sophie is also conditioned by the unrelentingly sexualised narration. This relationship and Stingo's continual characterisation of Sophie as an object of physical desire is a central feature of the

narrative, present from their first meeting. "God granting me the luck and strength, I would take over this flaxen Polish treasure" (Styron 1983: p. 71). As a result, much of the power of Sophie's story and Stingo's ability to convey it is lost, subsumed by the highly sexualised and ultimately doomed relationships she has with both men (20).

Styron is also unable to balance the desire to tell Sophie's story with the all-consuming literary devices he employs. It is this feature of the text that problematises the possibility of enacting Merlin's Laugh within the narrative. As the narrative moves between the fragmented testimony that Sophie offers and the descriptions and evaluations provided by Stingo, his imposed values, intimately detailed, condition the reader's response to the story. Thus the 'ownership' of the testimony becomes clouded. This problematic feature of the narrative is compounded by the depiction of Nathan, who could have provided an alternative narrative perspective on Sophie's experiences, as the embodiment of demented male machismo.

The effect of this type of appropriation is that the conclusion of the narrative, of Sophie's death and Stingo's redemptive vision, is unsurprising. Sophie's story is completely subsumed in Stingo's metaphorical rebirth and compromised through the literary flourish Styron employs to conclude the novel (21). In these terms Sophie's death can be read as embodying the "myth of redemptive dying" (Langer 1996: p. 123) that Langer argues is a central feature of contemporary idealisation and that precludes the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. Sophie's death in these terms has almost no meaning beyond the tragi-romantic ideals that Stingo's vision imposes upon it.

Thus the promise of Styron's narrative, of individual horror seen through a contemporary consciousness that could interrogate the effects of this experience and search for meaning within it, is lost to an all-consuming literary bent. Stingo's narrative can be read as a metaphor for a central, problematic feature of non-survivor fiction; the text answering the questions raised without adequately addressing the complexities inherent in Holocaust history that challenge comprehensive rendering. His example also illuminates the source of artistry present in survivor fiction; their gift lies not in embellishment but in its absence from their texts.

Styron's narrative highlights another of the problems of appropriating characters from the historical period and transplanting them to a fictional setting. One of the weakest moments of Styron's narrative is his encounter in fiction with the Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Hoss (22) and, by extension, his creation of the Nazi Dr. Jemand Von Niemand. The somewhat colourless characterisation of Hoss adds little to our understanding of the genesis of his actions or the effect of them upon his psyche. As a result Styron, "create[s]

a wooden figure, whose responses in fiction neither illuminate nor are justified by his actions in fact" (Langer 1996: p. 81). This inability to adequately address the complexities of the historical figure inhibits the credibility of the character in fiction, but also radically alters the terms of the interrogation of his actions by the writer. Nowhere is this more clearly recognisable than in Styron's portrayal of Jemand Von Niemand.

Unlike Hoss, the reader is made aware that Niemand is largely a creation of the imagination of the writer, struggling to understand the question 'Why?' elicited by Sophie's story. Stingo outlines a few personal characteristics, deducing these, the reader is told, from details present in Sophie's memory. For a moment the novel reads like a bad detective story, swathes of information garnered from a slight basis. Stingo's main assertion concerning Niemand reads:

> If he were not a good man or a bad man, he still retained a potential capacity for goodness and his strivings were essentially religious (Styron 1983: p. 644).

Sue Vice has argued that:

> The bleak truth about the Nazi doctors . . . that they had entirely split off any moral sense from their camp personae - is too much for the novel to handle (Vice 2000: p. 129).

However, the imaginative re-evaluation of the Nazi doctor, of the stereotyping that often conditions contemporary responses to them, does offer Styron a point of entry into a psyche that cannot be ignored or denied. It is at this point, undoubtedly contentious, that the Laugh of Merlin could be enacted in Styron's narrative; created through the imaginative connection between the contemporary subject, embodied by Stingo, and the Nazi he interrogates. Through the reader's implicit identification with Stingo, the questions raised by Niemand's choices could have been reflected back upon the reader and enabled the confrontation, through imaginative engagement, inherent in the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. This possibility is lost, drowned in the sea of 'evidence' proffered by Stingo to confer some accuracy upon his assertions and by an incessant need to give the characterisation of the Nazi a 'dramatic' centre: creating for Niemand a moment of crisis, a psyche in torment, that somehow offsets the historical recognition that whoever and whatever Jemand Von Niemand was, as a result of his choices, the selections for death were facts of his life, they were his job.

Styron's novel also illuminates points of reference that occur repeatedly in non-survivor fiction. The interplay between sex and death appears in various guises in much fiction, performing an at times salacious, often contradictory, role in the make up of the narratives. Styron's insistence upon the creation of art, its relation to Sophie's story and the

ultimate effect on the narrative, reflects another feature of much contemporary fiction. Thus the possibility of Merlin's Laugh within *Sophie's Choice* is tangible but it is never enacted. The possibility of its existence is raised by the questions that Styron's text provokes, but its inability to adequately address these issues precludes its enactment. Thus the potential of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh haunts the text, raised as a possibility, primarily by what is left undone rather than in what is achieved.

Styron's novel was followed by a number of texts that presented the Holocaust within a wider, contemporary context (23). Often centred around a doomed love affair that, whether conducted in the past or present day, were nonetheless infected by the symbolism of tragic death so often evoked in relation to Holocaust history. The Holocaust became imaginative fodder for the blockbuster novel, often providing little more than a backdrop to the text's action. Novels of this type ultimately reflect the type of abused memory described by James Young, bearing no resemblance to survivor fiction. However these novels reached out to a wide reading audience and, in a very basic way, drew attention to the Holocaust.

One recent example of this type of text was Pat Conroy's 1995 novel *Beach Music*. Like Styron, Conroy filters Holocaust history through a contemporary psyche, employing a white Southern male character as its narrating persona. *Beach Music*, the story of two broken families, one Southern American, the other Jewish, and the relationship between two of the children, is representative of a more popular, commercialised text.

A central feature of *Beach Music* is the ever-present ghost of Shyla, the daughter of Jewish survivors and wife of Jack, the novel's narrator. The narrative opens with a description of Shyla's suicide and the discovery of the newly tattooed numbers on her arm. The symbolism of this tattoo centres the Holocaust strand of the narrative and throughout the novel Shyla's experience of insanity is interwoven with the insanity experienced in wildly differing ways by both her parents during the war. The experience of her Jewish 'difference' in a white Southern Christian environment is also incorporated into the revelation of her suicide. Thus Shyla's ultimate refusal to live in a world forever contaminated by the near extermination of her family provides Jack with a humanising experience similar to that of Stingo. Her death draws Jack into a closer, more personal relationship with the history of the Holocaust.

It is through Jack's conflicted relationship with Shyla's parents that the narrative offers the possibility of interrogation into the legacy of the Holocaust and reveals another location for the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. One example of the ways in which a contemporary perspective can challenge and confront the reader with the realities of

Holocaust history can therefore be seen in Jack's relationship with his father-in-law, George Fox. Fox is presented throughout the narrative as an unforgiving, dominant presence who tries to gain custody of Jack's daughter. However, as George begins to reveal aspects of his life history, Jack is forced to acknowledge that the fact of survival does not end the individual's suffering and that George's memory of the Holocaust still influences his life and behaviour. It is an acknowledgement that illuminates the impact of Merlin's Laugh enacted a non-survivor narrative:

> It was only then that I realised that every stranger who approached George Fox was an S. S. man in disguise. I wanted to say something kind and transfiguring to my father-in-law but I stood before him wordless (Conroy 1996: p. 416)

This quote exemplifies the terms of the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh when it is conditioned by the author's contemporary perspective. This perspective enables Conroy to invite and manipulate the reader's relationship to the characters in order to enact Merlin's Laugh. Thus it is the reader's response to George Fox, continually influenced by their identification with Jack and his difficult relationship with George, that then enables Jack's own realisation to confront the reader with the impact of Holocaust memory on the individual. This realisation and Jack's inability to find a language through which to communicate his new understanding to George confronts and redefines the reader's own preconceptions.

However, the confrontational aspect of this revelation, the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, is rarely present within the narrative. This is due in large part to the blockbuster genre from which Conroy writes. Although Shyla's inability to cope with her personal legacy of the Holocaust is used to effect in the shocking opening of the novel, there is little recognition of the ways in which this inheritance informed her life or those around her. Conroy never undertakes the interrogation of the Holocaust's legacy symbolised by Shyla's death. The neat resolution of the novel, Jack's remarriage, approved posthumously by Shyla's suicide note, only adds to the sensation that the potential of the text is denied any kind of fruition by an inherent lack of interrogation into the legacy of the Holocaust plays and its effects on those who inherit it.

The example of Merlin's Laugh in Conroy's text reflects the narrative's inherent possibilities but also its inability to go beyond the limitations of its generic origins. Shyla's ghost can therefore be seen as a type of metaphor for Merlin's Laugh; she haunts the edges of the text but the questions her presence raises require more than the narrative can deliver. The novel is ultimately not concerned with the Holocaust and the necessity of explicating the variety of narrative strands and ensuring closure means that this moment is

not replicated. The narrative strategy that creates the confrontational moment inherent in the quote cited previously cannot therefore function within the terms of the novel as a whole. As a result the possibilities that Conroy's novel contains are subsumed by his unrelenting desire to use the Holocaust as symbolic currency reinvested with some form of redemption and the generic necessity of a 'happy ending'.

Including an example of the blockbuster genre is not designed in any way to validate the ineffectual ways in which these novels often treat the Holocaust but rather to examine the lessons they may contain for future writers. These novels represent the essence of popular writing; they contribute to the contemporary understanding of the Holocaust and represent "an index of the penetration of the Holocaust into the consciousness of those who had not experienced it" (Ezrahi 1980: p. 144). *Beach Music* can therefore be seen as reflective of the degree to which Holocaust history has influenced the stock of tragic symbolism available to writers, who through their productions have introduced it to a wider, more commercial readership.

These texts are also significant in that they illuminate the degree of imaginative freedom with which contemporary writers now approach this history. They still rely largely on the symbolic power of testimony, despite the fact that the testimony they provide is wholly fictional. They go beyond what Lawrence Langer has described as "factual fictions" (24) to a point where any recognition of appropriation is lost and the fiction they create stands only in the shadow of their 'real' counterparts. For the target readership, this pseudo-testimony may be one of their few points of contact with Holocaust history, but, as I have argued, the effect is often limited by the structure of the text and, as in *Beach Music* in relation to George Fox's Holocaust testimony, often become another dramatic set piece in the narrative.

The challenge of representing Holocaust history in a legitimate and interrogative form is embodied in this type of work. Imaginative freedom offers the possibility of a text that is able to enact Merlin's Laugh. However as novels like *Beach Music* exemplify, imaginative freedom can also result in texts that reinscribe contemporary idealisations and myths concerning Holocaust history and its legacy. The redemptive conclusion that narratives like *Beach Music* impose upon Holocaust history denies both the reality of the survivor's experience and the effects of this history on the next generation. These texts therefore illuminate a central concern that shadows the freedom to appropriate: the negative effects of abused memory, contained in the blockbuster, on the memory of the Holocaust within the collective consciousness. However the fact that there exists, within the context of this type of narrative, an example of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh

reveals both the potential of this narrative strategy, used in a text that is primarily concerned with the Holocaust, and also the validity and value of a contemporary perspective as a basis for examining the legacy of the Holocaust.

Redemption and its inherently problematic relationship to the Holocaust functions as a pre-eminent trope in many of the more recent literary texts that appropriate the Shoah. It is possible to argue that this aspect of non-survivor texts mirrors the desire of the reader (and by extension the writer, who in his relationship with the Holocaust is likewise distanced from the event) for a form of closure that in some way appeases the horror engendered by the overwhelming loss of the Holocaust. This desire, however well expressed or crafted, can be read as an exemple of the influence of contemporary attitudes to the Holocaust over the narratives produced. The desire that in some way the immeasurable horror of the Holocaust can be overcome or re-made represents a feature of contemporary conceptualisations of this history that could be engaged with and challenged in non-survivor representations of the Holocaust.

A text that deals explicitly with this theme is the novel *Fugitive Pieces* published in 1996 by the Canadian poet Anne Michaels. Michaels' text, which won the 1997 Orange Prize for fiction, is divided into two parts. The first section is the memoir of a survivor Jakob Beer, the second an address to Beer by the adult child of survivors who finds in Beer's poetry a means of better understanding his parents' experience and its effects upon his life.

The novel is beautifully crafted and is rich in both imagery and poetry. The abundant geological references in Jakob's narrative provide a central metaphor for memory; the surface of the ground hiding secrets that it may or may not give up, and that are in turn irrevocably altered by the nature of those who encounter them. The central dichotomy of this theme, the destruction and re-emergence of memory, is reinforced both by Jakob's hiding place, Biskupin (an archaeological site destroyed by the Nazis), and the work of Jakob's saviour Athos, 'Bearing False Witness', which counters the Nazis' fabrication of archaeology. Throughout the novel, these geographical and geological references reinforce the sense that, while the physical can be obliterated, memory remains, held within the landscape, held within the imagination. It also offers an analogy to Jakob's experience of living with the memory of the Holocaust; although his family is murdered their ghosts still rise from the ground to haunt his nightmares.

Michaels' narrative embraces poetry and yet at times seems overwhelmed by it. This is exemplified by Jakob's memoir, which contains within it moments of profound realisation that reveal as much about the relationship between the non-survivor writer and

the Holocaust as they do about the nature of the survivor's experience. Discussing the relationship between memory and language, Michaels uses Jakob to voice a belief that conditions not only her own work but that of many other non-survivor writers:

> If one could isolate that space, that damaged chromosome in words, in an image, then perhaps one could restore order by naming. Otherwise history is only a tangle of wires (Michaels 1997: p. 111).

Michaels' desire to conceive the Shoah in terms that can establish 'order' is embodied in Jakob's journey back from silence into language. It is rooted in his need to give a type of freedom to those lost loved ones who haunt him. In the closing stages of this section of the text, and indeed in Jakob's life, it is through giving a voice, in poetry, to his memories that he finds a personal redemption. His subsequent love affair finally provides a happiness that enables him to imagine a future child: the internal "Russian doll" (Michaels 1997: p. 14), ghost of his sister Bella, remembered through naming for a future generation.

The poetic language that Michaels uses to express Jakob's slow journey towards closure haunts every image, every description, within the text. While this provides moments of great beauty, even within Jakob's description of Nazi terrors, there is an inherent danger that, at times, undermines the textual authority that Michaels establishes for him. At one point in the novel Jakob asserts:

> No matter the age of the face, at the moment of death a lifetime of emotion still unused turns the face young again (Michaels 1997: p. 19).

This unquestionably poetic statement stands in direct contradiction to scenes, later imagined by Jakob, of the work of the Sonderkommandos and the murder of babies in Lublin. It is difficult to unite these two opposing perspectives. Thus, while drawing upon the abundant images of Nazi brutality, Michaels nonetheless juxtaposes imagery of death with the beauty of her poetry, encoding the horror to a degree that could be read as comforting. It exemplifies "how much of our language about the Holocaust is designed to console instead of confront" (Langer 1996: p. 5).

Michaels' text also provides an example of the way in which the poetic beauty of the piece overwhelms the questions she raises concerning the uncertainties of representation and its relationship to Holocaust experience. Michaels' fictional survivor stand in the shadow of the voices of his real life counterparts, yet the narrative, its fluidity and poetry, lend the piece a coherence that limits the efficacy of this engagement with the terms of survival. Describing the deaths of the Nazis' victims, Michaels writes:

> Those who breathed deeply and suffocated. Those who asserted themselves by dying (Michaels 1997: p. 139).

This description shields the reader from the reality of these deaths as expressed by survivors. It ultimately robs the assertion of any ability to confront the reader with the scale of human suffering enacted during the Shoah and the murderous and silencing nature of the Nazi genocide. The statement is therefore perhaps more reflective of Michaels' own contemporary desire to invest these deaths with heroic imagery than of the reality of the Holocaust.

Another example of this problematic feature of Michaels' narrative can be seen in Jakob's attempt to recreate the fate of Bella while paradoxically acknowledging that to do so is to "blaspheme by imagining" (Michaels 1997: p. 167). In spite of this recognition the narrative goes on to describe the gas chambers and Bella's death. It is somewhat ironic that Michaels is unable to engage with or represent the fundamental truth of her own assertion and does not draw back from this feature of camp experience or interrogate its meaning. The explicit imagining denies the possibility of confrontation between the horror of the death camp experience and the contemporary conception of it, which may have been more effectively enacted within the imagination of the reader:

> We know they cried out. Each mouth, Bella's mouth strained for its miracle . . . It is impossible to imagine those sounds (Michaels 1997: p. 168).

Thus even as Michaels acknowledges the uncertainty of imagining this experience, she has already marginalised the response, overwhelming the questions her uncertainty raises through the 'blasphemous' imaginings she offers the reader.

The central concern of Jakob's section of the narrative is the beating back of silence, a redemption through language and love. The danger inherent in this privileging of redemption is one of closure without resolution; a textual coherence that ultimately precludes the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. As a result the complexities of meaning and understanding in relation to this history are often hidden through the neatly packaged answers Michaels provides to her own questions.

One example can be seen in Michaels' comments concerning those who refused Nazism and helped or rescued those condemned. Michaels offers the explanation "what choice did I have?" (Michaels 1997: p. 167). It is an irony, not commented on in the text, that this line of reasoning has been proffered as a defence by Nazis themselves (25) and does little to illuminate the rationale behind either outcome. Choice, a concept the Nazis constantly tried to undermine in the language of racism they employed, remains a fundamental feature of the history of Holocaust perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers

alike. To remove or accept the choicelessness of a given situation precludes the challenge inherent in this aspect of Holocaust history and its use as a feature of Merlin's Laugh that, by revealing and interrogating the nature of the choices people made, could confront the reader with the effects of those choices.

The first section of Michaels's novel also rarely engages with one of the fundamental elements which exists within survivor texts (26), and which must in some way be carried forward into the writings of non-survivor authors:

> The reader must abandon all the protective measures that distinguish the conventional categories and pat answers of literary explication. The reader must pursue responsibility to the point of profound vulnerability, to the vulnerability of the victim (Hartman 1994: p. 156).

Any novel constructed around themes of redemption and catharsis inevitably runs the risk of never exposing the reader to his own vulnerability; never opening up to the possibility of hearing *le cri* (27), an expression of the ever-present shadow of the dead and the genesis for all writing concerning the Holocaust. However, this effect is offset by the juxtaposition of the happiness Jakob achieves with the lives of the parents of Ben, narrator of the novel's second section, 'The Drowned City'. Ben's narrative, less complex aesthetically and shorter than Jakob's, presents the reader with glimpses of the unending fear of survivors and its effect on the next generation.

It is Ben's story that provides examples of Merlin's Laugh. These moments are conditioned by the descriptions of his own confusion and confrontation with the emotional scars borne by his parents. From the discovery of his two murdered siblings to the meaning behind his own name, Ben's struggle, to come to terms with his parents' experience and with the broader history of the Holocaust, reveals for the reader the individual nature of the experience of survival. The fragmented nature of his journey also illuminates some of the hidden aspects of survivor experience. Commenting on the different ways in which his parents express their history, Ben notes, "now I see it as a clue: what my father had experienced was that much less bearable" (Michaels 1997: p. 223). This recognition confronts the reader, challenging them to remake their image of Ben's father and, in doing so, recognise and begin to imagine the terms of his experience. This moment exemplifies the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in a non-survivor context. Ben's 'outside' perspective functions as a central feature of the narrative strategy and reflects the reader's own desire for distance from Holocaust history. It is as a result of the reader's identification with Ben that his realisations are able to confront and challenge the reader to redefine their gestalten as he redefines his understanding of his parents.

The power of Ben's realisation and the impact of the moment of Merlin's Laugh is also reinforced for the reader by Michaels refusal to 'tell' Ben's parents story in full. The horror that shapes their lives and conditions their experience of life after the Holocaust is left to the imagination of the reader, influenced by the descriptions contained in Jakob's memoir but never explicated fully within the text. The enactment of Merlin's Laugh in Ben's story therefore brings an added dimension to the reader's understanding of Jakob's childhood experiences: the extent to which he was protected and the comparative freedom of his hiding (28). Thus redemption, Michaels suggests, is born out of the personal, both the individual nature of experience and the responses to it.

However, the complexities of Ben's relationship with his parents are often clarified for him by his wife Naomi and her ability to "come out with a statement that sliced to the heart of things" (Michaels 1997: p. 234). Naomi's character reflects a textual ambivalence even as she provides a framework through which this ambivalence can be countered. Michaels' narrative is continuously asking questions but, as a result of key characterisations like Naomi and Athos, few of these questions go unanswered, resolving many of the issues the text raises through the poetic rendering of answers that ultimately preclude the possibility of Merlin's Laugh within these terms. "If the truth is not in the face then where is it? In the hands! In the hands!" (Michaels 1997: p. 93).

Yet the often poignant daily examples of Ben's parents' suffering provide moments of unspeakable sadness that condition the examples of Merlin's Laugh within the text, subtly inscribing the brutalities they experienced as they redefine the reader's imaginative conceptualisation of their experience:

> One might say my parents were fortunate for they didn't lose the family silverware. They had already lost those things (Michaels 1997: p. 246).

Michaels' textual irony reflects its use within survivor narratives and exemplifies the contribution irony can make to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. She is therefore able to challenges the reader's gestalten and confront them with the realities of Holocaust history from an uniquely non-survivor perspective. The juxtaposition of Ben's contemporary perspective and the reality of his parents' existence conditions both the example of Merlin's Laugh quoted previously and the irony that is a feature of its enactment. As a result, this textual moment confronts the reader with the devastation of life enacted by the Holocaust as something that continues beyond liberation, influencing all aspects of life thereafter.

Thus the moments of extreme vulnerability that exist in Ben's descriptions of his parents find their profundity in the fact of his distance from and innocence of their

experience. It is the fact that Ben does not have all the answers, his ambivalence and unease, that enables the second section of the narrative to enact Merlin's Laugh:

> I thought I was encouraging my mother to stop waiting for me by the window . . . I'd like to think at the time I didn't know how cruel this was. When my father and I left the apartment in the morning my mother never felt sure we'd return at all (Michaels 1997: p. 229).

The quotation illuminates the possibilities of Merlin's Laugh enacted within a non-survivor context. It embodies a level of understanding born not of imitation but rather through inheritance. Ben's distance, mirroring both the author's and the reader's own, exemplifies one of the most viable imaginative paths a writer can pursue. It enables Michaels to use this perspective as part of the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh; textual moments that redefine the reader's gestalt and confront them with the on-going implications of this history. Ben's narrative exemplifies the ways in which the journey that the reader takes within the text and the vulnerability that the experience of Laugh engenders is not restricted to survivor narratives. Rather the narrative strategy that creates it can be adapted to reflect a contemporary view point. The relationship that enables the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, between the history of the Holocaust and the contemporary subject, is therefore shaped and forged in the author's dual perspective and experienced within the imagination of the reader. In these terms the work of survivors can be seen as a blueprint that can be adapted by non-survivor writers.

Ben's story illuminates the power inherent in the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor narrative. The re-evaluation of the contemporary subject's distance, through its interrogation within the narrative, can therefore be used to confront and alter the reader's understanding of Holocaust history. It is a narrative structure that is being increasingly employed in, for example, *Eve's Tattoo* by Emily Prager and, more recently, *The Reader* by Bernhard Schlink.

For Prager's central character Eve, a political satirist, the encounter with Holocaust history finds its genesis in her growing fascination with the subject, culminating in the tattooing of her arm with the number of an anonymous camp victim. Eve then uses the tattoo as means of educating those around her with fictional stories based on the life of the unknown Eva. These stories, her "enlightenments" (Prager 1991: p. 114), are a central motif within the text, a kind of performance theatre designed to shock the audience as they find something to identify with in the stories Eve narrates.

As in *Fugitive Pieces*, the function and power of memory are central to Prager's narrative. Eve fundamentally believes in her power to contribute to the continuation of

Holocaust memory through the enlightenments she performs. The central symbolism of the tattoo therefore reflects a powerful inversion of its original intent: as the Nazis used numbers to degrade their victims, Eve uses it to return a type of fictional humanity to the murdered.

However the initial promise of this approach is left unfulfilled by the narrative that Prager produces. It is the possibility of her own victimisation, her discovery of the Nazi euthanasia project, that fuels Eve's interest in Holocaust history and she rarely examines the prospect of her imaginative collusion with Nazism. Her concurrent quest, to discover why the women of Germany embraced Nazism, is never extended to include herself as a possible perpetrator. As a result, the final revelation, that the woman whose tattoo Eve bears was in fact an ardent Nazi, arrested trying to protect her resistance sons, is never interrogated or used to challenge the reader and functions as a final ironic 'twist' in Eve's story.

Sex and death are so deeply enmeshed in *Eve's Tattoo* that at times it becomes impossible to separate the two. This intimate connection ultimately precludes the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within the narrative, as it confines the effect of the meta-narrative of the enlightenments. Eve's lover finds the tattoo repugnant, loses his libido and confesses both his Jewish background and his parents' collusion with the Nazis before leaving. Eve's response exemplifies the discord inherent in an enforced connection between sex and Holocaust memory and the essential shallowness of the characterisations:

> Get him out of your heart, she said to herself. And then what? Ghetto him out of your heart (Prager 1991: p. 80).

Charles' rejection is then juxtaposed with another bedfellow of Eve's, who is so uninformed that he believes Eve to be old enough to be a survivor. He finds the enlightenment a turn on and it becomes a form of pillow talk that leads to sex.

Another feature of Prager's text is the 'clever' one-liners that influence both the narrative's movement and the characters. They neatly tie up both the questions Eve asks and Holocaust history in a tortured, one dimensional answer. "Adolf Hitler had his hands in the underpants of every German woman" (Prager 1991: p. 139). Eve's commentary reveals the challenges inherent in the use of irony as a feature of Merlin's Laugh. Eve's irony does not challenge or confront the reader. Instead it is used as an element of her characterisation. The answers Eve provides therefore precludes the enactment of the Laugh as her commentary closes down the possibility of interrogating the attitudes she espouses. It exemplifies the way in which the confrontational aspect of Merlin's Laugh is

not possible when an ironic response to Holocaust history is used merely as a quip or a witty aside rather than as a means of revealing and interrogating its reality.

The fictional survivor whom Eve encounters, a Jewish transvestite who earns a living imitating women in Yiddish Theatre, illuminates another potential site of enactment for the Laugh, even as his characterisation limits the possibility of its enactment. This characterisation is one of the least convincing in the entire novel, not because of the man's job or the experience he recalls for Eve, but because the narrative denies any confrontation between the way in which Eve conceptualises the Holocaust in her enlightenments and its reality as embodied in the survivor. "'My mother survived as well. Ours is a happy ending.' 'Thank God', said Eve" (Prager 1991: p. 155). The survivor offers a point at which the limitations of Eve's artificial memory could have been revealed, illuminating the limits of tolerable understanding that accompany contemporary Holocaust memory. However, this confrontation is beyond the remit of both the characterisations and the narrative. The depiction of the fictional survivor cannot move beyond wordplay and ultimately becomes a curiosity who has little impact on Eve's psyche or her understanding of the implications of her tattoo.

The novel's conclusion is also rooted in the implicit connection between sex and the Holocaust that Prager makes. Through the deus ex machina of a car accident which results in the removal of the tattoo, Charles and Eve are reunited, his libido restored. This explicit association does little to enlighten the reader and provides a problematic form of closure that, once again, is not struggled for by either the central character or the reader. The couple's new found happiness and Eve's pithy conclusions on the relationship of German womanhood and the Führer are played out against the backdrop of the ending of Apartheid. This encourages Eve to speculate, "can it be that the world will be at peace?" (Prager 1991: p. 182). The naivety of this question, when seen in the terms of the horror of the Holocaust and its continued legacy which Eve purports to remember through her tattoo, exposes much of the inherent shallowness that conditions the novel as a whole and precludes the enactment of Merlin's Laugh.

Eve's Tattoo embodies many of the problems that can accompany the filtering of the Holocaust through a centre of consciousness unrelated to the experience. In an attempt to provide a structure for the set-piece nature of the stories that Eve tells, Prager drowns out any power that they may contain. The Holocaust, like Eve's tattoo, becomes a prop, an interesting talking point, with no visible result or effect either upon the characters or the reader. Had Eve's journey been of a cyclical rather than a linear nature and had Prager used this as part of a narrative strategy that confronted and interrogated the implications of

choice and responsibility, which Eve's use of the tattoo implies, it is possible that Eve's true enlightenment would have been her own and thus the reader's.

Prager's novel is emblematic of the difficulties that exist in identifying the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh with non-survivor fictions. As a result, examining contemporary texts like Prager's is often concerned with identifying the absence or the potential for Merlin's Laugh rather than its presence. In a comparative study with survivor fiction it becomes immediately apparent that, rather than expressing the moment of the Laugh, some contemporary narratives express the possibility of its existence within the spaces the texts leave. The search for textual moments of the Laugh of Merlin in non-survivor fiction is therefore often defined by the identification of possibilities that remain just beyond the bounds of the text.

If Prager's novel is testament to the challenges inherent in the use of a central contemporary character, then Bernard Schlink's novel *The Reader* offers an example not only of its possibilities but also of what is yet to be accomplished by non-survivor fiction. Schlink's novel was a breakthrough German text that was translated into English and focused on the German experience of the Holocaust's legacy. Although the text is problematic, its challenge to the Nazi stereotype provides an example of the potential of Merlin's Laugh enacted within this context.

For the adolescent Michael, his fascination with Hanna contains within it an element of illusion:

> A broad-planed, strong, womanly face. I know that I found it beautiful. But I cannot recapture its beauty (Schlink 1997: p. 10).

It is emblematic of the initial fascination of Germans for the Nazi ethos; its genesis lying not in a reality that memory wants to identify, but in the illusion which is, by its very nature, easier to express. It is therefore possible to see the journey that Michael, the young protagonist, takes (initiated by his relationship with Hanna and altered irrevocably by the revelation of her Nazi past) as a type of metaphor for the relationship between the collective German memory and history, a memory both at war with and also implicated by the horror carried out by the Nazis. This analogous interplay between Michael as representative of the generation who inherited Holocaust history and Hanna as the human face of Nazi history conditions the narrative.

As a part of the 'generation after', Michael's perspective therefore reflects the inherent dualities of his time, the need to condemn outright not only those who took part in the Nazi genocide, but also those who, by their silence, allowed it to continue. This rebuke is conditioned by the recognition that those condemned represent his parents' and

grandparents' generations. In these terms the reader is forced to confront the fact that Holocaust history cannot be consigned to the past as its perpetrators and witnesses are not historical characters but people they could know or be related to. Schlink's examination of the entrenched and entangled web that post-war German memory has woven around the forms of Holocaust history can therefore be seen as another potential site for the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, through his engagement with the questions raised by the perpetrators, their choices and subsequent actions and the resultant fossilisation of their image in the collective German consciousness. Unlike the highly Americanised viewpoint offered by Prager, Schlink's narrative does not attempt to provide all encompassing answers through the personal encounter with history he describes; rather he endeavours to pull the multi-layered nature of those questions apart.

The turmoil experienced by the young Michael, when his relationship with Hanna ends with her desertion, finds its expression in his distance from both himself and those around him. It is a distance that exhibits itself in both "callousness and extreme sensitivity" (Schlink 1997: p. 87). This distance represents a wall of self-protection that is only breached by his recognition of Hanna as a defendant in a Nazi War Crimes trial, and offers an analogy to the influence of the desire for self-preservation which can exist within the uninitiated reader. Through their identification with Michael, his shock upon recognising Hanna becomes the reader's own. For Michael, the identification of Hanna as a Nazi is fundamental to his understanding of the perceived distance between the Nazi stereotype, the embodiment in language of the type of mental preservation Michael subconsciously desires, and the human being who inhabits it. The problematic nature of reconciling these two opposing images illuminates the possibility of Merlin's Laugh within the text as it provides the genesis for the novel.

This opposition is also expressed in Hanna's question to the judge, "so what would you have done?" (Schlink 1997: p.110). The judge's inability to answer this question in relation to himself exemplifies the complexity that exists, not in judging the action, but in attempting to understand the inherent multiplicity of choice and its relationship to human nature. It is a question that again reveals a feature of contemporary Holocaust memory that could be implicitly used as a feature of the narrative strategy that could explicitly confront it through the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. Once the question becomes personal, thrust from the realm of scholarly or judicial speculation, the answer is inevitably tainted by the individual. The judge's answer reveals how little this transference is undertaken, how difficult it is to examine oneself in the light of the Holocaust perpetrators who, when

removed from stereotype, become "men and women like the rest of us" (Langer 1996: p. 5).

This feature of Schlink's narrative represents another feature of contemporary texts that offer the potential to enact of Merlin's Laugh. The reading subject's gestalten, influenced consistently by their own beliefs and ideas, can be confronted and implicated by the reality of the history they encounter. The interrogation of the choices of the perpetrators could therefore illuminate similar aspects of contemporary life. Thus the reader's identification with the individual Nazi, humanised by the intimate, personalised characterisation that a narrative could provide, could expose the forms of stereotyping identified earlier by Bhabha and reveal the inadequacy of that stereotype. The confrontation that this identification could enact represents another possible location for Merlin's Laugh.

Hanna's secret, her illiteracy, which Michael perceives as central to both her journey to the camp and the role she chooses for herself once there, conditions Schlink's attempt to break through this stereotypical portrayal of the Nazi. This characterisation, though flawed, also illuminates the terms of a possible imaginative identification between the reader and the figure of the Nazi that could, through the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh, confront and challenge both the stereotypical image and the desire for distance that conditions it. The juxtaposition of understanding Hanna as an individual with the need for condemnation of her actions, which Michael experiences, illuminates an ambivalence that could have enacted Merlin's Laugh.

For Michael, his attempt to understand both Hanna and her role in the wider canvas of Holocaust history results in a "shameful failure" (Schlink 1997: p.153). His trip to a concentration camp and encounter with a man who, it is suggested, is also implicated in Nazi history, results in a renewed recognition of the paradoxes that challenge those trying to understand Holocaust history. The frozen memories and numbness that he ascribes to the experience of Stuthof concentration camp, and the destabilising effect of recognising Hanna where there exists a set of predetermined stereotypical images, highlights once again the textual possibility of Merlin's Laugh. We may not follow Hanna's life history to a point where we "empathise" (Rose 1996: p. 50) with her crime, as Gillian Rose has suggested, but the reader is encouraged to recognise the influences of personal priorities, in Hanna's case the fear of discovery as an illiterate, within the wider sphere of choices that lead to an individual becoming a perpetrator.

However, the way in which the issue of Hanna's illiteracy is privileged as a central feature of Schlink's narrative ultimately precludes the possible enactment of the Laugh.

Michael's response to the trial is conditioned by a discussion with his father concerning the nature of freedom for the individual and the right to chose. The irony, which is never expressed textually, is that Hanna's wilful inability to make a choice, to be driven by her own fear of discovery, led her to play a role in a system ultimately designed to rob others of that same freedom. Thus the question remains, not openly acknowledged within the text, as to the type of relevance Michael ascribes to his discovery, why he invests so much in the importance of her secret and its true relevance in relation to the crimes Hanna committed. Regardless of any conclusion either Michael or the reader might reach, Hanna's story is never fully interrogated and, as a result, stands as a testimony to the entrenched nature of the 'banality of evil' which Sue Vice recognises as palpable within the text (29).

Although Hanna is not portrayed as representative of German experience during the Nazi regime, the centrality of her illiteracy also negates questions concerning her involvement in the Holocaust and the emotional responses and choices that enabled the perpetrators to continue their work. Thus the highly personalised backshadowing that Michael undertakes conditions the text as a whole and the intimacy of their sexualised relationship influences the reader's understanding of the trial and its outcome. This ambiguity shadows the narrative and, as a result, the horrific image of Hanna selecting a reader from those about to die is never thoroughly interrogated. The confrontational aspect of the choices involved in becoming a perpetrator, that could have enacted Merlin's Laugh, are 'hidden' by the secondary issue of Hanna's illiteracy.

The genesis of Hanna's suicide and her bequest to the survivor of the massacre for which she was tried is also unclear. Its futility in relation not only to Hanna's own crime but to the entirety of Holocaust history, although never fully interrogated, is apparent:

> Do you have some suggestion for what to do with the money? Using it for something to do with the Holocaust would really seem like an absolution to me, and that is something I neither wish nor care to grant
> (Schlink 1997: p. 212).

As a result Hanna's story raises the problematic question of redemption and the expression of guilt without fully addressing their implications.

This aspect of the text is further complicated by the novel's fundamental lack of concern with the murder of the Jews. As a result the text has been criticised as being wholly "about German self-involvement" (Vice 1998: p. 77). The lack of references to the Jewish experience and the underdeveloped character of the survivor are significant flaws within the narrative and there is little to offset the highly personalised depiction of Hanna

or give her wartime victims an equally human face. This undermines the efficacy of the questions that Schlink engages with and problematises the suggestion of Hanna's desire for redemption. There is also little interrogation of the effects of her crime, a feature of collective German history that could have been examined through a more comprehensive rendering of the characterisation and testimony of the survivor.

Schlink's text is ultimately unable to enact the type of confrontation necessary to Merlin's Laugh because it cannot adequately breach the space between the public and the personal to reveal the inherent truths about the interdependence of the two spheres of life. This central and highly problematic feature of the text was addressed by Sue Vice in her critique of the novel in The *Jewish Quarterly*. Vice condemned the intertwining of the public history of the Holocaust with the personal life of Hanna, commenting:

> I think this is why *The Reader* leaves a faintly bad taste in the mouth. In a sense, the only way to make the Second World War symbolic of private matters is to cut out the Holocaust (Vice 1998: p. 77).

This problematic aspect of the text reveals the degree to which Schlink privileges the personal over the public. Thus the relevance of Hanna's illiteracy is never questioned, nor is there any discussion of the reasons behind the numbness that Schlink ascribes to Michael's experience of the camp. The dislocation Michael feels is confined to the specific experience of his love for Hanna and thus similarly confined within the narrative. The frozen images of horror remain, and the complexities of Hanna's responsibility and guilt are left largely unexamined. It is this problematised depiction of the relationship between the individual and the world in which they live, of which the novel is emblematic, that opens the narrative up to the charge of using Hanna's illiteracy as some form of excuse for her actions (30), and denies the possibility of active interrogation into the dualities of choice.

Schlink's novel embodies many of the difficulties facing contemporary writers who appropriate Holocaust history, difficulties which must be overcome if the meanings ascribed to Holocaust history and its legacy are to be revealed and challenged. Merlin's Laugh, enacted within the terms of a non-survivor text, cannot be achieved without a recognition and negotiation of the continuing problems this history poses. As Elie Wiesel has commented:

> If a novelist is ready to face the darkness, if a poet is ready to face the anguish honestly, and not for cheap, easy reasons, anyone can deal with the subject (cited by Lewis 1984: p. 155).

In these terms, non-survivor fictions may "require no defense or justification, but stand or fall on the strength of their aesthetic mastery of the material" (Braham 1993: p. 118).

The majority of texts examined exemplify the ways in which identifying the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in a non-survivor context can resemble the search for the Grail. One catches glimpses, not of its occurrence but of its possibility. Merlin's Laugh therefore functions, in relation to texts like Schlink's and Prager's, as a potential narrative strategy that illuminates both the possibilities and problems of the texts examined. However the examples of its enactment, even in popular, commercialised texts like *Beach Music*, illuminate both the inherent value of such a textual moment, the narrative strategy that creates it and its availability to all non-survivor authors as a means of confronting and challenging their readers to reconceptualise their understanding of Holocaust history.

Through this reading of Merlin's Laugh and the on-going evolution of the non-survivor Holocaust narrative, from appropriation in docu-drama to more imaginative renderings like *Fugitive Pieces*, it is possible to envisage a point of imaginative freedom wherein the complexities of human nature that the Holocaust reveals can be fully examined and interrogated. The work is not reliant inherently upon one seminal text but rather on the collective body of non-survivor texts. This is perhaps the most fundamental common bond between survivor and non-survivor texts, that each individual text provides a part of the mosaic of Holocaust memory and its legacy.

As Ben's narrative in *Fugitive Pieces* exemplified, the creation of Merlin's Laugh in a non-survivor narrative requires a different approach to that of re-creation. The necessity of examining the reciprocal relationship between past and present, asking the right questions and facing the darkness that Wiesel described, illuminates the value of survivor texts as a conduit for this history. Their texts challenge and confront the uninitiated reader/author and their narrative strategy can be adapted within the texts non-survivor writers produce without overwhelming their contemporary perspective. Using survivor narratives in this way could therefore not only alter the forms in which this history is passed on, but also provide a clearer recognition of the effect, on future generations, of the meanings and values applied to the experience of the collective inheritance of Holocaust history.

This work may prove to be central to the continued transmission of Holocaust history. As Bernstein argues:

> The urge to find a new way to tell our stories is not due to any faddish longing after novelty . . . but rather to an urgent need to find a narrative strategy that

> adequately expresses the full range of intellectual premises of our own epoch (Bernstein 1994: p. 124).

Bernstein's comments concerning the genesis of contemporary Holocaust texts illuminate the possibilities inherent in non-survivor narratives. I would argue that the challenge of identifying and interpreting the relationship between Holocaust history and contemporary life, of creating a narrative that can express the implications and legacy of Holocaust history, lies within the grasp of the non-survivor writer. It resides in a framework of projection that may include narrative strategies like Bernstein's sideshadowing and Merlin's Laugh enacted within a non-survivor context. The passing of time has opened up the vista of Holocaust memory to the non-survivor writer; where this opening leads, be it ritualisation and the assignment of a fixed "memory-place" (Hartman 1994: p. 15) or enlarged imagining, remains to be seen.

This work is necessary. Holocaust history, even in the condition in which it appears in many novels, continues to press on the imagination of the reader and informs the stock of symbolism and imagery available to the contemporary writer. The enactment Merlin's Laugh in texts like *Fugitive Pieces* illuminates both its inherent possibilities and the challenges that the Holocaust continues to present to the contemporary imagination. The primary importance of the non-survivor Holocaust novel may therefore lie in its continued existence, in the on-going challenge of examining this history in the light of contemporary attitudes, stereotypes and idealisations, (as opposed to the mastery of the subject matter) that all non-survivor texts reflect. If survivor fiction can be read as a mosaic of the personal experience of the Holocaust, then non-survivor fiction, I would argue, represents the wide range of emotional responses and imaginative connections made by those unrelated to the event by experience. They provide a continuing history of the responses to the Holocaust and their value is expressed by Lawrence Langer:

> Holocaust art is transitional art . . . a necessary art, even more necessary as the event recedes in time and new generations struggle to comprehend why a civilised country in the midst of the 20th century coolly decided to murder all of Europe's Jews. The documents themselves do not answer this vital question for us (Langer 1996: p. 175).

Endnotes for Chapter Two

1. For the orthodox view of non-survivor appropriations of the Holocaust, *see* A. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington &

Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988). In a chapter entitled 'Exploiting Atrocity' (p. 154), Rosenfeld argues:

> All such efforts at 'adapting' the Holocaust are bound to fail – artistically, for reasons of conceptual distortion, and morally, for misusing the sufferings of others.

Although this orthodox argument continues to influence Holocaust criticism, its salutary effects have, I would argue, been reduced by the number of texts produced.

2. J. Young, *Writing and Rewriting The Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990). In Chapter Six Young argues for the availability of Holocaust history to metaphorical rendering.

3. This view of the legacy of the Holocaust is supported in D. Cesarani, ed., *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994). Cesarani argues (p. 308):

> The Holocaust has no end. We still live in a world in which the Holocaust took place. We do not deal with a past, but a present.

4. Lawrence Langer highlights the role of language within the terms of contemporary memory, arguing, that it "illustrates how easy it is to change the impact of a disastrous event simply by renaming it." (L. Langer, *Admitting The Holocaust* (Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 6). The effect of renaming described by Langer can be seen as a central feature of the inscription of contemporary idealisation and the desire for a manageable framework that can be imprinted upon Holocaust history to ensure that its reality does not overcome the desire for distance and safety in relation to the event.

5. For work on Wolfgang Iser's theory of the reader's gestalten, *see* introduction and W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 119.

6. In *Preempting the Holocaust* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998), p. xvii, Lawrence Langer argues that "the urgency to undo ruin has always outpaced the desire to confront it".

7. For a discussion of the arguments concerning uncertainty and my reading of it *see* 21 in the introduction to this work.

8. H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, Routledge), p. 79.

9. J. Semprun, *Literature or Life* (New York and London, Penguin Books), p. 123. Semprun's definition of the wrong question is quoted in the introduction to this work.

10. As James Young has argued, there is "a reciprocal exchange between the past and the present when each is figured in the terms of the other" (J. Young, *Writing and Rewriting The Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 85). This is equally true of the relationship between texts written today concerning the Holocaust and their influence over the production of future texts.

11. *See* D. M. Thomas, *The White Hotel* (New York, Pocket Books, 1981). Thomas's acknowledgement can be found in the frontispiece of the text. Although this referencing tends to suggest that Kuznetsov's relationship to the events he describes is that of a witness, James Young notes that the novel,

> Was also based on the verbatim transcript of the Babi Yar survivor, Dina Pronicheva . . . Because he [Kuznetsov] was not a victim and was too young to remember the surrounding details properly . . . he has deferred to an actual survivor's testimony and to the authority it carries (J. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990) p. 55).

For other examples of the docu-drama genre, *see* J. Hersey, *The Wall* (London, Panther Books, 1978); R. Raske, *Escape From Sobibor* (London, Sphere Books Ltd., 1983).

12. T. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark* (Suffolk, Book Club Associates, 1983). Keneally's footnote, like Kuznetsov's, lays claim to the devices of the novel while decrying the modes of fiction. He comments, "I have attempted to avoid all fiction though, since fiction would debase the record" (Keneally 1983: p.10). He also lists the many Schindler survivors who have helped in the production of the text. Once again the positioning of this author's note is vital. The reader enters the text in the knowledge of both the survivors' contribution and

Keneally's forswearing of fiction. We believe the account we read to be the truth, a fictional stand-in for testimony.

13. *See* M. A. Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (California & London, University of California Press, 1994), pp. 9–42.

14. The difficulties and challenges of creating memory within narrative are a central feature of many survivor writers' experience. Elie Wiesel has famously asserted that "to substitute words, any words, for it [the Holocaust] is to distort it" cited by A. Rosenberg and G. E. Myers, eds., *Echoes From The Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988) p. 382). Primo Levi also described the uncertainties of language in writing of his experience in Auschwitz:

> We say 'hunger', we say 'tiredness', 'fear', 'pain' . . . and they mean different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort (P. Levi, *If This Is A Man* (London, Abacus Books, 1996), p. 129).

As Sara Horowitz argues:

> The unreliability of memory, the inadequacy of representation and the indifference of posterity problematise the role of the witness and the nature of testimony (cited by G. Hartman, ed., *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Massachusetts and Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p. 52).

15. For the range of responses to Stingo's narrating presence and Styron's project in general, *see* A. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 155-166 and S. Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000) pp. 117-140. For an alternative review, *see* Richard Pearce, 'Sophie's Choices' in R. K. Morris, ed., *The Achievement of William Styron* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1981).

It is interesting to note the extent to which Styron's novel still informs the debate concerning Holocaust fiction. In an article entitled 'Giving Memory its Due in an Age Of Licence' Sarah Boxer comments on Cynthia Ozick's critique of the text, given during a symposium in Boston. The symposium, 'The Claims of Memory', was attended by a variety of writers, including Elie Wiesel and Ariel Dorfman. Sarah Boxer cite Ozick's argument that,

> The vast majority of the victims of the Holocaust were Jews but *Sophie's Choice* is about a Polish Catholic victim. 'So what? Why must a writer's

character be representative of the statistical norm?' [Ozick] asked. 'No reason', she answered – 'unless it is the novelist's intention to "put flesh on history". The term historical novel', she said, 'is an oxymoron. Since Sophie's story stands in for history, "the rights of history can begin to urge their own force" over the rights of the imagination' (Sarah Boxer, 'Giving Memory its Due in an Age of Licence', *New York Times*, 28 October 1998, p. E1).

16. For textual references to Styron's text, *see* Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's Ark* (Suffolk, Book Club Associates, 1983), p. 344 and Bernard Schlink, *The Reader* (London, Phoenix House, 1997), p. 147.

17. Styron has never made the balance between fiction and fact in *Sophie's Choice* explicit. However, in his collection of essays entitled *This Quiet Dust and Other Writings* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1983), he comments on one possible source for Sophie's stories. The experience he relates bear direct parallels to fictional elements of Sophie's experience:

> The once devoutly Catholic Polish girl I knew many years ago, the memory of whom impelled my visit to Auschwitz. It was she who, having lost father, husband and two children to the gas chambers, paid no longer any attention to religion, since she was certain, she told me, that Christ had turned his face away from her as He had from all mankind (p. 304).

18. W. Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (London, Corgi Books, 1983) p. 288.

19. *See* W. Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (London, Corgi Books, 1983), pp. 410, 452, 456.

20. In response to the sexualised depiction of Sophie, Gloria Steinem commented:

> If she weren't beautiful and the author hadn't spent a whole summer trying to go to bed with her, he wouldn't have bothered to record her experience at all (cited by S. Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000), p. 138).

21. The text concludes:

> 'Neath cold sand I dreamed of death' but woke at dawn to see in glory, the bright, the morning star. This was not judgement day - only morning.

Morning: excellent and fair. (W. Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (London, Corgi Books, 1983), p. 684)).

22. For a detailed discussion of Styron's work on Hoss, *see* S. Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000), pp. 122–127.

23. The success and influence of *Sophie's Choice* is exemplified by the way in which it is used as a selling point for other texts. *See* T. Hayden, *The Sunflower Forest* (London, Grafton Books 1986). The front cover advertises the book as 'A remarkable poignant novel in the great tradition of *Sophie's Choice*.'

24. *See* L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust* (Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 75-88.

25. For an example of this type of reasoning as used by the Nazis in defence of their actions, *see* G. Sereny, *Into that Darkness: From Mercy Killing To Mass Murder* (London, Pimlico, 1995). The text, comprised in part of interviews with Franz Stangl, bears ample evidence to Stangl's inability to recognise his behaviour as a result of a series of choices. On page 134, Stangl argues this point, highlighting what he perceived to have been the inherent danger and futility of resistance.

26. Interestingly, Michaels also openly acknowledges the debt her work owes to survivor texts, highlighting Terrence Des Pres' *The Survivor* as being of particular importance in her acknowledgements, found at the end of the novel.

27. For a discussion of *le cri de Merlin* and its application in relation to Holocaust texts, *see* the introduction.

28. A. Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing 1997), p. 44.

29. S. Vice, 'The Holocaust Without Jews', *Jewish Quarterly*, 169 (Spring 1998), p. 77.

30. Ozick made this charge against *The Reader* at the symposium mentioned in note 15. Sarah Boxer comments:

The woman's [Hanna's] illiteracy is used, Ms Ozick said, to exculpate her. Furthermore, she said, this woman is an anomaly: after all most Germans in power were far from illiterate. An anomaly like this, Ms Ozick said, 'sweeps away memory'. She cannot be excused even in the name of literary freedom (S Boxer, 'Giving Memory its Due in an Age of Licence', *New York Times*, 28 October, 1998, p. E1).

Chapter Three

Merlin's Laugh And The Holocaust on Film: Creating a Cinematic Past For Future Remembrance

> Ours is an era that has special difficulty in distinguishing appearance from reality. Our comprehension of the past is less and less shaped by the complexities of the written word and the intimacy of human dialogue. Increasingly, our understanding of history is transmitted via the fleeting imagery of mass media. Whether we like it or not, these media have become primary vehicles of socialization. They dictate the way we see the world (Fensch 1993: p. 231).

> Film has changed the way we perceive the world and therefore, to a lesser extent, how we operate in it. Yet while the existence of film may be revolutionary the practise of it most often, is not (Monaco 1981: p. 218).

> What is to be done with the cinema animal: how can it be nurtured, but also trained? (Hartman 1994: p. 91).

There can be little doubt that, in spite of the relatively short history of film, 'the movies' have assumed a pre-eminent role in shaping the ways in which we see and understand the world. The iconic freight of the last hundred years of film surrounds us; an 'entertainment' that has a undeniable hold over the imagination of the public. While the running time of a film may be anywhere between two and three hours, their impact can be immediate and far-reaching:

> Often the depictions seen on screen influence the public's view of historical subjects much more than books do (Toplin 1996: p. vii).

Film presents a profound challenge to the transmission of the Holocaust. A central feature of this challenge is the problematic nature of translating Holocaust history through a visual medium that is, by and large, concerned with entertaining the spectator. The creative norms and choices that underpin the medium and the ways in which they condition the creation of visual Holocaust texts therefore assumes an even greater importance as more and more movies specifically dealing with the Nazi era are released. The passage of time and the popularity of films like *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful*

(1) have encouraged filmmakers to view the Holocaust as a suitable subject for appropriation.

For Elie Wiesel, the consequences of such wholesale appropriation reveal an underlying anxiety concerning Holocaust representation:

> If we allow total freedom to the mass media, don't we risk seeing them profane and trivialize a sacred subject? (Insdorf 1990: p. xi)

His question, while raising important issues concerning the way in which the Holocaust is represented on film, is rapidly becoming obsolete. The total freedom that Wiesel feared has become a reality. The debate as to whether or not the Holocaust belongs on cinema screens is inevitably being superseded by the issues raised by the existence and continued production of films. However, as Hollywood treatments of the Holocaust grow in number, the concerns that motivate Wiesel assume a greater significance.

Film undoubtedly offers the possibility of communicating Holocaust history to a far wider audience, a proportion of whom may never come into contact with any of the significant literary representations of the Shoah. Yet the inherent dichotomy of film – dissemination versus trivialisation, a revolutionary medium that appears largely conservative in its practice – is a potent one. The power of film lies in its inclusiveness; it is an artistically seductive genre with an enormous appeal. For films dealing specifically with historical material the seductive features of the medium can be both promissory and dangerous. Thus, in attempting to reach across the diversity of its audience, film can foster trivialisation and distortion, creating a highly persuasive, if essentially false, understanding of the given subject in the mind of the spectator (2).

The relationship between the Holocaust and its rendering on film is therefore both encouraging and contentious. There can be little doubt that if the aesthetic power experienced by all who have been captivated by the movies could be harnessed to give expression to the realities and legacy of Holocaust history, it would be possible to clearly define the inherent promise film as a medium offers. However, the very characteristics which make the medium so appealing to a mass audience (happy endings, universally identifiable characters, etc.) seem to be diametrically opposed to the very nature of the Holocaust. In these terms the application of the narrative strategy that creates the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh would appear beyond its scope. The question therefore remains as to whether contemporary filmmakers who, like non-survivor writers are distanced from the Holocaust, can create a cinematic narrative that could, through a confrontation with the spectator's preconceptions, enact the Laugh of Merlin.

As previous chapters have exemplified, the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh is linked to the representation of Holocaust history. To break down the desire for distance and the "clamour for reassurance" (Langer 1995: p. 7) that exists for those of us who have inherited this history, rather than experienced it, continues to be a challenge for all who appropriate the Holocaust. As a result it is possible to see the blueprint provided by survivor texts as equally available to both the filmmaker and the writer. Survivor narratives illuminate the experience of the Holocaust and the complexities inherent in its representation. Through their work and the experience of reading the textual moment I have described as Merlin's Laugh they challenge the preconceptions and idealisations that can condition the reader's reception of the text. Their narratives exemplify the ways in which it is possible to confront this desire for distance and mental self-preservation. As a result, their work stands as a bench mark and a guide-line for all Holocaust narratives.

Thus authentic non-survivor representation, asking "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) of an audience, as a means of enacting a confrontation between their preconceptions and the reality of the Holocaust legacy, is central to the creation of Merlin's Laugh whether in visual or written texts. Like their authorial counterparts, non-survivor filmmakers face the challenge of discovering and asking these questions of their uninitiated audience. As previously discussed, non-survivor narrational future knowledge (3) need not be based on imitation or re-creation, as a means of fostering interrogation and affecting the response of its audience. The contemporary viewpoint on Holocaust history, the challenges it still presents and the questions it continues to raise, could provide the non-survivor narrative with a valid perspective that can be guided by, but is not dependent upon, the survivor's experience.

However, if the enactment of the Laugh of Merlin within a contemporary narrative is related directly to Holocaust history and its legacy, then the structure of the vehicle of its telling is equally important. Film, a visual medium, with an innately different structure from literature presents its own problems and possibilities. As Robert Rosenstone argues:

> Films change the rules of the historical game, insisting on its own sorts of truths, truths which arise from a visual and aural realm that is difficult to capture in words (Rosenstone 1995a: p. 15).

The structural differences that exist between literature and film would appear at first to preclude the possibility of Merlin's Laugh. As discussed previously, the active involvement of the reader/spectator is vital to its enactment. This involvement, in a literary work, is conditioned by the reader's consistent gestalten (4). Thus, within the terms of a literary text, the imaginative engagement of the reader forms the basis for the

confrontation with textual moments within the narrative that the Laugh enacts. Without this engagement, without "the conflict between preconceived, culturally nourished moral expectations and the violation of that expectation" (Lang 1988: p. 36), the text's confrontation with the reader's preconceptions and desire for distance, that defines the moment of the Laugh, is lost.

However, the structure of film appears to foster the perception of spectatorship as an essentially passive act, of watching as consumption, as opposed to the active imagining required in reading. As a result, this type of engagement would appear to be beyond its scope. Yet recent film theory has challenged this concept and redefined the role of the spectator:

> In opposition to all passive notions of spectatorship then, we should consider film viewing a complicated, even skilled activity . . . Here perhaps, is the most significant relation between the spectator and the reader
> (Bordwell 1995: p. 33).

Bordwell's argument concerning the parallels between reader and spectator is based upon three key criteria for spectatorship which are necessary to the imaginative production of meaning: perceptual capacities, the construction, into a continuous whole, of the rapid images presented; a prior knowledge and understanding, a schemata of everyday life that exists within the mind of the spectator and drawn upon in the creation and assignment of meaning; and the material structure of the film, a structure designed to encourage fabula construction through cinematic gestures like cues and gaps (5).

The parallels between Iser's argument concerning active readership and the spectator are evident. Both reader and spectator share a basic and immediate perceptual capacity to recognise the construct that they are confronted with. For the construction of a narrative to be discernible, the spectator, like the reader, must come to the film with an already existing 'database' of expectations and experiences, that will condition the interpretations placed on a given sign. Like the reader, the spectator's understanding of the text is, to a certain extent, conditioned by the pre-existing set of values, hopes and ideals that are brought to the text. As Bordwell argues:

> The spectator comes to the film . . . prepared . . . to apply a set of schemata derived from context and prior experience (Bordwell 1995: p. 34).

It is this store of knowledge and belief that conditions the gestalten or, in cinematic terms, "fabula" (Bordwell 1995:p. 49) construction of the spectator and that can be implicitly recognised as part of the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh.

The structure of a film's narrative actively engages the spectator in fabula construction, encouraging imaginative connections between signs, drawing on both their own knowledge and experience and the emotional connection forged between spectator and character to create a coherent understanding of the film. Thus the spectator, contrary to any ascribed passivity, is part of a dynamic process of assigning meaning to the films they watch. The film's fabula is never present on the screen, existing only within the minds of the spectators and conditioned by their active role in the process of understanding film.

The parallels between the act of reading and spectatorship illuminate the possibilities of film as a medium through which the Laugh of Merlin can be created and experienced. As Bordwell argues:

> The mixture of anticipation, fulfilment, and blocked or retarded or twisted consequences can exercise great emotional power. *The formal processes of perception and cognition . . . can trigger affect* (Bordwell 1995: p. 40).

The active participation of the spectator and the ability of any given text, regardless of genre, to confront, challenge and ultimately derail the prior expectations of the spectator, form the basis for the application of Merlin's Laugh within a cinematic context. However, this possibility is inevitably conditioned by the narrative employed to translate Holocaust history. As a result, cinematic interpretations of the Holocaust present significant challenges and unique opportunities for adapting the blueprint narrative strategy found in survivor texts and that creates Merlin's Laugh.

It is the act of observation that defines the difference and singularity of movies as a mode of translation for history:

> The huge images on screen and wraparound sounds tend to overwhelm us . . . destroy our attempts to remain aloof, distanced or critical. In the movie theatre we are, for a time, prisoners of history (Rosenstone 1995a: p. 27).

Unlike the act of reading, a central feature of cinematic spectatorship is the completion of a narrative within a set period of time, without distraction or interruption. The actualised time of the film means that the spectators' fabula construction, their personal assignment of meaning within the confines of the narrative, is always working to catch up with the images presented on the screen. The pace of the film requires the full attention of the spectator, who must, to a certain extent, become a 'prisoner', not only of the depicted history, but also of the imagery chosen to translate it. Thus the structure of film offers the possibility of leading a spectator, without a significant break in the momentum of the narrative, to a moment of confrontation with the realities and legacy of

Holocaust history: Merlin's Laugh. The effect of its enactment within film could therefore be all the more powerful for its immediacy.

However, the existence of such an encounter depends almost entirely on the choices and decisions of the director. The level of control ascribed to the director finds its genesis in the variance between a linguistic sign and a visual one.

> In film the signifier and the signified are almost identical: the sign of the cinema is a short circuit sign (Monaco 1981: p. 140).

Like a literary text, the symbols, the metonymic and connotative signs that condition the journey of the spectator through the visual text, remain almost totally under the remit of the director, "le grand imagier" (6), or author of the cinematic text. However, the actualised time of film, coupled with the short circuit nature of the cinematic sign, gives the director almost unparalleled control over the presentation of his subject and the meaning ascribed to it. Fabula construction therefore functions on a different level to the gestalt of literary readings; a general meaning given to collective portions of the action as opposed to the specific meaning created within the imagination by the individual word or phrase:

> Film does not suggest, in this context it states. And therein lies its power (Monaco 1981: p. 128).

This examination of film as a medium illuminates the possible impact of Merlin's Laugh. The effect of the Holocaust's legacy experienced within the physical and imaginative confines of the medium, bringing a confrontational dimension to the viewing experience that could be all the more effective because of the immediacy of film. As a result, it is possible to imagine a cinematic narrative which could resist closure and redemption and confront the implicit idealisations of the spectator as it presents alternative interpretations of the legacy of the Holocaust.

However this relationship between uninitiated director-construct-audience also illuminates those conditions inherent in film which allow for the type of misrepresentation which could terminate the enactment of the Laugh in the instant that the possibility of its existence is recognised. The decisions made by a director concerning both the narrative and the images used to translate it are underpinned and reinforced by the framework that the camera, and by extension the screen, provides (7). The rigorousness with which this boundary operates, claiming the audience's whole attention and dissuading them from imaginatively seeing beyond it, ensures that in the pursuit of coherence, the director's use of conflation and omissions plays a significant part in the construction of individual scenes and the overall meaning created by the film.

Conflation and distortion are invisible to the spectator: the camera provides a seamless construct which exists within a duality of seeing and being seen. Although the audience is aware that they are watching something specifically designed for that purpose, film presents itself as complete and in some ways removed from the act of seeing:

> The secret of its [film's] efficacy as a discourse is that it effaces all marks of enunciation . . . the transparent film . . . rests upon a denial that anything is absent or that anything has to be searched for (Caughie 1993: p. 226).

Although film can provide a cinematic site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh, there can be little doubt that, within the terms of the medium, the Holocaust presents significant problems. The Holocaust resists closure and an authentic representation must challenge and overwhelm pre-packaging or the type of containment that defines the camera's gaze. As previously argued, a central feature of the translation of Holocaust history and the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor narrative must be the interrogation of the tolerable limits of the uninitiated subject's understanding of Holocaust history, based upon the recognition of that which they cannot or do not want to know. As a result, a feature of the narrative strategy that creates the textual moments of Merlin's Laugh, adapted within a visual context, must be to challenge and overcome the limitations of the cinema screen.

Thus the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a cinematic context can be seen as posing, for the director, many of the same challenges which confront non-survivor writers. It is therefore possible to argue that a central feature of the director's role is the recognition and interrogation of their own distance from the event. This work may then be reflected by the ways in which a director can expand the boundaries and accepted norms of their given medium to express truthfully both the horror and its inheritance in a way that demands an imaginative response from the audience. As a result the terms of non-survivor narrational future knowledge, of interrogation as opposed to recreation, can be seen as equally available to the cinematic text as they are to the literary narrative.

One example of the way in which film can achieve this type of representation can be found in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. It is in this work that a cinematic enactment of Merlin's Laugh can be seen. Eleven years in the making, *Shoah* is an original and significant attempt to engage with the Holocaust on film. The film, nine and a half hours long, was compiled from over three hundred and fifty hours of interviews with survivors, witnesses and Nazis, and includes footage of death and concentration camps (8). It is a testament to the power of Lanzmann's film that many of the visual images that he used

have become part of a cinematic 'database' and have appeared in contemporary Hollywood treatments like *Schindler's List* (9).

Although *Shoah* can be categorised as a documentary, driven by a structure that differs significantly from the fictionalised narratives of more popular films, the film holds key lessons concerning the value of cinematic interpretations and the effect of the aesthetic decisions that underpin all visual narratives. Thus the central feature of Lanzmann's narrative, to allow the Holocaust to emerge through the fragmented testimony of those who experienced it, study it and live with it today, illuminates vital lessons for contemporary filmmakers. The example which *Shoah* provides concerns not only the way in which the Holocaust is rendered cinematically, but also the type of philosophical and historical awareness that can contribute to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh.

The enactment of Merlin's Laugh in *Shoah* finds its genesis in Lanzmann's refusal to create a construct which disavows its own nature. Throughout *Shoah* the audience is made aware that the film is demanding their acknowledgement of its existence as product. The role of the spectator is made explicit throughout the film and there is nothing to suggest that the spectator is looking through a window at an alternative reality. The world which Lanzmann depicts is the spectator's own and its landscape bears the markings of genocide, even as time and memory resolve to remove them. For Lanzmann, the truth of Holocaust history could not be found by attempting to recreate images or events, but rather by allowing the landscape of the Shoah to speak for itself (10). This central metaphor of the landscape is not confined to the geography of the Holocaust but extends to include the survivor and the perpetrator. That which the landscape can no longer tell is made material through the faces of the survivors whom Lanzmann interviews.

Shoah does not rely on historical footage to give the text a pseudo-authority. Instead it utilizes contemporary images of the camps and the mechanics of the extermination process, trains and sidings. These images are often voiced over with the recollection of survivors, cutting between the face of the witness and the landscape described as it exists today. This feature of the text is central to the narrative strategy that Lanzmann employs and that enacts Merlin's Laugh within the film. *Shoah* demands the imaginative participation of the spectators, placing their sensibilities somewhere between, for example, the green panorama of Chelmno today and the description, by Simon Srebnik, of the burning of the bodies of those murdered there. The juxtaposition of the contemporary vision of the landscape with the testimony of the history given by survivors creates the confrontational, imaginative engagement necessary to Merlin's Laugh. It demands the

active engagement of the spectators in the meaning they ascribe to each testimony, revealing the tolerable limits of contemporary understanding.

Thus the spectator is made aware not only of the act of witnessing, the physical process that Srebnik undertakes on his return to Chelmno, but also of their own role within it. To begin to understand Srebnik's testimony, it is not enough simply to listen to his description or look at the footage of the Chelmno site today. Something more is demanded: the conjoining of sight and sound, of oral testimony and visual images, within the imagination, to create a meaning that is inherently personal to the spectator. It is this confrontation that conditions the spectator's experience of Merlin's Laugh in *Shoah*. As a result, mental self preservation, conditioned by the spectator's store of implicit hopes and idealisations, is constantly challenged by the images and testimony which Lanzmann uses to evoke the reality of the Holocaust, a reality which confronts and radically affects the terms of understanding.

Shoah also reflects another key aspect of the terms of creation of Merlin's Laugh within a visual context; a refusal to allow the history documented to become in any way subordinated to the agencies of film. By ensuring that the past is rendered through the voices of survivors in the present, Lanzmann connects both spheres with an underlying, interrogative aspect that implicitly acknowledges the preconceptions of the spectator as part of the narrative strategy that is then able to constantly question their understanding of the Holocaust; creating cinematic moments of Merlin's Laugh. This approach illuminates the Holocaust's legacy rather than appearing to resolve the questions that it raises concerning contemporary life. The camera functions not as a closed frame, but as a roving eye, insisting that the audience look beyond it for that which cannot be seen, revealing the limitations of the cinema screen. As a result *Shoah*,

> Rather than opening a window onto the past, . . . opens a window on to a different way of thinking about the past (Rosenstone 1995a: p. 63).

The mosaic of experience which Lanzmann documents makes explicit the continuing influence and effects of the Holocaust, while ensuring that the spectator is left in no doubt of the historical realities of the Nazi death machine. In this way, Lanzmann illuminates "right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) and reflects them back upon the spectator, refusing to admit any form of closure or redemption which could influence the film's narrative or reduce the impact of the moments of Merlin's Laugh his film enacts.

For the spectator, whose contemporary perspective conditions the way in which the differing testimonies are received, the words of the bystanders and perpetrators carry a particular challenge. Much of the testimony given by the Polish villagers and Nazis

interviewed by Lanzmann concerns 'what was not seen' and it is made apparent that the rules of seeing are arbitrary and dependent upon the choices of the individual witness. The film makes explicit the relationship between a personal agenda, whether, as in the case of the bystander, that agenda works to limit personal responsibility, or, as in the case of the spectator, it is conditioned by idealisation or the desire for distance. Thus the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in these sections of the film is defined by the implicit suggestion of a parallel between the bystander and the cinematic spectator, using this feature of the narrative strategy to tacitly question the terms of witnessing, whether historical or contemporary.

The immediacy of film also allows Lanzmann to juxtapose the testimony of the bystander with the memory of survivors, revealing the results of the choices made and illuminating the interconnected nature of personal responsibility within the framework of the larger history of the Holocaust.

As Annette Insdorf notes, this is only possible because of Lanzmann's "intimacy with (and commitment to) the cinematic medium as well as the historical facts" (Insdorf 1990: p. 254). Lanzmann's cinematic style, the ranging camera, anchored by the presence of Lanzmann himself as investigator and interviewer, demands from spectators a recognition of the nature of their witnessing and their relationship to Holocaust memory. This type of radical approach to film provides the spectator with a defining experience, and it is this which opens up the possibilities of Merlin's Laugh within the cinematic medium.

One example of Merlin's Laugh can be seen in the meeting between Simon Srebnik and the residents of Chelmno (11) outside a church that was used as a holding centre for Jews selected for death. During a long sequence, interrupted by a procession celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Virgin Mary, villagers offer their recollections of the Nazi campaign. As the people talk, the spectator is aware that many of those present stood by as genocide was enacted. Their testimony is, at times, both ludicrous and disturbing. However it is not simply this testimony which enacts Merlin's Laugh. In the midst of the villagers stands one of the two survivors of Chelmno: Simon Srebnik. It is the almost unreadable expression on his face, the half smile that frames every word spoken, which underpins the testimony of the residents. It is the landscape of his face which renders the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh. This moment lies beyond linguistic description; it is tied irrevocably to the image of Srebnik stood amongst the people of Chelmno.

The subtle irony of Rudolf Vrba's testimony offers another example of Merlin's Laugh and exemplifies the contribution that textual irony and laughter can make to its

enactment. Vrba, an Auschwitz inmate, describes the arrival of transports at the camp and his job of unloading the bodies of those who did not survive the trip. Unloading, Vrba comments with a wry smile, was always done at a feverish pace, always running, never walking: the Germans "are a sporty nation you see" (12). Vrba's irony provides a corollary to the textual examples found in survivor narratives such as that of Tadeusz Borowski (13). It is the terms of Vrba's humour, the confrontation between the extremity of experience which is the context for his humour and the spectator's perception of the unacceptability of laughter in relation to the Holocaust, reinforced visually by Vrba's facial expression, which defines the moment of the Laugh.

Whether it is in the fixed smile of Mordechai Podchlebnik, or in the grainy image of Franz Suchomel's rendition of a Treblinka song which, as he comments, no Jewish person is left alive to remember (14), Merlin's Laugh is enacted on screen. It is the underlying questions and challenges which Lanzmann's film continuously poses, combined with the duality of the images and the experience of sight and sound, which enable the confrontation inherent in moments like that of Srebnik in Chelmno. These moments are difficult to describe precisely because they are linked directly to the act of viewing. They represent a rendering of Merlin's Laugh in a structure that is unique to film. As a result:

> Cinematic language is pushed and prodded into expressing complex truths, disorientating, stinging and enlightening the viewer (Insdorf 1990: p. 255).

Shoah also illuminates the possibilities inherent in film's ability to employ silence as a key factor in the translation of memory and the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. Silence is presented as a fundamental trope within the film. Throughout *Shoah*, the images on screen speak for themselves, following particularly difficult moments of testimony with a space of silent reflection that heightens the impact of the words of the witness, whether survivor or perpetrator. The positioning of these silences is crucial, humbling the spectators as the silence confronts them with the depth of the horror of the events described. Silence in these terms contributes to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh as it confronts the desire for distance, closure or redemption by focusing the spectator both on what has been said and also on that which remains beyond speech.

Silence can therefore be read as assuming the hallmarks of a secondary character, of *le cri*, the shadow of the dead. It actively engages the spectator and demands an imaginative response. *Shoah* is therefore able to juxtapose the unceasing nature of the medium with the need for contemplation, highlighting the singularity of the event and exposing the spectator to the lost testimony of those that died, through the absence of sound. In the shots of Srebnik and the Chelmno inhabitants, it is his silence that confronts

the spectator not simply with what is being said, but with that which is left unspoken. It implicitly questions the spectator's response to both the witnesses and the survivor. Thus it is Srebnik's silence that enacts Merlin's Laugh. This is perhaps one of the most important lessons that *Shoah* holds (15), one that few directors have been able to emulate as successfully.

Shoah represents a primary example of the value of the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh adapted within a cinematic context. The meta-narrative of the film is essentially the journey of the filmmaker to overcome his own distance from the Holocaust, his own desire to look away, and this conditions the whole film. The explicit engagement with the contemporary subject's distance and its influence within the terms of the film's narrative strategy reveals not only the possibilities of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh within a cinematic text but also its effects: illuminating the inherent potential of a non-survivor perspective on the history of the Holocaust.

However *Shoah*'s remit is undoubtedly different from the fictionalised narratives that make up the vast majority of popular, commercial films dealing with the Holocaust. This distinction, combined with the nine-and-a-half-hour running time, ensures that while the profound effect of watching the film is undeniable, its sphere of influence does not compare to the reach of a recognisable Hollywood vehicle (16). There can be little doubt that the widespread dissemination of Holocaust history through film will not be brought about by cinematic documentary, regardless of the level of achievement inherent in the film. Lanzmann's film was an exclusively European enterprise that held little interest for American investors or distributors (17). This apathy can be seen as reflective not only of the difficulties inherent in getting Holocaust narratives of this scope into cinemas but also of the perceived resistance of the cinema-going audience to sitting through it.

To truly understand the effect of the more popularised, accessible Holocaust films which have shaped perceptions of the Shoah in the contemporary consciousness, requires an examination of films which reach larger audiences. Examining well-known treatments in the light of the innate dualities of film illuminates the perceived boundaries under which such films work and highlights ways in which they can be overcome if mainstream cinematic texts are to adapt the narrative strategy that enact the textual moments of the Laugh of Merlin. It is possible to employ Lanzmann's film and its relation to more commercialised film in an analogous way to that between survivor narratives and their non-survivor counterparts. The "right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) that his film asks and embodies can therefore be seen as a blueprint or guide-line, not to dismiss the role of mainstream narrative films or their achievements, but to illuminate the terms of the

cinematic narrative strategy that enacts Merlin's Laugh applied within this more conservative cinematic product.

However, if *Shoah* illuminates the enactment of Merlin's Laugh on film, its application to the 'blockbuster' movie is complicated by the dualities inherent in narrative film. Distinguishing the narrational and visual elements and the contribution they make to the translation of the Holocaust is challenging, as the very nature of film is designed specifically to remove the features of its own creation; to give the appearance of a seamless whole. The interdependence of the narrative and visual signs and the way in which this relationship functions within the terms of the cinema screen influence every aspect of the cinematic text. For commercial movies, the 'story' is explicitly part of their appeal and as a result the terms of this relationship is central to the cinematic enactment of Merlin's Laugh.

One film concerning the Holocaust that achieved widespread popular and critical acclaim was Alan Pakula's 1982 adaptation of William Styron's novel, *Sophie's Choice*. His film provides an initial example of the complexities inherent in film and the challenges it presents. Predating *Shoah* by three years, *Sophie's Choice* garnered five Academy Award nominations (although not one for Best Film) and won Meryl Streep a Best Actress award.

Pakula's film exhibits many of the dualities that exist within the novel (18) and in many ways the literary bias of the novel is transplanted to the screen. Pakula adapts the nineteenth century novelistic conventions of the narrative to film, using Josef Summer's voice-over as a way of framing the subsequent narratives of Sophie and Nathan. As a result, the words of the older Stingo instantly identify the narrative as memory, appearing on screen as literally rose-tinted by time and defined for the audience by Stingo's sensibilities.

The use of colour to illustrate both the nature of memory and the multi-layered meanings ascribed to it reinforces the artistic project at the heart of the narrative and functions as one of the film's defining features. It illuminates the role of colour as central to the visual texts' expression of its metaphors. Thus Stingo's emergence from the darkness of the subway into the light of the street is expressive of his entrance into the world and the subsequent importance of his experiences with Sophie and Nathan in Yetta's lavishly pink palace. The interplay between shadow and light works in a variety of metaphorical ways, illustrating visually the darkness at the heart of Sophie and Nathan's relationship as well as the 'excess' of emotion that conditions it

Colour contributes a uniquely visual perspective to the possibility of Merlin's Laugh. It is possible to see the sensuous colours and textures of Brooklyn juxtaposed with the sepia tones of Sophie's memory of Auschwitz as exemplifying, in purely visual terms, the variance between post-war life as experience and life as existence as it was encountered in Auschwitz. As a result, the use of colour can offer a visual challenge to the spectator's conception of the Holocaust through its depiction on screen.

Pakula also makes judicious use of subtitling and does not adopt the universalising accented English of most Hollywood treatments. This ensures that a sense of the Babel of languages that was Auschwitz is translated cinematically. On a more basic level, the subtitling demands the audience's attention in the sections of film which deal specifically with Sophie's memories. Disturbing the linear progression of the narrative, these episodes appear as flashbacks. Each flashback is 'heard', focused visually through close up shots of Sophie, before they are 'seen'. This technique identifies Sophie's story as a form of testimony that, in the cut to the images of her past, graphically represents her memories' intrusion into her life in the present.

The most cinematically interesting of these flashbacks deals specifically with Sophie's experience of Auschwitz and it is during this episode that we find another example of the way in which Merlin's Laugh can be adapted visually. The imagery with which Pakula evokes the camp is minimal. We do not see Sophie's daily life or the detailed workings of the camp; rather, it is through the stark contrast with the sumptuousness of previous scenes that the degradation of life in Auschwitz is illustrated (19). As Sophie is taken through the gates of the commandant's house, the camera pans up and over the wall and the screen is suffused with yet another level of textual colour. Thus the house, an oasis of colour surrounded by the dull, muddy existence of the camp, illustrates graphically the perceived distance between persecutor and persecuted. It is this connotative experience, of the distance between the identifiable features of life that exist in the Hoss household and the world of the camp that surrounds it, that provides another possible site of confrontation for the spectator. The additional juxtaposition of these scenes with the resplendence of Brooklyn conditions the spectator's response to Sophie and challenge and shape the meaning ascribed to her story.

It is the possibilities exemplified by this visual encounter which condition the enactment of Merlin's Laugh in a cinematic context. The rendering of the images used to define the movement between Auschwitz and the post-war world both disturb the linear progression of the narrative and influence the spectator's fabula construction of the terms of survival as experienced by Sophie. The repeated flashbacks graphically illustrate the

ways in which Holocaust memory refuses closure and overwhelms the fact of physical liberation. Through the use of colour, flashback and the ever-present simplicity of Marvin Hamlisch's musical score, Sophie's death can be experienced by the spectator as the final enunciation of her camp life and the constant, intrusive nature of its memory.

However, much of what is positive in *Sophie's Choice* in terms of understanding the complexities of presenting the Holocaust on film, appears as a result of Pakula's skill as a filmmaker as opposed to a story-teller. Pakula uses Streep's face as a landscape through which much that cannot be said is translated. It is an essentially intimate portrayal, expressive in purely visual terms, and it is Streep's performance that anchors the film, focusing the spectators on the limitations of Stingo's understanding and by extension their own (20). It is due largely to Streep's performance that Sophie is never totally subsumed by the narrative dominance of Stingo or by Kevin Kline's overpowering characterisation of Nathan. The final shot of the movie, Sophie's face seen through a blanket of white light, draws the spectator back to her story in a way that was impossible in Styron's narrative. It allows for a moment of contemplation which is both powerful and effective, offsetting the effect of the deus ex machina of the couple's suicide and Stingo's redemptive vision. This scene again illustrates the possibilities of silence as a feature of Merlin's Laugh, as a means of refusing closure and confronting the spectators with the limits of their own understanding.

What becomes apparent from this reading of the visual aspects of *Sophie's Choice* is the dimension that film can add to the translation of Holocaust memory. In many ways Pakula's film works, in visual terms, against the conventions of Styron's novel, drawing attention away from the all-consuming narrative of Stingo as it illustrates its presence, attempting to give a visual pre-eminence to Sophie as a means of defying her subjugated narrative role. However, the historicised 'present' in *Sophie's Choice*, while providing an effective visual juxtaposition with the Auschwitz scenes, also contributes to a sense of her story as a completed tragedy. This feature of the film illuminates the visual challenges inherent in enacting Merlin's Laugh within a cinematic context. While the film insists that the spectator recognises that this is essentially Stingo's memory, the visual texture of the Brooklyn scenes can be read as 'dating' Stingo's experience and allowing the audience a distance from the story as a whole. The failure to breach the distance between the contemporary spectator and the historicised past the film presents problematises the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. Although the spectator responds to the representation of Holocaust history emotionally, they are never implicated by it; it is not of our time. Thus

the legacy of the Holocaust ends with Sophie's death, confined to a past, defined by costume, colour and setting, which is not connected to contemporary life.

Streep's compelling performance also highlights the problematic nature of Styron's narrative, which proves impossible for the film to bypass: the shoehorning of Sophie's experience between the hackneyed and intrusive story-line of Stingo's emergence into literary manhood and the excess of Nathan's insanity. The film can never quite overcome these boundaries and intrusions. It exemplifies the complex relationship between the visual depiction and the underlying narrative as it is given on the screen. The simplifications necessary to contain the story within the film's running time mean that many of the questions concerning the nature of the perpetrator raised by Styron's novel are lost in order to facilitate the plot. The problematic aspects of the text, for example, the pre-eminent sex and death metaphor which damages the efficacy of Styron's Holocaust appropriation, are also present within the film. The final sex scene between Sophie and Stingo, positioned immediately after Sophie's description of choosing between her children on the ramp at Auschwitz, appears gratuitous. This response is reinforced by the voice-over of the adult Stingo informing the spectator of his inexhaustible lust for Sophie, a lust that has not been affected by her testimony.

The result is that, as in Styron's novel, Sophie's cinematic story is constantly at risk, seen only in terms of the eroticised gaze of the two men that displaces her Holocaust testimony to a point where it ceases to function as anything other than a rather grim prelude to sexual or emotional conquests. In these terms the immediacy of film vividly illustrates both Styron/Stingo's and Pakula's fundamental misuse of Holocaust memory. Pakula is unable to extricate his film from the limitations which exist within Styron's text. The Holocaust therefore becomes the director's tool, extending a vicelike grip over the audience's sympathies while its legacy, the questions the film could raise to challenge the audience, is subsumed by its use as an emotional counterpoint to the stories of Stingo and Nathan. Streep's poignant performance, evoking the paradoxes of survival, endeavours to rescue the film and the depiction of the Holocaust from its plotted fate as literary and cinematic fodder, but it is simply not enough. *Sophie's Choice*, in these terms, exemplifies the problematic nature of Holocaust memory on film that:

> Novels of the cinema are out to conquer and occupy the audience's historical imagination instead of stimulating and liberating it (Kaes 1989: p. 196).

Sophie's Choice illustrates the paradox inherent in the relationship between film and the translation of Holocaust memory. Visually, cinematically, Pakula offers the possibility of Merlin's Laugh through his prioritising of Sophie's face as a landscape which visually

communicates the lasting effects of her experience. However, this possibility is circumscribed, not only by the visual challenges inherent in Holocaust appropriation, but also by the problematised narrative that underpins the film and precludes the enactment of the Laugh. As a result, *Sophie's Choice* illuminates the terms of enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a cinematic context as being reliant upon a finely tuned balance between the narrative and its visual representation. Pakula's film therefore exemplifies the way in which many of the cinematic devices which add to the telling can be overwhelmed by the problematic nature of the narrative material that defines them. It reinscribes the type of "prosthetic memory" (Loshitzky 1997: p. 98) which not only precludes the possibility of the Laugh in the moment of its recognition, but also reduces the Holocaust to little more than a signifying trope of victimhood.

Sophie's Choice provides an example, both positive and negative, of the challenges inherent in film and the type of resistance to the medium's norms necessary if it is authentically to depict Holocaust history and enable the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. On a narrative level, this resistance could find its genesis in the filmmaker's own awareness of his distance from the subject and the possible desire for redemption which can leave the audience "with memories of a healing wound rather than a throbbing scar" (Langer 1996: p. 11). Thus the refusal to represent Holocaust history as contained or manageable, as nothing more than a recognisable other, provides the genesis for the possibility of Merlin's Laugh in a non-survivor text, whether that text be literary or cinematic.

In film this resistance is, I would argue, rooted in a refusal to allow the norms of cinema, particularly of the Hollywood blockbuster, to totally define the visual translation of the story. Pakula's film contains elements of this resistance: the visual translation of the texture of memory, the final reflective shot of Sophie's face. However, the film locates itself within the framework of a tragic, historical love story, neatly packaged by the deaths of two beautiful people in a beautiful setting. Although Sophie's suicide can be read as an example of an initial resistance to Hollywood norms, it ultimately endorses the underlying function of the cinema screen, that there is simply nothing more to be seen.

One of the few films that placed the Holocaust within a contemporary setting was Costa-Gavras' 1989 treatment, *Music Box*. Written by Joe Esterhas, it was one of the first films to eschew literary adaptation in favour of screenplay, examining the shadow of the Holocaust in modern life without recourse to flashback or the visual historicisation of Pakula's film. *Music Box* was widely seen and reviewed and, seven years after *Sophie's Choice*, gained an Oscar nomination for its leading actress, Jessica Lange (21).

It is Lange's character, Ann, a second generation American-Hungarian lawyer, who provides the central focus for the film. The film opens with establishing shots of a American-Hungarian party, identifying Ann's close family relationships. The subtle score and visual texture reinforce this sense of intimacy. The scene is telling; subsequently Ann's father is accused of war crimes and faced with extradition and Ann's decision to defend him in the ensuing trial forms the basis of *Music Box*'s narrative. The film is concerned with the nature of guilt and the perpetrator, using the courtroom drama as a framing mechanism for the personal and philosophical questions it raises. Costa-Gavras, described as "the master of message entertainment" (22), draws on previous films of this genre, for example *Judgement At Nuremberg* (1961), enclosing the personal nature of the drama within the more public, legal definitions of guilt and innocence.

In terms of the creation of Merlin's Laugh, *Music Box* offers a significant point of departure from the historicised texts that both pre-date and succeed it. As discussed in relation to non-survivor novelists, the inheritance of the Holocaust and its role in modern life can offer a perspective that is less reliant upon the recreation of survivor experience for authority and can provide the genesis for Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor narrative context. Ann's contemporary viewpoint therefore illuminates the possibilities inherent in of this type of non-survivor perspective. The film's structure is underpinned by her personal struggle, the tension between her desire to find the truth and her will to disbelieve that her father could be capable of the crimes described. As the film progresses, this conflict exposes the space that exists between Ann's, and by extension the spectator's, imaginative construct of the stereotypical Nazi and its contemporary reality. Throughout the film Ann's innate morality, exemplified by her relationship to her family and her multi-cultural work environment, is brought into question. Her crisis of identification becomes the spectator's own as the emotional balance of the film shifts in favour of and then against her father.

The imaginative displacement of Holocaust history and its inheritance by the 'generation after' is made explicit through the character of Harry, Ann's ex-father-in-law. Harry's apparently amoral attitude, his description of the survivors as secular saints, his political understanding of the problematic nature of post-war Europe, where he dealt with Nazis, juxtaposes Ann's naive assumption that all Nazis were 'monsters', with the requisite stereotypical imagery attached. Harry functions throughout the film as dispassionate and provocative chorus, undercutting the moral dimension of Ann's struggle and emphasising the dualities of her role as mother-daughter-lawyer. It is Harry's commentary that lifts the narrative, inducing the spectators, in the midst of their own fabula construction concerning

Michael's guilt or innocence, to recognise that the Nazi is defined by stereotypical imagery. In these terms, Harry's characterisation, which exposes the ways in which the contemporary image of the Nazi is conditioned by the modern need to render as stereotype that which threatens to overwhelm the tolerable limits of understanding and identification, can be seen as a possible site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh

Harry also provides a juxtaposition to Michael, played by Armin Mueller-Stahl. A rich, educated, savvy lawyer, Harry views the case simply in terms of Ann's ability to win it, refusing to engage with the moral dimension of the trial. Harry therefore provides an alternative perspective on the condition and necessity of Holocaust memory in the contemporary world. The challenge inherent in his attitude embodies the possibility of Merlin's Laugh in relation to his characterisation. He creates a tension within the narrative, confronting what the spectators may consider an acceptable response to Holocaust history with the hidden or irreverent comments that he expresses and that they may share.

Thus, on a narrative level, *Music Box* raises issues which represent a basis for the cinematic enactment of the Laugh of Merlin. The subjective nature of terms such as 'truth' and 'justice' are scrutinised through the framework of the trial and challenged by Harry's dispassionate commentary. Ann's courtroom victory is also shadowed by the discovery of her father's guilt after he is acquitted. This aspect of the film exposes the terms of legal justice, the rigid parameters of accepted fact and its problematic relation to survivors' memories of events over fifty years old. The film also questions the contemporary view of the Nazi, dehistoricising the stereotype and placing it within the context of contemporary life. These features of the text confront the spectators, challenging them to redefine their own conception through the revelation of Michael's guilt.

The confrontational aspect of the narrative is also reinforced through the spectator's identification with Ann. The trial acts as a metaphor for Ann's distanced relationship to the history in which her father is implicated and examines the inherent difficulties of an individual unrelated to the Holocaust by experience. Like Ann the spectator 'sees' Michael as a good father and grandfather, his plausibility enhanced by the personal portrait presented. Costa-Gavras' refusal to use flashback means that Mishka, the reflection of Nazi evil, is only 'heard' through the words of the survivors. The conflict between the apparent truthfulness of that which is seen and the reality of that which exists only within the survivor's memory and the spectator's imagination offers another possible site for Merlin's Laugh and is perhaps the most interesting challenge that the film presents to the spectator (23).

On a visual level, the film also provides another example of the uniquely cinematic dimension which film can contribute to the creation of Merlin's Laugh. The muddy taupes and mauves which define the film's visual palette allude to the long stained blood of the victims, which colours the contemporary setting rather than dating the film as a whole. The courtroom scenes, shot in shadowy light, use the imagery of architecture to illustrate the clash between the austere nature of the law and the traumatic memories which the survivors present and define Ann's private struggle as reflective of a larger public question which remains unresolved more than fifty years after the liberation of the camps.

This use of colour is particularly significant during the scenes shot in Hungary, the landscape of her father's crime. The hue of the Danube, a site of executions, represents for Ann a history that is forever tainted by the horror of the testimonies she has witnessed in court. Experienced in purely visual terms the river offers the spectator a wealth of connotative meaning, symbolising the slow erosion of memory which resists closure as it gives a sense of permanence to the experience of the survivors. Again the contribution which a visual medium could make to Merlin's Laugh becomes apparent. Like the landscapes of Lanzmann's *Shoah*, the contemporary shots of the river demands the spectator's imaginative engagement. The symbolic meaning ascribed to the site by Ann is experienced in purely visual terms and is a result of the connection, also made by the spectator, between the words of survivors and the scene depicted. In these terms the film encourages the imaginative co-joining of the history of the Holocaust with the landscape in which it was enacted.

In the final sequence of the film it is also possible to glimpse the type of resistance necessary to derail the sense of closure implicit within the film's structure. It provides a concrete example of Merlin's Laugh within a more commercial, cinematic context. As the film cuts from Ann's tearful renunciation of her father to a shot of her home, a newspaper headline informs the audience of the Michael's prosecution. The camera then follows Ann as she leads her son out on to the deck. This entirely visual sequence is akin to the final shot of *Sophie's Choice*, and made more powerful by its contemporary setting. The framing of mother and son facing away from the camera, implicitly acknowledges the spectator's desire for closure and explicitly confronts it. The scene therefore acts as a metaphor for the unending legacy of the Holocaust, its inheritance colouring the present and reaching into the future through Ann's son. This sequence also allows the spectator a moment of reflection, heightening the awareness that, while the narrative of the film has reached a point of conclusion, the reality it represents is more unyielding and cannot be easily contained.

Once again it is possible to see Merlin's Laugh in the context of film as residing equally within silence and sound. Silence offers the director and audience a moment of reflection, embodying a type of reticence that is unique to film. The final scene of *Music Box* is undoubtedly the most powerful of the entire film, creating a palpable sense of humility which the austerity of the film attempts but never completely achieves until this moment. Silence demands an imaginative response, implicating and challenging the spectator in a more profound way than anything which precedes it in the film.

Although *Music Box* illuminates some cinematic features which could be utilised by a non-survivor director as part of the narrative strategy that enacts Merlin's Laugh, there are aspects of the text which blunt the efficacy of the narrative and undermine the effects of the Laugh present in the final scene. The film contains many of the recognisable devices of the standard courtroom drama and is replete with surprise witnesses and last-minute evidence which provide little insight into the questions that it raises. Though Ann's will to disbelieve is made explicit throughout the trial, the film offers little scope for a direct confrontation between her preconceptions and the realities of the Holocaust. The shift in narrative focus, from the personal issues that arise from the trial to the plot-driven questions concerning Michael's guilt, ensures that any tension is dissipated and, like Harry, fades from view, becoming little more than a simple plot twist which encourages the spectator's identification with the essentially 'good' Ann.

When the Holocaust is brought directly into the courtroom through the survivors' testimony, the challenge that it could pose to the inscribed order of the plot is nullified by their problematised portrayal and lack of characterisation. Their testimony is never able to enact a moment of rupture or confrontation in the film's progression. The individuality of the survivors is lost, their testimony colouring the narrative with a vague sense of horror without overwhelming it, achieving little beyond the heightening the emotional impact of Ann's dilemma. In the moment when the Holocaust could become a reality for the spectators, challenging their preconceived expectations and enacting the Laugh, the narrative steps back and the possibility of confronting the realities of Mishka's crime is marginalised.

The character of Michael is also underdeveloped and, as a result, the film often resembles a one-dimensional thriller, confining itself to the resolution of the question of his guilt. This lack of characterisation means that the film is unable to address the complex nature of personal responsibility or choice. Thus the spectators' own perceived morality, which shapes their relationship to the character, is never challenged or problematised to reveal the possibility that Mishka, like the spectator, was an individual whose choices led

him to murder. The spectator experiences the somewhat unsurprising discovery of Michael's guilt through the deus ex machina of the eponymous music box but the effects of this discovery, on Ann and the spectator, are limited by the narrative's focus on the explication of Michael's involvement in war crimes. As a result, there is little interrogation of the difficulties which confront Ann as she faces the reality of her father's past.

However the centrality of Lange's character offers the filmmaker an authentic non-survivor subject position from which to enact Merlin's Laugh. Ann has not experienced the Holocaust and she, like both the filmmaker and the audience, is distanced from the event. This characterisation provides the spectators with a consciousness which is akin to their own in relation to Holocaust history. Yet, as the film increasingly conforms to the norms of its genre, the challenge to the spectator embodied by Michael, the dualities of the individual which resist closure and stereotype, are lost. The questions raised by his complete disavowal of memory and its implications are never explored and another possible site for Merlin's Laugh is left unfulfilled. As the *Chicago Sun-Times* reviewer Roger Ebert noted:

> *Music Box* is a vehicle for the Jessica Lange character and so the old man, who should be the central character if this movie took itself seriously, is only a pawn *(Chicago Sun-Times* Online 1.19.90: p. 2).

Roger Ebert's criticism mirrors Gillian Rose's (24) call for a film which truly engages with the realities of the Nazi and could confront the spectators with their own limits of understanding through an identification with him, enacting Merlin's Laugh in the moment the subject recognises the breach of mental comfort this identification causes. However, the emotional showdown between Ann and Michael that offers this possibility is almost an addendum to the film, finally raising the spectre of the unanswerable questions concerning how and why an individual freely committed such horrific crimes.

This important paradox constantly shadows the narrative, but is overwhelmed by the plot-motivated assignment of guilt. As a result, the showdown does little more than re-establish Ann's, and by extension the spectator's, moral authority. The film simply leaves itself no room to explore Ann's question, "how could you, Papa?" It is the challenge inherent in this question which could implicate the spectator through their identification with the central characters and reveal the inadequacy of contemporary understanding. In these terms, Ann's question illuminates the confrontational aspect of Merlin's Laugh that could challenge and alter the spectators' understanding. Unfortunately this type of interrogation of the subject is beyond the film's remit.

Music Box, I would argue, represents a point of departure from the norms that condition many cinematic interpretations of the Holocaust. However, it was simply not effective enough to alter the general perception of filmmakers and audiences of the Holocaust as an historical topic. Although *Music Box* had a cinema release and received Oscar nominations, it was never a 'breakthrough' film. This breakthrough came in 1993, with the release of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*.

Schindler's List has become recognised as a worldwide cinematic event. Spielberg, the most successful director of his generation, a true grand imagier, created a film that reached 120 million Americans, one-fifth of the population of Great Britain and a quarter of the population of Germany (25). On its release, *Schindler's List* was met with almost universal praise and showered with awards, including Oscars for both Spielberg and his film. Described as "the finest fiction film ever made about this century's greatest evil" (Fensch 1995: p. 144), the film's impact has been far reaching, conditioning the way in which a large percentage of the cinema-going audience conceptualise the Holocaust. It subsequently became part of educational programmes in schools and colleges.

Schindler's List marked a return to the type of literary adaptation that defined films like *Sophie's Choice*, using Thomas Keneally's docu-drama as a basis for the narrative. However, the film could also be read as a point of departure, presenting a 'direct view' of the Holocaust, a mirror image of events as they happened, without recourse to flashback or the framing omniscient narrative persona which shapes the novel. This feature of the film mirrors television's breakthrough text *Holocaust* and its imagery and approach is recognisable in *Schindler's List*, from the synecdochic piles of suitcases to the love amongst the ashes of Joseph and Rebecca Bau.

This type of visual re-creation presents a significant challenge to the director. Presenting the horror as part of the fabric of the cinematic narrative carries with it an inherent danger. Like literary texts, the subjective nature of film necessitates a series of choices by the director, choices which carry direct consequences for the depiction of Holocaust history. The process of editing, of deciding what is and what is not shown, conditions both the spectator's fabula construction and their conceptualisation of Holocaust history. However, unlike a literary text, the results of this process can be reinforced by the actualised time of the cinematic text and the boundaries created by the cinema screen. Thus the spectator, for a time becomes a prisoner, not simply of the history but of the director's vision of it, a vision shaped by the distance between the non-survivor and the actuality of the history appropriated.

The central relationship of *Schindler's List*, the inverted brotherhood of Amon Goeth and Oskar Schindler, provides an example of both the achievements of the film and the problematic nature of its telling. Oscar's story is a type of 'Saul on the road to Damascus' conversion, laced with mythic elements which truthfully represent the manner of Oskar's heroism and determine the way in which the audience responds to them. Oskar's confrontation with his own morality, enacted by the Nazi genocide he witnesses, therefore provides the spectator with a positive example of the relationship between personal choice and its role in Holocaust history.

However, there is little in the film which examines the very nature of these choices. At its heart, the film is a story of redemption with Oscar depicted as a hero. It is a depiction that is reliant,

> On the diffuse and insinuating imagery of the Christian religious tradition, which gives its evocations their emotional power (Friedlander 1984: p. 39).

To reinforce the underlying juxtaposition of good and evil, Goeth's character is inevitably one-dimensional and as a result the effectiveness of the counter-narrative he could provide is impaired. He is represented without a personal history and his execution in the closing stages of the film ensures that, in the imagination of the spectator, he has no future. He is defined only in the terms of the violence he enacts upon his Jewish prisoners. The lack of interrogation into his motives, combined with the comparative nature of his relationship to Oskar, means that throughout the film he functions only as a metaphor for Nazi atrocity, rather than a complex individual with whom the spectator could identify. He becomes the living embodiment of a contemporary stereotype, allowing the spectator to ignore the reality of the individual who took part in the enactment of the Shoah:

> It suggests that all Nazis – or the ones we really have to worry about – suffered from personality disorders (Fensch 1995: p. 229).

The accuracy of this appraisal can be seen in Roger Ebert's review:

> Studying him [Goeth], we realise that Nazism depended on people being able to think like Jeffrey Dahmer (cited by Fensch 1995: p. 181).

Ebert's comments, allying Goeth and Nazism with a psychotic condition, illuminate the problematic nature of Spielberg's portrayal of the Nazi and the explicit distance between character and spectator which the film enforces. Goeth functions throughout the film as the personification of irredeemable evil. Spielberg's privileging of the good versus evil dichotomy which underpins the film's narrative means that episodes in Keneally's book which could resist the overwhelmingly stereotypical nature of his portrayal, like Goeth's humiliating visit to the Brinnlitz factory (26), are ignored. This feature of the film ensures

that the spectator remains safely distanced from Goeth. This portrayal ultimately precludes the possibility of enacting the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh, closing down any point of identification between spectator and subject which could implicate the spectator through an imaginative engagement with Goeth. It is therefore possible to argue that, due to the popularity of *Schindler's List*, the portrayal of Amon Goeth has reinforced contemporary stereotypes rather than confronting and challenging them.

It is the unrivalled supremacy of the 'story' that conditions these characterisations and precludes the enactment of the Laugh in *Schindler's List*. The focus on the story, the depiction rather than interrogation of Holocaust history, contributes to the personifications of the mythic meta-narrative of good versus evil which Spielberg employs. In spite of good performances by both Ralph Fiennes and Liam Neeson, the characters "remain stylized figures that fail to transcend the handsome silhouettes of the average Hollywood film" (Loshitzky 1997: p. 62).

The dangers inherent in this type of narrative relate directly to the nature of cinematic product as a completed whole. The film confines itself to an examination of Oskar during the war years; the effect of those years on his later life, which gives Keneally's portrayal a tangible humanity, is not examined. The pace at which *Schindler's List* progresses, the dominance which Spielberg allows his personal vision of the story to have over the film, re-inscribes the sense of completion; everything there is to be seen is confined within the limits of the screen and there is nothing to be searched for within the imagination.

This type of cinematic closure conditions many aspects of *Schindler's List*. The polished nature of the piece often fails to overcome its own beauty (27) or test the bounds of the cinema screen. The result is the underlying sense of the Holocaust as history; traumatic, difficult history, but history nonetheless. This historicisation is reinforced by Spielberg's choosing to shoot the film in black and white, replete with grainy images and hand-held camera work suggestive of the documentary (28), which inevitably lends itself to the view of the film as historical reality recaptured. While the final colour images of the film, the shots of survivors filling past Schindler's grave, allow for a moment of recognition of the survivor as contemporary subject, the scene contributes to a sense of the positive inheritance of Schindler's bravery without addressing the implications which the history that facilitated such courage contains for modern life.

The final scene also provides a powerful example of the way in which *Schindler's List* functions in the shadow of many of the unanswered questions of Holocaust history without ever addressing them directly. It highlights the biased gaze of the film, which

filters out much that is uncomfortable and disconcerting about the Holocaust. By marginalising the continued existence of Nazis who took part in the Holocaust and the millions who did not survive, the film creates an emotional crescendo that allows the audience to leave the cinema with their equilibrium restored. The focus on the positive aspects of survival, reinforced by Goeth's death, means that this disruptive feature of Holocaust history, its legacy, is never referenced. It is this paradox which gives the film its powerful pathos, while limiting its efficacy as a means of exploring the issues raised by Goeth's choices and actions and the memory of those who were not fortunate enough to be 'saved'.

Spielberg's story is at its heart a celebration of survival and the film's failure to challenge the blinkered nature of the cinematic product, combined with its pace, leaves little to the imagination. The essential humility of moments like the final scene of *Music Box* are simply not possible, and the potential effects of Merlin's Laugh which they evoke lie beyond the remit of the film. Once closure and redemption become the signifying trope of a film, the possibility of a non-survivor Laugh enacted within a cinematic context is beyond its scope.

Schindler's List identifies itself as being of and about the Holocaust while ensuring that the history that it represents never overwhelms the allegorical elements that underpin it. Although the film appears to recreate Holocaust history, there is little to suggest the terms of "deep memory" (Delbo 1995: p. xi) which shadows survivors' narratives. As a result, the vision of the Holocaust which Spielberg presents is contained within the norms of a generic 'blockbuster' including the salvation of the hero and a happy ending. These features of the film can be seen as an essential misrepresentation of Holocaust history, illustrating the words of Raul Hilberg:

> There is nothing to be taken from the Holocaust that imbues anyone with hope or any thought of redemption but the need for heroes is so strong that we'll manufacture them (cited by Fensch 1995: p. 229).

In order to sustain the narrative privileging of the triumph of good and the restoration of order, the Jewish characters and, by extension, the experience of the victim is contained. The horror of this victimhood presents the biggest challenge to the visual texture and linear, pacy narrative which Spielberg employs, and its absence defines the moment where the perceived limits of cinematic representation could be expanded in order to depict the realities of the Shoah. Significant characterisations like that of Itzhak Stern function throughout the film only in relation to Oskar and there is little to define their individuality or the experience of the camps and the daily fear it engendered. The effect of

this limited characterisation is reinforced visually through the physical dominance which both Oskar and Amon exert over the screen which, in turn, intensifies the visual metaphor of Oskar's benevolent, paternal relationship to the Jewish men and women whose lives and experiences provide the basis for the film's emotional power.

Thus the experience of the victims, another possible challenge to the spectator's progression through the narrative, is subjugated. Scenes of horror are routinely intercut with shots of Oskar and while this editing is central to the theme of Oskar's 'conversion', they express more about the variance between Oskar and Amon than they do about the victims' experience. The film is therefore unable to implicate the spectators through the horrors they are witnessing, never interrogating their implicit identification with Oskar or the moral superiority that this identification engenders.

The lack of interrogation of the subject position of the spectator is reinforced by the survival of almost every significant and identifiable Jewish character. This lends the film a sense of progression, of the triumph of humanity which Oskar is presented as embodying. For a film about a mass genocide, there is little in *Schindler's List* which creates a palpable sense of loss, or engenders the type of humility which the extent of the murder necessitates. While the Jewish survivors perform a secondary role, of often helpless victim, in the narrative, the depiction of the murdered is defined by the moment of their death; they are rarely given a past. Thus the shadow of the dead, the "essential truth" (Semprun 1998: p. 125) of the Holocaust, *le cri*, is lost. It is possible to argue that for Merlin's Laugh to be enacted within the terms of Oskar's story, the question as to why so few individuals responded to Nazism in the way that he did would have had to have been a central feature of the narrative strategy, placing the survival of the Schindler Jews within the context of the overwhelming numbers of the dead. However, the underlying preference for an idealised image of survival over the realities of death precludes the possibilities raised by this question.

The film's biased gaze also reinforces the safe distance between the spectator and the experience of the survivors. The latent meaning attributable to the beating of Helen Hirsch re-inscribes the conjoining of sex and death which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is often a feature of the non-survivor literary texts. The depersonalisation of the Jewish characters through the weighted gaze of the camera creates sense of voyeurism that is never interrogated or questioned. One example can be seen in the shower scene. This scene is evidence of the degree to which Spielberg re-inscribed the comforting distance that conditions a non-survivor spectator's initial response to the Shoah and of how difficult it is to enact Merlin's Laugh within these terms.

As the naked women are herded into the shower, the camera pans down and moves directly through a peep hole into the room, directing the spectator's eye to a vista contemplated from a position of safety which is analogous to the view of the SS. This distance is not questioned or even made explicit and when water pours from the showers rather than gas, it does not need to be. The whole scene can be read as a microcosm of the type of filtering and positioning which defines the film as a whole. The women's survival is, for the spectator, conditioned by an on-going fabula construction that, by this stage in the film, is defined both by a distance from Jewish experience and a sense of the infallibility of Oskar as rescuer.

The scene therefore becomes a manageable moment of horror which the spectator is already primed to see in terms of survival not death; it filters out the reality of the gas chamber and with it those murdered. It is an example of the subjugation of Holocaust history to Spielberg's cinematic telling of the story and exemplifies the distance between the film and the type of interrogation of the Holocaust's legacy and the spectator's relationship to it, necessary to create Merlin's Laugh. As David Thomson comments:

> He [Spielberg] only enters the gas chamber because he knows he can get out – he pardons (cited by Fensch 1995: p. 93).

Thomson's words have a worrying significance when examined in relation to the worldwide impact that the film has had and its affect on the future production of the Holocaust on film. The 'sweeteners' which Spielberg allows his audience contradict the reality of the Shoah and blunt the efficacy of the representation. As Claude Lanzmann was able to express in *Shoah*, authentic representation is conditioned by a recognition of, and refusal to turn away from, the stark brutality of the facts. The stylistic choices and Spielberg's privileging of survival were not simply a result of turning Oskar's Schindler's story into a three-hour movie. They express deeper truths, not about the Holocaust, but about Spielberg's and by extension the audience's distance from it. These truths are implicit within the film, lending a sense of coherence and progression to the spectator's fabula construction. Spielberg's decision to 'pardon' the spectators during the shower scene, to allow them the privilege of seeing the trauma without confronting its implications, precludes the moment of the Laugh, and ensures that the desire for mental self-preservation, the perceived distance between the contemporary world and the history of the Holocaust, remains intact.

This type of filtering created a narrative that protected the spectator's sensibilities, rather than holding them up to interrogation, and exemplifies "the complete absence from this film of any kind of humility before its subject" (Fensch 1995: p. 117). As previously

noted, a sense of reticence, of humility, defines some of the most powerful examples of the possibility of Merlin's Laugh in films like *Shoah*. Both *Music Box* and *Sophie's Choice* have also provided examples of the unique way in which film can utilise silence as being expressive of the need for contemplation in relation to the Holocaust history it appropriates. Both films used silence as a means of focusing the audience on the individual and the history which underpins the narrative. While the degree of success of each is conditioned by the nature of the stories told, it is possible to argue that these silences reveal the boundaries, of both contemporary understanding and the film as construct, which the Holocaust threatens to overwhelm.

This type of silence is almost completely absent from *Schindler's List*. It is ironic that even when Schindler calls for silence to pay respect to those who did not survive, Spielberg never allows the characters or the audience time to reflect, to understand the shadow that the countless dead cast over the survival of the few. The effect of this moment on the spectator is compounded by Schindler's final scene of farewell, an emotional breakdown that contradicts directly the scene as it is reported in Keneally's novel (29). Once again the film focuses the viewer's attention on Oskar, decontextualising his achievement by displacing the sense of loss. As a result:

> The positively repulsive kitsch of the last two scenes seriously undermines much of the film's previous merits (Loshitzky 1997: p. 45).

Spielberg creates a fluid and complete cinematic text, beautifully shot and well acted, but it is ultimately unable to face the issues raised by the history it appropriates and as a result it comfortably privileges one story of survival over the history of atrocity which the Holocaust represents. Thus the emotional impact of the film is conditioned by the reinforcement of the audience's distance from the implications of Holocaust history rather than through its breach:

> There is something a little too exhilarating about these tears. I'd prefer to be stunned into silence (Fensch 1995: p. 97).

It is therefore possible to argue that, more than any other film examined, *Schindler's List* conformed to the norms of the blockbuster image, sanitizing the Holocaust as it made it accessible, presenting the image of fact while relying on the tools of cinematic fictions without any type of delineation of the two, and betraying an insistent need for redemption. In these terms, identifying even the possibility of Merlin's Laugh is problematic.

The degree to which *Schindler's List* has conditioned the public's perception of the Holocaust (30) and the corollary between this influence and the "desire to redesign hope from the shards of despair" (Langer 1996: p. 52) which marks the film as a whole, once

again raises questions concerning the effects of popular interpretations on contemporary Holocaust memory:

> This insistence – that representations mirror the event rather than its re-telling – has thereby blunted the role of popular culture as a legitimate voice in addressing the Holocaust (Loshitzky 1997: p. 23).

Thus, the massive appeal of *Schindler's List* can be seen as carrying with it an inherent danger, defining a cross-roads in Holocaust film wherein interrogation could give way to memorialisation (31). The problematic nature of *Schindler's List* and its subsequent canonisation in the public consciousness illustrate the role which Merlin's Laugh, enacted within a non-survivor cinematic text, could play in redefining the audience's understanding of Holocaust history. The effect of the confrontation which defines Merlin's Laugh, experienced by an audience the size and scale of *Schindler's List's*, could counteract the historicisation, the distance between the contemporary spectator and the history appropriated, which the film implicitly endorses.

The application of Merlin's Laugh to narrative film also raises interesting questions concerning the nature of textual laughter and its appropriate uses in relation to popular cinematic texts. In *Shoah*, textual laughter and irony contributed to some of the examples of Merlin's Laugh, revealing a parallel between Lanzmann's film and survivor narratives. Textual laughter and irony illuminate the space that exists between the survivor's understanding of the terms of life during the Holocaust and the reader's post-Holocaust conception of it through the variance between the survivor's use of laughter and what the reader/spectator would conceive of as a suitable subject for humour. The question as to whether this type of humour can be translated into a non-survivor cinematic text assumes a greater importance in the light of Roberto Benigni's 1998 film, *Life is Beautiful*.

Benigni's film is an interesting cross-reference of style and genre. A low budget European film, given studio backing by Miramax, the movie was publicised in much the same way as a Hollywood treatment. As a result, *Life is Beautiful* was seen worldwide in large multiplexes, reaching beyond its 'art-house' remit. It gathered awards across the board, including the Jerusalem award for Best Jewish Experience, and Oscars for Best Foreign Film and Best Actor for Benigni.

However the film, a comedy concerning the war-time experiences of an Italian Jew, Guido, and his five year old son Giosue (played by Giorgio Cantarini), has received mixed reviews. Although Judith Lungen, co-ordinator of the Jerusalem Film Festival described it as "one of the finest films ever made" (Borger 1998: p. 15), there has been great debate concerning both the nature of Benigni's film and the larger issues of comedy and its

relationship to the Holocaust. Although Benigni's project differs significantly from *Schindler's List*, it shares its idealised bias, reinforced throughout by the centrality of Benigni's character, Guido. This characterisation, coupled with the benevolent narrative drive, was a significant factor in the extremes of opinion which the film provoked.

The film opens with a voice-over by the adult Giosue which immediately identifies it as a simple story, like a fable. This voice-over also reveals that, while this story functions in the shadow of Holocaust history, it is not attempting to cinematically document or replicate it. The screen is suffused with a rose-coloured tinge reminiscent of the palette of *Sophie's Choice*. This choice of colour is significant, contrasting effectively with the tonality of the concentration camp scenes, muted greys suggestive of the reductive nature of existence within the camps.

The courtship of Guido and Dora provides the dramatic centre of the first half of the film. As the audience watch Guido woo Dora through a series of comical stunts which are so fantastic they appear magical, Guido is established as in some ways distanced from the realities that his humour exposes, a visionary who is always out of sync with the world around him. Guido's Jewishness is not made explicit in the opening section of the film and this is suggestive of the highly integrated nature of Italian Jewish life during the pre-war period. Guido's unawareness of the ultimate aim of German persecution also reflects the historical reality and does not allow for a sense of Backshadowing to influence the film or create a sense of impending tragedy which could somehow be avoided if Guido were more in touch with reality (32). This characterisation is juxtaposed with Guido's elderly uncle Eliseo, whose historical understanding of the persecution he experiences provides a counterbalance to Guido's imaginative resistance. Eliseo's death at the hands of the Nazis also symbolises the loss of culture and ancestry of European Jewish life.

What becomes apparent as the film progresses is that this first section of the narrative is perhaps the most effective in expressing aspects of the Holocaust. The film subtly reveals the presence of Fascism as it intrudes into the landscape of the film, then exposes the absurdity of anti-semitism, as Guido instinctively moves to protect his child from the confines of their existence. In a memorable scene, Giosue questions his father about the exclusion of Jews from their local shops. Guido's response is to propose the banning of spiders and Visigoths from their bookshop. This subtly illuminates the inherent illogicality of anti-semitism.

For Guido imagination provides a way of refashioning reality, referencing the theory of Schopenhauer, "I am what I want to be" (33). However, it is this central premise which proves difficult to sustain once the film moves into the landscape of the Holocaust,

paradoxically creating and then containing the moments of clarity within an essentially benevolent framework. Yet as Guido's protective instinct drives him to respond to the camp by creating a fantasy for his son to believe in, there are instances where Merlin's Laugh becomes a tangible possibility on screen.

Guido's 'game' works on a variety of metaphorical levels, revealing the 'unbelievable' nature of the experience for those persecuted and illustrating the devastating deception enacted by the Nazis through a juxtaposition of Guido's insistence upon life with the machinery of death. This inverted parallel is exemplified in the scene where Guido translates the rules of the camp into the rules of a game designed not only to save his son's life but also to protect his innocence. Giosue's belief in his father's artifice is complete and it is this innocence which conditions the confrontational enactment of Merlin's Laugh, echoed through the comments of the child as he tells his father, "I died laughing".

Throughout this section of the film, the horrors are alluded to through diffuse metonymic imagery: the stray cat of a young girl transported to the camp, smoke from a chimney stack. The victims of the camp appear once, through a hazy fog. This vision of the murdered is highly stylised and the power of this scene is derived not from their depiction, but from their effect on Guido. Throughout the film Guido is continuously talking, spinning out tales which capture the imagination of his wife and son and, by extension, the audience. It is the reality of the camp which literally stuns him into silence, enacting Merlin's Laugh through the unique possibilities of silence available to film. It is this silence which confronts the spectator, illuminating both the loss of those murdered and the reality of Holocaust history which literally overwhelms speech. The speechlessness of Guido can therefore be read as a metaphor for our collective horror of the actuality of the Shoah, revealing the extremity of an experience which cannot be denied or displaced.

However, the visual imagery which Benigni employs illuminates the problematic nature of the mythic elements which underpin the narrative. The film is marked throughout by a tasteful reserve which, although not problematic in and of itself, ultimately downplays the depth of the horrors which form the backdrop to Benigni's narrative. The unintentional aestheticism of the dead, the factual inaccuracies which Benigni includes to reinforce the image of his film as akin to a fable, and the mythical Chaplinesque figure of Guido combine to undermine the efficacy of the humour which Benigni employs. It marks out the variance between comedy as a redemptive force which

can transform horror into a re-affirmation of life, and the harsh irony which enacts Merlin's Laugh in survivor texts and which implicates and confronts the spectator. Thus:

> The film suffers not from bad taste, but from too much good taste – which under the circumstances is almost worse (Shone 1999: p. 7).

The inherent good taste of Benigni's appropriation is particularly noticeable in the depiction of the film's only identifiable Nazi, Dr. Lessing. Lessing trades riddles with Guido, commenting on the speed with which the waiter is able to solve them. The iconography of the riddle remains constant throughout the film and acts as a metaphor for the madness that has enveloped Dr. Lessing during his period in the camp. His refusal to see the reality of which he is a part is an inverted mirror image of Guido's own game, but its implications for the figure of the Nazi, the denial of choice and responsibility which Lessing's madness suggests, seriously undermines the efficacy of his characterisation. This reliance upon the comforting stereotype of the insanity of the Nazi distances the spectator, contributing to the defining tragedy of Guido as it blunts the irony of the gracious pre-war relationship the men enjoyed. Once again the possibility of Merlin's Laugh exists but is denied expression. Thus the confrontation of the spectator's implicit store of hopes and ideals, which this meeting within the confines of the camp could have enacted and which might have further illuminated the illogicality of Nazi anti-semitism, is lost. Lessing, like the film, simply cannot address the ironies and issues that they raise.

The comfortable distance which Benigni allows his film conditions both its humour and its narrative. Guido's death should contradict the spectator's desire for a happy or redemptive ending. However his death also satisfies the sacrificial nature of the father-and-son relationship which centres the film. The underlying impression that Guido's death is not in vain, that it ensures not only his son's survival but also the survival of his innocence, allows the spectator to leave the film with a tangible sense of closure that bears little relation to the millions of meaningless deaths that are the centre of Holocaust history. In the Holocaust according to Benigni, needless death can be remade, re-imagined within a context of survival and self-sacrifice.

As a result, *Life is Beautiful* contains the Holocaust within a manageable framework which conforms to many of the generic formulations of cinema: a sense of progression, a triumph, even in death, of good over evil, a happy ending. The film's evocative style contributes to a sense of the text as parable which, unlike *Schindler's List*, never allows the film to represent itself as a complete rendering of the Holocaust. However, central features of the narrative, like Guido's sacrifice for his son, do not challenge the spectators' fabula construction or encourage them to understand the Holocaust within the terms of

contemporary life. The final scenes of reunion between Giosue and Dora return the characters to the colourful panorama of the first half of the film, reaffirming an idealised reading of 'life is beautiful' as it precludes the inherent irony of applying such a catechism to the Holocaust.

It is the lack of irony inherent in the use of the title and sustained throughout the film which ultimately limits the possibilities of Benigni's comedy and precludes the possibility of other examples of Merlin's Laugh. The subtlety with which the presence of Fascism is alluded to and exposed through Guido's witticisms conditions the effective first section of the film but ultimately cannot withstand the overwhelming nature of the Holocaust. Benigni is forced to down play the horror in order to ensure the survival of the narrative tone of the film. To truthfully face the horror requires a harder edge, an irony rather than a quip, which would have radically altered the film's underlying narrative strategy and visual texture:

> Comedy can't address the Holocaust with a benevolent smile. Nothing less than a pained rictus will do (Romney 1999, p. 6).

However *Life is Beautiful* does reveal the potential of textual irony as a contributing feature of Merlin's Laugh. Merlin's Laugh, in these terms, offers the possibility of using the poignancy of the father/son relationship in a radical way, altering the idealised bias of the film and revealing the inherent irony of the title. Throughout the film the spectator catches glimpses of this shadow narrative strategy, but Benigni's humour is too benevolent, too reserved, to enact the challenging or confrontational aspect that conditions Merlin's Laugh within survivor narratives.

It is also possible to argue that the achievement of Benigni's film is that it represents an attempt by a filmmaker to go beyond re-creation in a search for meaning. Benigni's film illuminates the variance between an imaginative engagement and the type of recapturing of reality which conditions *Schindler's List*, highlighting the need for a balance between historical appropriation and the type of imaginative representation he prefers. That it is possible to imagine a more powerful shadow of *Life is Beautiful* reveals the inherent possibilities of Merlin's Laugh enacted within a non-survivor narrative.

Thus the paradox that Holocaust representation presents to film is not simply confined to an 'either/or' debate between a detailed re-creation of events as the filmmaker imagines they happened or a more creative representation. Rather it reflects the need for on-going interrogation of the nature of cinematic authenticity and the various narrative and visual devices which create the representation and shape the spectator's imaginative relationship to Holocaust history. As in non-survivor literary texts the terms of cinematic

authenticity are both challenging and complex. Thus the authenticity of the non-survivor cinematic text could be based on the need to interrogate and challenge contemporary idealisation and the comforting myths that condition the reception and understanding of the Holocaust today. The adaptation of this narrative strategy, conditioned by the non-survivor perspective, could therefore enact Merlin's Laugh in this context. This challenge is as applicable to the contemporary setting of *Music Box* or to Benigni's evocative rendering as it is to Spielberg's recreation.

Each of the films examined exemplifies the degree to which the representation of the Holocaust on film is conditioned by the desire for mental comfort which the Holocaust threatens to overwhelm. Film is a product of and about its time. As a result, it can be seen as providing an index of the relationship between the Holocaust and the contemporary consciousness. This problematised relationship often conditions the text of film, even as it attempts to redefine it. Thus, while the Holocaust appears regularly on our screens, the necessity of asking "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123), as part of the narrative strategy that enacts Merlin's Laugh, continues to challenge all who appropriate it. The chronology of the films examined highlights the evolutionary nature of this enterprise, each individual piece raising unique questions, offering different solutions and adding another dimension to the issues raised by cinematic representation. Once again, identifying the potential of the Laugh of Merlin on screen is not defined by a single authoritative text but is conditioned by the mosaic of interpretations that these films offer.

However, as the films examined show, the terms under which Merlin's Laugh could be enacted on film exist even within the inclusive, accessible form of the Hollywood movie. Although the commercial films examined have been unable to adapt this narrative strategy within the terms of the whole film, the examples that exist and the use of uniquely visual features like silence, highlight the potential film holds for its enactment. In these terms, a cinematic Laugh of Merlin experienced by a contemporary audience could also encourage a redefinition of the 'popular versus high art' dichotomy. As Barbie Zelizer comments:

> The explicit function of popular culture, therefore, should be not only to shake up the public and rattle its sensibilities about the contents of the past but also to generate questions about the form of the past
> (cited by Loshitzky 1997: p. 30).

Enacting Merlin's Laugh within the context of a popular commercial film could therefore reach beyond the seemingly reductive features of the medium. It could encourage a re-

evaluation of the part that film could play in the translation of Holocaust history and its legacy to a large and diverse audience.

To imagine a cinematic text which embodied the "right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123), seen and experienced by a world-wide audience, is to begin to understand the possibilities which film offers to the translation of Holocaust memory. Rendered through an uniquely visual framework, this type of representation could raise questions about both the nature of the Holocaust and its continued influence on modern life, as it exposes the tolerable limits of understanding which contain it within the contemporary consciousness. As Robert Rosenstone comments:

> The best historical films may do something for history by showing, personalising and emotionalising the past and delivering it to a new audience. But this is not, I feel, to use the capabilities of the medium to their fullest. In no way do such films do what film might do; offer a new relationship to the past (Rosenstone 1995a: p. 11).

Endnotes for Chapter Three

1. The original Italian title for Benigni's film was *La Vita E Bella* but I shall refer to it in English throughout this chapter.

2. This argument is supported in P. C. Rollins, *Hollywood as Historian: American Film In A Cultural Context* (Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky, 1983) who argues:

> The aesthetic power of a motion picture, historically correct or incorrect is difficult to resist (p. ix).

3. For a discussion of non-survivor narrational future knowledge, *see* Chapter 2.

4. For Iser's work on consistent gestalten, *see* W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 119. For its application to Merlin's Laugh, *see* Chapter 1.

5. D. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 32–33).

6. Albert Laffay, cited by D. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, Routledge, 1995):

> The master of images: an . . . invisible personage who chooses what we shall perceive (p. 62).

7. The framing carried out by the camera has particular relevance to historical films, as Rosenstone argues:

> The fundamental fiction that underlies the standard historical film – the notion that we can somehow look through the window of the screen directly at the real world (R. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge to our Idea of History* (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1995a), p. 55).

8. A. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge & New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 252.

9. One of the significant episodes in *Shoah* (C. Lanzmann, *Shoah* (France, 1986), First Era, Part I) which was incorporated into a mainstream film was the throat-slashing gesture made by a Polish onlooker to the transports. This gesture was used by Steven Spielberg in *Schindler's List*.

10. This reading of Lanzmann's cinematic style is supported by Insdorf who argues:

> The achievement of *Shoah* is that it contains no music, no voice-over narration, no self conscious camera work, no stock images - just precise questions and answers, evocative places and faces, and horror recollected in tranquillity (I. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 254).

Although there can be little doubt that some of these features are directly linked to the documentary catechism applied to the film, Insdorf's comments illuminate the conditions within *Shoah* which contribute to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh.

11. C. Lanzmann, *Shoah* (France, 1986), First Era, Part I

12. C. Lanzmann, *Shoah* (France, 1986), Second Era, Part I.

13. T. Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (New York and London, Penguin Books, 1976). For a discussion of Borowski's use of textual laughter and irony and its contribution to Merlin's Laugh, *see* Chapter 1.

14. C. Lanzmann, *Shoah* (France, 1986), Second Era, Part I.

15. For a commentary on *Shoah see* S. Feldman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London & New York, Routledge, 1992), pp. 204–283; S. Friedlander, ed., *Probing The Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (Massachusetts & London, Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 208; A. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge and New York Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 251–5.

16. As Omer Bartov argues:

> I would assume that more people saw *Schindler's List* in the first month of screening than have watched *Shoah* since it was first released (O. Bartov, 'Spielberg's Oskar: Hollywood Tries Evil', in Y. Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 55).

17. For Lanzmann's comments on his difficulties in funding *Shoah*, *see* S. Feldman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London & New York, Routledge, 1992), p. 250.

18. W. Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (London, Corgi Books, 1983). For a discussion of the novel, *see* Chapter 2.

19. For survivor Kitty Hart's work on the visual representation of Auschwitz in *Sophie's Choice*, *see* A. Gill, *The Journey Back From Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors* (London, Grafton Books, 1988), p. 155.

20. Pakula's use of ECU and CU to give Sophie's story a visual pre-eminence is commented upon by Insdorf:

> Pakula offers us a continually close-up and consequently sympathetic view of Sophie and despite his distanced style one senses that he added a new dimension to the story of Styron Stingo (I. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge and New York Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 39).

21. S. Rhodes, review (1996) at http://www.USIMBD.com

22. R. Kempley, 'Music Box', (*Washington Post*.com: www.washingtonpost.com. 19 January 1990), p. 1).

23. The challenge that the character of Michael could present to the spectator reflects the words of Liliane Weissburg:

> Many of these brutal beasts are still among us, but one cannot recognise them . . . the lovely grandma who walks with her grandchild . . . perhaps she had been a supervisor in a concentration camp, killing little children. Because it did not happen that long ago (cited by Y. Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 186).

24. G. Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 50.

25. Y. Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 9.

26. T. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark* (London, The Book Club Associates, 1983), pp. 388–90. This episode is crucial to the survivors' experience of Amon Goeth and its exclusion reveals much about the biased gaze of Spielberg's film and the marginalisation of the survivors' experience. When Amon arrives at Brinnlitz, he is no longer the embodiment of evil which Spielberg portrays. As Keneally comments (p. 390), by this stage Goeth's power over the Plaszow prisoners was confined to their memories and nightmares about him, "it was clear now that he had no power at all".

27. J. Romney, *The Learning Zone: Cinema and History, The Holocaust on Film*, broadcast on BBC2, 29 April 1999.

28. For Spielberg's attitude towards the use of black and white footage as opposed to colour *see*, Y. Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 109, 156.

29. T. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark* (London, The Book Club Associates, 1983), pp. 406-7.

30. The impact of Spielberg's Holocaust iconography can be seen through an examination of the Peugeot car advert of the late 1990s, which showed the rescue of a young girl dressed in red against a black and white backdrop. The front page of the *Mirror* (1 April 1999) also used a similar black and white image with the picture of a child in colour to illustrate the Kosovo crisis.

31. The acceptance of *Schindler's List* as the pre-eminent canonical cinematic text, and its contribution to the memorialisation of the Holocaust is, I would argue, exemplified by the Holocaust Memorial Day (28 January 2001), where the film was screened as the final work in an evening of programmes dedicated to the Holocaust.

32. Maurizio Viano argues:

> The proof that *Life Is Beautiful* is not a cynical market move lies in the historical and cultural awareness that sustains the script (M. Viano, '*Life Is Beautiful*: Reception, Allegory and Holocaust Laughter', in A. Rodrigue and S. J. Zipperstein, eds., *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, Vol..5, No.3, (Spring/Summer, 1999), p. 52.

I think this argument has a particular relevance to the first section of the film, which deals with Italian-Jewish experience of persecution. It is, however, harder to sustain when the film moves into the realm of the camps.

33. For Viano's discussion of Benigni's use of Schopenhauer, *see* M. Viano, '*Life Is Beautiful*: Reception, Allegory and Holocaust Laughter', in A. Rodrigue and S. J. Zipperstein, eds., *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, Vol..5, No.3, (Spring/Summer, 1999), pp.59–60.

Chapter Four

The Age of Television: Taking Holocaust Fictions Into The Home

> Television has emerged over the course of the second half of the twentieth century as the most pervasive and diverse source of Holocaust mediations (Shandler 1999: p. 256).

> The arguments that television is always an agent of the status quo are convincing but not totally so. Social change does occur, ideological values do shift and . . . television can be, must be part of that change, and its effectivity will either hasten or delay it (Fiske 1994: p. 45).

> Everybody is a television critic. I have never met anybody who wasn't (James 1982: p. 21).

Television's familiarity with its audience embodies the domestication of the technological age; of mass produced, mass consumed images that have enabled TV, in its short history, to emerge as a dominant form of communication in contemporary society. Its audience is undeniably vast; by the late 1970s, more than 90 per cent of western households had at least one set and this figure has continued to increase (1). As Bruce Cummings argues:

> Its importance is so great that these days the first thing revolutionaries think of is to occupy the television stations (Cummings 1992: p. 31).

The underlying features of television – mass production based on market-driven economics, the viewer's consumption of an unending flow of sounds and images, its popularity – are the very features which, while contributing to its powerful role in the world today, seem to define television as a largely mundane, passive enterprise (2). The box in the corner of the living room has quickly become part of the daily routine, absorbed rather than investigated and attended not by the prolonged gaze of the cinematic spectator, but by the distracted glance of a TV viewer.

However, there can be little doubt that, in spite of the apparent limitations of the medium, television continues to play a significant role in the translation of Holocaust history. Perhaps more than any other medium, television, a product of and about its time, reflects the degree to which the Holocaust has penetrated the public consciousness, even

as televisual narratives struggle to represent the meanings ascribed to it. Television as a hybrid animal has been witness to the Holocaust as news and history (3), exposing audiences to the stories of survivors, the commentary of historians and footage of the period. As a result, the Holocaust has been consistently portrayed on television on a scale that is unmatched either by non-survivor literary or cinematic appropriations. As Jeffrey Shandler argues:

> Television has made the Holocaust a household word in ways unmatched by other forms of memory culture (Shandler 1999: p. 179).

Yet, while the value of television as a means of communicating documentary evidence is as unique as it is diverse, its ability to use these resources creatively in the TV movie and mini-series has been largely vilified or ignored (4). This response may therefore be a reflection, not only of the type of Holocaust representations that have been aired on television, but also of an underlying resistance to the medium as a whole. Television's dramatic narratives, in this traditional view, are conditioned not by the imaginative or creative elements associated with literature and even, to a lesser extent, film, but by an explicit agenda of commercial interest.

This concept of the medium also influences the traditional assessment of the role of the viewer as a 'consumer' of television's uniform flow of products. In relation to Holocaust representations, this would appear to rule out the possibility of adopting the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh within a televisual context. As previously identified within film, visual media possess their own unique structures which could be exploited in the enactment of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh (5). This is possible, within a cinematic context because of the active involvement of the spectator in the assignment of meaning and the role of the director as the creator of the text that can manipulate, challenge and confront the spectator's fabula construction. However the perception of television's audience as essentially passive would seem to preclude this type of active fabula construction (6) necessary to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh.

This assessment of the televisual product and the role of the viewer cannot be sustained when examined within the terms of the medium. For it is television's diversity, as opposed to its perceived uniformity, that underpins its extensive audience appeal. Mass popularity on such a world-wide scale simply cannot, by its very nature, be achieved or sustained by a uniformity of product:

> The emphasis is on . . . discussion rather than indoctrination, on contradiction rather than coherence (Newcomb 1994: p. 506).

Television as a medium is therefore conditioned by this deceptively simple truth: even in its most basic form it must embody the plurality and diversity of the viewing audiences of which it is representative (7).

Television's diversity functions structurally, within the format of a particular programme and its relation to other broadcasts, but also thematically, within the potentials of meaning each programme generates. In order to recognise and respond to the diversity inherent in television, the viewers occupy an activated subject position and are therefore able to read the programmes and infer their own unique meanings. Whether dominant, oppositional or negotiated (8), these readings are the product of the individual imagination at work upon the programme. This understanding of the active involvement of the television viewer is already internalised by the medium as a whole. Long-running drama, soap opera and serials exemplify television's ability to encourage and prolong the fabula construction of the viewer. Their extended life span relies inherently on this factor. Without the imaginative connection between the viewer and the programme it loses its ability to sustain the viewer's attention and they switch off.

Television, when viewed in these terms, reveals the possibilities of the programme as a new and varied site of meaning that cannot be contained. Whatever the foregrounding ideology or discourse, "the polysemic character" (Newcomb 1994: p. 427) of the television programme means that dominant readings cannot be guaranteed. The programme can therefore be seen as a space in which the viewer becomes "the maker of meanings" (Fiske 1994: p. 17), reading, retrieving and experiencing his or her own meaning within the terms of the programme. As a result, television programmes can be seen as texts in ways indicative of both literature and film:

> A programme becomes a text at the moment of reading, that is when its interaction with one of its many audiences activates some of the meanings/pleasure the text is capable of producing (Fiske 1994: p. 14).

The terms of reading in a televisual context are conditioned by the immediacy of medium and the pace at which visual images are presented. As a result, the viewer, like the spectator, gives a general meaning to portions of the visual text, as opposed to the specific meaning created by the individual signs of a literary text. However, in the age of VCRs, which enable the viewer to have greater control over the time taken to progress through the narrative, televisual viewing may be located somewhere between its literary and its cinematic counterparts.

The re-evaluation of the relationship between the viewer and the televisual text illuminates the limitations of the stereotypical definition of their exchange as a low-brow,

passive reception of a dominant discourse and is supported by Robert C. Allen, who has applied the work of Wolfgang Iser (9) to television viewing. Allen argues:

> Each sentence of a literary narrative or each shot of a television narrative both answers questions and asks new ones (Allen 1992: p. 106).

Thus with each image the text leads, guides, and shapes the viewer's readings but never dominates them. Viewing television therefore draws on the viewer's own preconceptions and experiences in the creation and assignment of meaning. As a result:

> The reception of television always occurs within value systems that are not confined to television itself but that are produced through other sites, discourses, cultural forms and commodities (Allen 1992: p. 356).

The act of viewing can be therefore be understood as "a dialogue between the text and the socially situated reader", and within this dialogue the "balance of power lies with the reader" (Fiske 1994: p. 66).

Within the terms of Holocaust narratives, it is the viewers' inherent "value systems" (Allen 1992: p. 356), their store of knowledge, beliefs and stereotypes, that conditions their journey through and reception of the text. These preconceptions can be used an implicit part of the narrative strategy that enactes Merlin's Laugh. Thus, within the terms of televisual Holocaust narratives, the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh could lead the viewer to a confrontation between these idealisations, for example "that suffering in Auschwitz was somehow ennobling" (Langer 1998: p. 35), and the realities of Holocaust history and its continued legacy.

The televisual Holocaust text, in these terms, can be seen as conditioning, challenging and confronting the viewer's fabula construction in ways similar to its cinematic counterpart – allowing for a variance between a given image or 'sign' and its signified meaning as it exists in the imagination of the viewer. Televisual Holocaust texts may therefore be able to take "advantage of the viewer's almost unquenchable habit of inferring causality from succession" (Allen 1992: p. 70), producing a text capable of using the viewer's own preconceptions and the asking "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123). These questions can confront and challenge the viewer; creating the moment of the Laugh. It is therefore possible to see the blueprint narrative strategy that survivor writers provide as adaptable within the terms of a televisual medium.

However, the terms of Merlin's Laugh within a televisual context and its effect on the viewer are inevitably conditioned by the place of television within the home. In cinematic narratives the consistently directed gaze of the spectators contributed to the effect of Merlin's Laugh, walling them into its moment as they are walled in by the movie

theatre experience. Television, with its regime of the glance, perpetually fights to occupy its audience, encountering a resistance that is intimately linked to its domesticity and familiarity.

Television's place within the home provides it with a site that is unique to each viewer; a private space of safety. The "living room as cultural space" (Fiske 1994: p. 74) is central to the internal/external dichotomy that is the heart of the medium's appeal; its experience is unique to each viewer but shared by the many households or viewing communities that make up the TV audience. Television's need to represent a generalised familiarity within the private space of the viewer is therefore built into the medium at a very basic level:

> When it does not address the audience directly, it creates a sense of familiarity based on the notion of the familial which is assumed to be shared by all
> (Ellis 1997: p. 137)

As a result, television constantly invites its viewers into an unique, dual relationship with both itself as medium and with the individual programme as a text. Viewing becomes an act of "complicity with TV's own look at the passing of life" (Ellis 1997: p. 160). The viewer's trust in what is shown is based largely on an understanding of and relationship to the medium that goes beyond either the text or its individual authors, within the confines of the viewer's private space. In essence, it is television itself the viewer's trust and encounter when they switch on the set and it is this centrality of the medium, above and beyond the text, that conditions their relationship to it.

This unique relationship reinforces the role of television, as a medium, in creating certain expectations, a viewing meta-discourse that could contribute significantly to the confrontation between text and viewer enacted by Merlin's Laugh. Thus a viewer's shocked reaction to a specific textual moment is defined, not only by the moment itself, but also by its appearance 'on TV'. In these terms, the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within the televisual context could bring an added dimension to the viewing experience, shocking the viewer by disrupting TV's underlying familial tone:

> It is the very familiarity of television which enables it . . . to act as an agency for defamiliarisation (Fiske and Hartley 1994: p. 19).

The importance of this relationship between the viewer and the television as a medium is exemplified by the way in which television generates its own secondary commentary in the form of discussions or 'gossip' (10). This type of exchange, actively endorsed by the medium, connects the viewer to a communal site, a viewing community, where meanings drawn from programmes can be exchanged, discussed and interrogated.

Within the terms of Holocaust narratives, this feature of TV's communality can be utilised in both the pre- and post-airing period; countering the distractions of the home by encouraging viewers to tune in to specific programmes and then sustaining and encouraging their imaginative connection to the history of the Holocaust in the aftermath of the programme. The effects of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, in these terms, may also be extended and interrogated as viewers are explicitly encouraged to discuss and compare their responses. The importance of this feature of the medium is exemplified by its contribution to large-scale productions like *Holocaust* (11).

The centrality of the medium over and above its products is also illustrated by the difficulties that exist in defining the role of directorship (12) and its relationship to both individual texts and the medium as a whole. In film, the role of the non-survivor director was central to the possibility of Merlin's Laugh and the cinematic texts' ability to identify and ask the "right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) of their audience. It is the director, the 'author' of the cinematic narrative, whose role enables the possibility of using both non-survivor narrational future knowledge and the understanding of the viewers uninitiate' perspective as part of the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh. The director's vision shapes the visual and narrational levels of the text that condition the moment of the Laugh. Without this central figure, the possibilities of the televisual text as a site of enactment become more complex and challenging.

Unlike film with its "grand imagier" (13), television appears less reliant upon the guiding vision of a director. This variance is a direct result of television's structure, which "constructs a situation of looking itself, apart from any specific individual" (Allen 1992: p. 221). Thus the terms of television directorship can be seen as a more amorphous concept than a literary author or cinematic director, extending from a "textual construct . . . an agency, that which chooses, orders, presents and thus tells the narrative before us" (Allen 1992: p. 78–9), for example, in long-running programmes like soap operas, to a definable individual who directs completed texts. So, in relation to TV movies and mini-series, which make up a significant proportion of dramatic Holocaust narratives, the terms of directorship function in ways similar to a cinematic director. However they work within the structures, like segmentation, inherent to television.

At every stage of production, 'directing' is therefore affected and influenced by the nature of the medium (14), emerging as a textual locus where television's defining features and its directors and writers interact to create the text. In these terms, non-survivor narrational future knowledge can be used within the context of a television programme,

conditioned by the nature of the medium but not precluded by it. This is particularly relevant in the dramatic narratives which are presented as completed texts.

This re-examination of the terms of television viewing and the conditions of directorship illuminate the possibility of Merlin's Laugh, within a televisual context, that can challenge the preconceptions and idealisations brought to the text by the viewer. Although cinema and literature appear to be more innovative than the televisual text, this in no way precludes television as a source of radical representation. The possiblility of adapting the narrative strategy that creates the Laugh of Merlin exists, within a medium where its presence is least expected. The effects of this confrontation may therefore be equal to the power of the literary or cinematic encounter with Merlin's Laugh, precisely because of the comfortable familiarity embodied by the medium. However, as with each medium examined, television possesses its own unique structures which can contribute to, but also problematise, the creation of Merlin's Laugh. In terms of its format and production, the limits that inform the televisual representation also contribute to the creation of a radically different text from cinematic films.

Television embodies the personal, the familiar, through its small scale. The screen is much smaller than its cinematic counterpart, its frame-time is 1/30 of a second and has been described as "the smallest unit of meaning" (Cummings 1992: p. 24). As a result, the visual focus of the television text, literally what can be seen, shifts; its attention to visual detail is necessarily different from that of film. Television therefore privileges sound, and in particular dialogue, as a means of both attracting and maintaining the viewer's attention. For Holocaust narratives, this feature of TV has enabled it to become a diverse and challenging site of testimony, of the spoken word that, while married to the visual elements of the medium, is not subordinate to them.

The small screen also reduces television's effectiveness as a means of communicating a panorama or detailed visual shots and as a result "the human face becomes the stage on which drama was played" (Shandler 1999: p. 43). Through the use of mid-shots and extreme close-ups (15), television creates a connection between the viewer and actor that is wholly unlike its cinematic equivalent and is underpinned by the personal or familiar (16). Thus, in its portrayal of the Holocaust, television texts mirror the unique effects of its format and have consistently relied on the individual, and by extension the family, on the 'face', to provide the platform for the wider history to be played out. This defining characteristic, creating meaning from a reduced space, can, as Jeffrey Shandler argues, be seen as "less of a limitation than a virtue, enabling a new kind of drama that . . . depends more on character than on action" (Shandler 1999: p. 43).

As discussed previously, with reference to Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (17), the human face can be a visually powerful contributing factor to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh and there can be little doubt that the intimacy of television could enhance its effect within the terms of a televisual representation of the Holocaust. The effect of its enactment in these terms could also be heightened as the structural intimacy created by the small screen is, as previously discussed, reinforced both by the apparent safety of the medium and the complicity that it invites from its viewers. The imaginative identification between viewer and character that could provide a location for the enactment of Merlin's Laugh is therefore explicitly encouraged by the conditions inherent in television viewing.

The reduced visual scope, enforced by television dimensions, also affects the televisual Holocaust text at a narrative level and the majority of fictional or dramatic representations portrayed on TV reflect the personalised, familiar dynamic that conditions the medium as a whole. As a result, Holocaust televisual narratives are able to deal more comprehensively with Holocaust history through the cipher of the individual or the family (18). This can be clearly seen in fictionalised narratives like *Holocaust* and within the TV movie genre, where the Shoah is almost always represented through the cipher of the family group. The effect of the medium's structure on the choice of Holocaust narratives that it presents can be seen as humanising the overwhelming nature of the statistics of the Holocaust, using an identifiable family or individual to lead the viewer into the realm of the concentration camp experience.

However television's underlying agenda, of delivering audiences to advertisers, inevitably problematises Holocaust representations and the possible creation of Merlin's Laugh. One example of the ways in which the commercialism of television can explicitly interfere in programming can be seen in the 1959 broadcast of *Judgement at Nuremberg* (19). The programme was sponsored by the American Gas Association, which pressured its makers, CBS, to blank out all references to the word gas. Although this episode occurred at an early stage in the history of televisual Holocaust texts, its implications for the medium are clear. This type of intervention inevitably precludes the creation of Merlin's Laugh; the confrontational aspect of the Laugh cannot exist when it loses out to the interests of the advertiser.

The commercial nature of television also creates its defining, and in relation to Holocaust representations, its most contentious structural characteristic: the ubiquitous 'commercial break'. This feature of television's structure defines both the material production of a television text and the pace at which it can be read. Its effects are reflected, on a narrational level, by the creation of the segment, a compartmentalisation of

narrative bonded on either side by adverts (20). The segment conditions every aspect of the narrative. The result is that each portion of drama must be, to a certain extent, self-contained, while simultaneously creating questions that can sustain the viewer's attention through the commercials. It is the unanswered questions or incomplete fabula construction that draw the viewer back into the programme and overcome the distractions inherent within the home.

For Holocaust narratives, advertising breaks present a profound challenge. While British television has a tradition of public service broadcasting, a huge proportion of worldwide television and, by extension, the majority of dramatic Holocaust representations, are subject to the norms of commercial television and its attendant structure. To take a break from a Holocaust narrative seems at once to be incompatible with the nature of the event itself. The incongruity of cutting from a scene in Auschwitz to a commercial for a soft drink represents the heart of the problematic relationship between TV as medium and as a site of appropriation of Holocaust history and led Elie Wiesel to describe it as "unthinkingly immoral" (cited by Shandler 1999: p. 209).

There seems to be little room to negotiate around this contentious issue; perhaps restricting the broadcast of Holocaust treatments to public service channels. This solution exists only as an ideal; the Holocaust text has inevitably become subject to the norms of commercial television and its most common dramatic incarnations, the TV movie and the mini-series, reflect the narrative style of segmentation imposed by the medium. Yet, as with any form of narrative, these limits can either contribute to the telling or inhibit it and their effect is dependent upon the ways in which the text itself is influenced by them.

However, it is possible to argue that the perceived incompatibility of television as a site of appropriation for Holocaust history is conditioned, not only by the problematic nature of commercialised segmentation, but also by the traditional understanding of the viewer as passive receptor, rather than active participant, in the journey through the text. The active role of the viewer within the terms of the televisual narrative therefore means that their relationship to and understanding of the medium prepares them to expect the commercial breaks. This expectation works in ways similar to the reader of literary text, who expects, or is prepared for, chapter breaks. Thus, within the framework of the viewers' fabula construction, the commercial can be experienced not simply as an interruption, but rather as,

> Providing an excellent opportunity to reassess previous textual information and reformulate expectations regarding future developments
> (Allen 1992: p. 111).

The commercial therefore becomes an obvious textual space, a gap in the progression of the narrative which can be employed in ways that, rather than distancing the viewers, could bring them closer to the Holocaust text, through the continuing imaginative reflection that segmentation can promote.

The viewer's active participation in the assignment of meaning within the context of the programme also means that the experience of commercial disruption is influenced, not only by the content of the programme, but also by the extent of the viewers' involvement in the narrative. In Holocaust narratives, sustaining the interest of the viewer over the commercial can therefore challenge the very norms of the medium. For the duration of the break the text can ensure that the viewer remains connected imaginatively to the narrative, the questions and challenges provided by the text overwhelming the break. In terms of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh, this break could also provide a textual space for reflection on and re-evaluation of the viewer's idealisations or hopes that this moment creates. It could therefore extend the effect of the moment of the Laugh in a way that cinematic narratives are unable to duplicate.

The explicit segmentation of television's Holocaust texts can also be manipulated to elicit anticipation and discussion between those watching. As a result the commercial break can be 'used' by the viewer in ways that can be conditioned by textual content, but that cannot be controlled by the advertisers. The critic Saul Friedman provides a useful example of this type of reading, describing the experience of viewing the mini-series *Holocaust* with his family:

> My wife and I used the commercial pauses to answer the inevitable questions [raised by his nine-year-old daughter and twelve-year-old son]. I am certain that even experts and survivors could have used [this time] for discussion. Failing that everyone could have made use of the pauses in this tale of horror for simple reflection (cited by Shandler 1999: p. 172).

The Friedman family's experience illustrates the degree to which viewers are able to respond to the Holocaust texts above and beyond the perceived limitations of the medium. The viewer is able to absorb the incongruity of the commercial interruption in a variety of ways. At a textual level, the narrative can also encourage viewers to use the space to analyse their responses to what they have seen and bring their own implicit store of hopes and expectations into play in their fabula construction. These hopes can function as an implicit part of the narrative strategy that can then be provoked, denied and confronted by the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh that the strategy creates. In these terms the effect of Merlin's Laugh could be heightened as the viewer's expectation is

encouraged, perhaps even made explicit, and then challenged through the segmentalised narrative.

This brief discussion of the structure of the medium illustrates the way in which television, while presenting the programme-maker with a unique set of problematising conventions, can offer a singular space wherein the narrative strategy that creates the Laugh of Merlin can be can be adopted. The duality inherent in television, at work in every level of the medium from its production through to its reception, opens up possibilities in a way that has yet to be truly defined or exploited.

The implications and impact of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, occurring within the private space of the home, cannot be ignored. Elie Wiesel, who often provides a guide-line for orthodox thinking, described television as a "double edged sword", commenting:

> I think it would have exposed Hitler . . . and millions of lives might have been saved. In that way it is a wonderful tool (cited by Shandler 1999: p. 209).

How to employ this wonderful tool to the best of its ability, to overcome its limitations as a medium, to exploit its small scale and its commercial interruptions rather than be subject to them, to enact Merlin's Laugh, remains within the realm of the televisual text, of the narrative of each individual programme or series. The examination of television's fictional Holocaust appropriations can therefore be seen in ways similar to its literary and cinematic counterparts, as part of an on-going process that reflects the development over time of the changing face of the televisual Holocaust text. Each programme, each text, adds a new dimension to our understanding of the Holocaust on television and generates new questions.

The origins of the debate concerning the validity of television's dramatic representations of the Holocaust can be traced to *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss*; aired on NBC in April 1978. The programme was subsequently screened world-wide and attracted approximately 220 million viewers (21). As a result, it is one of the most discussed and debated televisual texts. Aired over four nights during the week before Passover, with its final episode coinciding with the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising (22), the programme also provides an example of the explicitness with which television is able to connect its texts to larger world events and dates, drawing attention to the historical anniversary, while using it as a springboard for its programming.

Holocaust was an extensive and expensive programme with a large production crew and cast. This high level of production was matched by the publicity surrounding the première; which presented the broadcast as an event to be shared by a large proportion of American viewers (23). This publicity also explicitly fostered discussion and comment,

encouraging viewers to utilise this secondary feature of television viewing. Written by Gerald Green and directed by Marvin J. Chomsky, *Holocaust*'s narrative focused on the family of Dr Josef Weiss, an assimilated, wealthy, Jewish family with three children. Part one, 'The Gathering Darkness', opens with the wedding of the Weiss's eldest son Karl, to Inga Helms, a non-Jewish German. The wedding and much of the action in this first section highlights not only the Weiss family's good standing and character but also its integration into German life. These opening scenes project the family as essentially 'good' and conditions the viewer's understanding of the family's subsequent disbelief in the face of the increasingly harsh wave of Nazi anti-semitism.

As the narrative progresses, each character's fate ties them to many of the major landmarks of Holocaust history. Rudi, the younger son, for example, becomes a partisan, witnesses the mass executions at Babi Yar and is part of the Sobibor uprising. The explicit significance of each character's life and death therefore provides the viewer with a cipher, a personal, identifiable connection to the suffering experienced by the many at each site of devastation. This feature of the narrative was reinforced through the historical referencing that was central to the programme. As a result, no scene was without an historic reference point, from Kristallnacht through to the Pope's concordat with Germany. While this enabled the text to be explicitly educational, bringing less familiar camps and sites of execution to the attention of its audience, it also gave the fictionalised narrative of the family a veneer of factuality. Thus the attention to detail, like the introductory voice-over which informs the viewer "It is only a story but it really happened" (24), blurs the line between the history appropriated and the fictions created to enable the Holocaust to work as a dramatic backdrop for the personalised narrative of the family.

The Weiss family is juxtaposed throughout the programme with two German families; the Helms, and the younger family of Erik Dorf. The three families are connected arbitrarily within the narrative and their behaviour provides the audience with a range of responses to Nazi genocide. While the Weiss family conduct themselves with consummate good humour and respect, their familial equivalent, the Helms, represent the self-protective, disinterested German perspective. The Dorfs' parallel narrative strand therefore reflects the effects of total involvement with the Nazis, Eric emerging as the glassy eyed, bureaucratic SS officer. The spectrum of behaviour that these concurrent story-lines represent is also reinforced by secondary characters like the Dorfs' Uncle Kurt, who provides the voice of German guilt, as he expresses his shame at his own inactivity in the face of Nazi genocide.

However, within the terms of the possible enactment of Merlin's Laugh, these characterisations are problematic. The highly stylised script and extensive historical remit which underpin the programme result in a significant lack of characterisation that does little to encourage the viewer's identification with those who allowed or enacted the genocide. The distance that this creates between the viewer and the figure of the Nazi diminishes the confrontational or interrogative dimension that could have arisen from an examination of the choices made by characters like Dorf, and precludes the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within this context.

Dorf's characterisation as both stereotype and representative of the Nazi experience, whose presence at almost every major site of genocide is never questioned or challenged, is clearly problematic within the terms of Merlin's Laugh. On a narrational level, Dorf's character functions as a cipher, a Nazi everyman, his judicious use of language symbolising Nazi attempts to cloak their crimes in a veil of legal and scientific jargon. Dorf's character also enables the recurrent leitmotif of documentary photographs to be used to give the dramatic rendering of scenes of execution a glaze of factuality. The explicatory nature of Dorf's characterisation therefore creates a distance between his character and the viewer and as he moves from innocent initiate to a fully committed Nazi, this distance is reinforced by a glassy-eyed, almost inhuman portrayal that is suggestive of a pathological problem. As a result, the confrontational aspect of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh, that could be created through an imaginative engagement with the perpetrator, is never possible within the terms of the narrative of *Holocaust*. Dorf's depiction as the embodiment of Nazi evil also means that his suicide functions in the shadow of this characterisation and allows the narrative a sense of closure, of resolution, that enables the viewers to leave the text with their equilibrium restored.

Sentimentality and heavy-handed symbolism govern both the visual and narrational aspects of *Holocaust* and, as a result, moments of trauma that could reflect the horror of the Holocaust and challenge the preconceptions and idealisations of the viewer, enacting Merlin's Laugh, are contained within a manageable framework. On a visual level, the metonymic signposts with which each family's journey is defined are often indicative of a heavy-handed pathos, as, for example, in the Dorfs' appropriation of the Weiss family's treasured piano (25). This approach is mirrored on a narrational level. Thus, as Dr Weiss marches to his death in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, he appears to happily reminisce with his old friend and fellow prisoner on their pre-war days in Berlin.

There is little in this scene to suggest the trauma of this experience, inherent in similar episodes recounted by survivors like Tadeusz Borowski (26), which reveals the

duality of concepts like hope in the concentration camp world and use the variance between the reality of Holocaust experience and the reader's understanding of these terms as part of the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh. The type of sentimentality inherent in *Holocaust* inevitably precludes the possibility of the Laugh, even in moments which could, as survivor narratives exemplify, evoke it.

Dramatic irony is also a central feature in many traumatic scenes. One example can be seen in the death of Berta Weiss, who is led into the gas chamber at the same moment as her son enters to collect the clothes of those going to their deaths (27). As previously discussed in relation to both literary and cinematic narratives, textual irony can be used as a powerful contributing feature in the enactment of the Laugh of Merlin. However, this scene illustrates the degree to which the confrontation inherent in this moment is precluded when irony is used merely as a dramatic tool, rather than as a challenge to the viewer's idealisations concerning the moment of death in Holocaust history.

It is difficult, when viewing *Holocaust* today, to understand the phenomenal success the series experienced. This response is the result not simply of the way in which the Holocaust was treated within the narrative, but also of the aesthetics that govern the programme. The lurid 1970s colour and set design create a kitsch visual aesthetic which reduces the impact of the scenes of genocide depicted. The degree to which this visual aesthetic was shaped by television as a medium and its effect on the viewer can be seen in a comment from the playwright Dennis Potter:

> The score of naked extras quivering about the already open grave were sufficiently accommodating not to show their genitals to the cameras. Prime time codes of behaviour, praise be, are still strong enough to over-ride Nazi edicts (cited by Shandler 1999: p. 168).

Death in *Holocaust* is, for today's viewer, a desensitised experience, bland and completely lacking in any horror. The various camps represented, including Sobibor, Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, appear almost indistinguishable from one another. The sparsity of detail, rather than evoking a sense of the bleakness of camp existence which could visually enact Merlin's Laugh, bears a distinct resemblance to a holiday camp. Thus, in the type of camp the Weiss family inhabits, it is almost unsurprising to find Berta Weiss's bunk in Auschwitz adorned with pictures of her children and her sheet music kept neatly in a wooden box (28).

There can be little doubt that both visually and textually *Holocaust* has come to embody television's perceived inability to express any meaningful truth about the nature of the Holocaust. As today's viewer watches *Holocaust*, both the visual and narrational levels

of the text ensure that they remained distanced from the reality of the experience it attempts to represent. Within the terms of Merlin's Laugh there is little in *Holocaust* that could be used to illuminate either its enactment or its effect on the viewer. The problematic features of *Holocaust* led Elie Wiesel to describe the programme as:

> Untrue, offensive, cheap: as a TV production, the film is an insult to those who survived (cited by Kaes 1989: p. 28).

Wiesel's opinion of the programme has been clearly reflected in a critical debate (29) that has continued until today and has largely defined all critical engagements with Holocaust television, spilling over from a simple assessment of values within the individual programme and bringing the whole televisual enterprise into question. *Holocaust* ultimately provided a negative bench-mark against which all other productions, including many cinematic interpretations, have since been measured.

However, this critical response must be seen within the context of the time in which *Holocaust* was made. Television as a medium is innately linked to the contemporary and the visual fabric of the piece is reflective of the level of technology inherent to the medium during the 1970s. It is therefore possible to argue that, while today the colour and texture of the piece appear incongruous with the history portrayed, at the time this incongruity may not have been as obvious. Thus the palette of *Holocaust* could have be seen as a refusal to historicise the events depicted, presenting viewers with a world which not only mirrored their own, but was also similar to the visual texture of television in general during the period.

The programme was also able to transcend the diversity of its audience and introduce viewers to a history with which some may never have come into contact before. Thus the programme's centring of historical facts, while problematising the fictional/factual bias of the narrative, resulted in a text that, at its most basic level, transmitted hitherto unknown 'educational' information into the public arena. This aspect of the text was due, in part, to television's almost unique ability to give over extensive air-time to Holocaust texts. Unlike the majority of fictional cinematic narratives, which have a running time of two or three hours, *Holocaust*'s seven-and-a-quarter hour running time fostered the explicit attention to historical dates and events which defines the educational aspect of the series as a whole. It was able, in a very basic way, to draw attention to elements of Holocaust history which conflation, necessary to shorter cinematic texts, often precludes.

The lengthy running time of *Holocaust*, coupled with television's secondary commentary, therefore encouraged a prolonged imaginative engagement between the

viewer and the characters, generating interest and discussion of both the history of the event and the next episode of the drama. While the problematic nature of *Holocaust* precluded the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, it reveals the inherent possibilities of such a textual moment enacted in a televisual context. The impact of Merlin's Laugh, in these terms, could have been heightened by the relationship built up between the viewer and the characters. Thus, by centring a prolonged narrative around a single family, the unimaginable statistics of the Holocaust were humanised and made accessible for the viewer. While the portrayal of the Nazi may have distanced the viewer and precluded the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, the imaginative identification the programme fostered between the viewer and the family meant that even the narrative's positive conclusion, with Rudi leaving for Palestine to a triumphant sound-track, was experienced by the viewer through the shadow of the destruction of the Weiss family and the millions of victims whom they represented. As Clive James commented:

> People who thought they knew a lot about the death camps might have been unmoved by *Holocaust* but people who knew little were often moved to tears (James 1982: p. 18–19).

Nowhere was the powerful effect of *Holocaust* more clearly seen than in the response to the West German broadcast in late January 1979 (30). Attracting over twenty million viewers, the programme generated a public debate which included calls to phone lines set up by the network and letters ranging from "aggressive rejection to demonstrative self-chastising confessions of guilt" (Kaes 1989: p. 35). This wholesale appropriation of the mechanisms of television's secondary commentary by the German public exemplified the power of television as a medium, leading Heinz Hohne, in an article for *Der Spiegel*, to comment:

> An American television series, made in a trivial style . . . accomplished what. . . all the concentration camp trials have failed to do. . . to inform Germans about the crimes against Jews committed in their name so that millions were touched and moved (cited by Kaes 1989: p. 31).

While the effect which Hohne describes is undoubtedly contentious (31), the popularity of *Holocaust* cannot simply be attributed to the perceived 'dumbing down' of Holocaust history in the name of accessibility. Rather it illuminates the possibilities of television's dramatic appropriations as a site of representation which can draw the viewer in to a more intimate, imaginative connection with the historical event depicted. This effect is encouraged by television's internal/external dichotomy, which brought the Holocaust directly into people's living-rooms.

The variance between the effect of *Holocaust* on its premier audience and the subsequent critical dismissal of the series may also be reflective of the effects of television's "nowness" (Fiske 1994: p. 97), its immediacy and constancy, on its audience and its texts. This feature of television is created by its continuous production and contributes to an understanding of the exchange between the medium, the viewer and the text as one of perpetual interchange. As Jeffrey Shandler argues:

> When television first dealt with the Holocaust the medium was itself new. Thus television and Holocaust memory culture have in some ways, a shared history . . . [and they have] reached thresholds in their respective developments at similar times (Shandler 1999: p. xvii–xviii).

This exchange is also conditioned by the fact that, in its relationship to Holocaust history, television and the creators of the televisual text reflect the non-survivor, uninitiated perspective, being connected to the event through an imaginative engagement rather than as part of the fabric of experience. The televisual text can therefore be seen as integrally tied to and reflective of the store of preconceived ideas, hopes, stereotypes and desire for distance that can be seen as conditioning non-survivor appropriations.

Thus, on a technological level, *Holocaust* embodied the development inherent to the time and on a narrative level, was reflective of many of the difficulties facing all non-survivor texts. Its popularity can be seen as paradoxically reflecting its inability to overcome the challenges which the Holocaust presents to all non-survivor writers and filmmakers who appropriate this history. As a result, the picture of the Holocaust presented in the mini-series embodied many of the comforting myths which can problematise all imaginative engagements with the Holocaust. At this stage in the development of the televisual Holocaust text, it was easier to attempt to recreate this history rather than interrogate its legacy and this feature of *Holocaust*'s remit was reflected in the problematised narrative and visual aesthetic that the programme employed. *Holocaust* can therefore be read as representative not of the event itself, but of the contemporary level of understanding of its audience. As Alan Rosenberg comments, *Holocaust*'s success "does not mean that we have attempted to understand the significance of these events for our personal lives" (Rosenberg and Myers 1988: p. 380).

This recognition reveals the challenges inherent in adopting the narrative strategy that creates the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh even as the impact of *Holocaust* illuminates its possibilities in relation to the televisual text. As in non-survivor fiction and film, the possibilities of television as a site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh can tied to the search for the "right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123). However, its continuous

production and presentation make the challenges of this search explicit in the texts television produces. Yet its unique and complex relationship to vast audiences ensures that television could provide a dynamic space for these questions to be translated, a space the potential of which remains to be truly examined or fulfilled.

In the aftermath of *Holocaust*, the efficacy of dramatic Holocaust narratives in attracting viewing audiences led to a profusion of representations. The prohibitive size and scope of the mini-series, defined by its status as 'event TV', resulted in the emergence of the TV movie as a primary site of Holocaust representation.

As previously discussed, the TV movie is created and presented as a complete narrative, made by a director and structured specifically to encourage a prolonged engagement, akin to the spectatorial gaze, from its viewer. However, it is conditioned by the structures inherent to the medium and its attendant 'limitations'. Thus the small screen, low-budget and reduced production time mean that the broad sweep of cinematic narration is simply beyond its scope. In terms of its textual pace, the TV movie is, like all televisual texts, characterised by segmentation, organising the dramatic material around the commercial interruptions that distinguish the medium.

The TV movie is also reflective of the domestic remit of the medium, embodying in both its visual characteristics and narrational content the centrality of television in the home and its uniquely familiar dimension. Intimacy is therefore built into it at a basic level. As a result, the TV movie is able to elicit active engagement with a disturbing or controversial subject through the cipher of the individual or family which is, in turn, reinforced aesthetically through the reduced vista of the screen. Televisual intimacy and the attendant perception of viewing in safety, combined with the essentially cinematic element of a completed text, has enabled the TV movie to function "as a privileged site for the negotiation of problematic social issues" (Newcomb 1994: p. 167).

As a site of appropriation for Holocaust history, the TV movie presents its own unique set of problems and possibilities. Like its mini-series counterpart, the explicit relation between the text produced, contemporary technology and viewer attitudes influences both the material production and choice of narratives within the genre. However, the inherently melodramatic nature of issue-driven narratives has contributed to the dismissal of the TV movie text as an appropriate site of appropriation for Holocaust history (32). This dismissal, while reflective of the traditional perspective of the medium, must be understood within the terms of the popularity of TV movies and the type of activated viewing that underpins television as a whole. As a result:

> Many critics of the made-for-TV movie seem to underestimate both the essential contradictariness of the TV movie and the audience's role in actively making meaning and pleasures from popular texts (Newcomb 1994: p. 157).

The popularity of TV movies is underpinned by their reliance on life stories, on biographies and autobiographies, as fodder for their films, and reflects, on a narrative level, the personalised intimacy and familiarity that defines the medium. Intimacy is also reinforced textually by their privileging of sound, notably dialogue, and the face as a means of conveying overwhelming statistics or issues to their audience on a personal level. This aspect of the TV movie genre, coupled with television's immediacy and perpetual production, has resulted in texts that reflect the continued effects of the Holocaust rather than portraying the event in purely historical terms. Thus, as a result of its limitations, both technological and financial, the TV movie widened the scope of Holocaust narratives on television in a way that opened up the genre as a site of representation, occupying a more discursive relationship to Holocaust history, which can be seen as more reflective of a non-survivor, uninitiated perspective than many cinematic interpretations.

This paradox is central to understanding the terms of Holocaust representation within the TV movie genre and is significant in terms of the possible enactment of Merlin's Laugh. The narratives that TV movies appropriate are often centred around the struggle to derive meaning from the Holocaust and illuminate its continued presence in contemporary society. They could provide a starting point from which "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) could begin to be uncovered and presented to an audience as part of the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh. As a result, TV movies can challenge the viewer to recognise the Holocaust as more than history and confront them with questions raised by an event that continues to influence the world in which they live. The TV movie can therefore be seen as indicative of both the viewers' continued interest in the Holocaust and its changing face within the contemporary imagination. These texts may also be read as emblematic of the difficulties inherent in defining the contemporary relationship to Holocaust history as they contribute to its conception.

Never Forget provides one example of this type of text and bears many of the defining features of a TV movie. Made in 1991, directed by Joseph Sargent and written by Ronald Rubin, the film depicts survivor Mel Mermelstein's legal battle with the Institute for Historical Review. For the viewer, the dominant narrative theme of the trial is

conditioned by the perspective of Mel and his family, embodying the effect of the medium at a narrational level. The result of the privileging of the more recent aspects of Mel's life history is the consistent and effective juxtaposition of his experience and understanding with that of his children, who live with the legacy of the Holocaust.

The influence of the medium over the textual choices made by the director can also be seen in the visual palette. *Never Forget* is set in Southern California in 1980 and, beyond an establishing sequence of the young Mel's family in Hungary and the arrival in their village of the Nazis, there is no attempt to recreate Mel's experience of the Holocaust or Auschwitz. The intimate portrayal of the family is also reinforced visually for the viewer through the domestic setting and a warm tonality of colour.

Although a contemporary story, driven by topical issues of racism and Holocaust denial, Mel's fight with the Institute also draws on an age-old dramatic theme; a David and Goliath struggle, with the family challenging the power of a larger organisation. Mel is portrayed as a survivor in the fullest sense of the word. He has a life, a family, a business and, through an establishing shot of Mel talking to school children about the Holocaust, the narrative suggests that he has been able to find a meaningful way of using his experiences to educate the next generation about the senselessness of the Nazi genocide. Thus as a dramatic character, played by the 'familiar' Leonard Nimoy, Mel embodies the humanity of the survivor. He is emblematic of a life after and this portrayal ensures that the viewer recognises the survivor as part of the contemporary world.

Through the leitmotif of Mel's exhibit and artwork, the viewer is also encouraged to understand the nature of memory and its effect on the survivor. While Mel's work and family condition the viewer's understanding of his ability to rebuild his life, the exhibit reflects the on-going presence of the memory, of both the experience of the Holocaust and the family that Mel lost. Thus, when Mel is challenged to provide evidence of the deaths of 6 million in the camps, the viewer experiences the devastation and anger this challenge provokes through the personalised, imaginative connection forged in the opening scenes with Mel and his family.

The underlying theme of memory and its effects are also revealed for the viewer through the conflict that arises between Mel and his eldest son. In these scenes, the viewer is again confronted with the ever-present nature of Holocaust memory for the survivor and the experience of this memory by default for his children. His son's comment, "We can't even say we're hungry unless we're starving to death", illuminates the possibility of creating the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh through the variance that the viewer witnesses between the apparent normality of Mel's family and the shadow that the

Holocaust continues to cast over, not only Mel, but also his children. This feature of the text also reveals a possible site for the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, as television's intimacy contributes to a narrative that makes Holocaust denial real for the viewer by revealing the effect of such denial on the survivor and the family. Elements of the arguments presented by the Institute during the painful scenes of Mel's deposition, which may mirror misconceptions shared by the viewer, are also exposed for the viewer and then challenged through Mel's responses.

Another site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh can be seen in the juxtaposition of Mel, his family and life with another survivor, Elsie, who has been unable to find a similar level of equilibrium. Elsie's tangible fear, transforming an apparently calm old lady in the instant she is asked to recall her experience, is once again depicted through the face. This secondary character therefore provides a shadow narrative to Mel's fight. Thus, when viewing the scenes of depositions, the viewer understands the traumatic nature of the interrogation in the light of Elsie's fear and inability to discuss her memories, as Mel breaks down reliving his own.

Inevitably, *Never Forget* conforms to the norms of TV movies and is complete with the happy ending of jubilant scenes of the victorious Mermelsteins celebrating their victory. While Mel's trial testimony provides the dramatic centre of the closing scenes, contrasting the oral testimony of the loss of his family with the faces of his children, the outcome of the trial is never in doubt. However this positive conclusion is conditioned by a heterodiegetic (33) voice-over that informs the viewer of the results of the case and provides a context for its outcome, closing with the words 'the fight against prejudice continues'. This conclusion, when contrasted with the final scenes of mainstream movies like *Schindler's List*, illuminates the type of partial closure that is more reflective of the realities of the legacy of the Holocaust and that is a result of the privileging of the smaller contemporary stories that define the TV movie as a genre. Thus *Never Forget* reveals a central paradox of television that could be exploited in the adaptation of Merlin's Laugh to a televisual narrative. The remit of the TV movie paradoxically results in the appropriation of stories that cannot be completely contained within a manageable framework, the contemporary aspects of the story, for example the on-going effects of racism, overwhelming the completed nature of the text.

The uniquely televisual features that inform *Never Forget* can also be seen in *The Man Who Captured Eichmann*, a 1996 production aired on TNT and directed by William A Graham. The screenplay is based on the book by Harry Stein and Peter Malkin (34), the Mossad agent responsible for Eichmann's arrest, and adapted by Lionel Chetwynd. The

narrative moves from 1960s Israel to Argentina and the period is brought to life through location shots and an attention to detail in both costume and set design. This aesthetic is also reflected visually through the richness of colour and texture of the film's palette working in juxtaposition with the sparsity of Eichmann's cell in the safe house. Although not centred around a family, the team of agents who assist Malkin in the kidnap function in a very similar way and the period of hiding that follows the capture focuses the viewer on the experience of the group as a whole. Most of the group, including Malkin, lost family in the camps and it is Malkin's promise to his dead sister Fruma, represented through his art, that frames the capture and provides the film with a moral centre. This promise also lends the narrative a palpable sense of *le cri*, the shadow of those murdered during the Holocaust.

The first section of the film deals with the plans for the abduction and an establishing shot of Eichmann counting the passing freight trains gives the viewer a surety that the man pursued is Eichmann. This sequence also provides the film with a leitmotif that Malkin later uses to identify the fugitive Nazi. It bears many of the hallmarks of an adventure film as the viewer follows the planning and execution of the team's mission. However, this effect is offset by the variance that the viewer experiences between the team's discussion of the monstrous nature of the crimes Eichmann committed juxtaposed with shots of the man and his family. This feature of the narrative implicitly acknowledges the viewer's own stereotype concerning the Nazi and then challenges it; forcing the viewer to recognise Eichmann as a human being with a life and a family of his own.

Significantly, the movie follows Malkin's book closely, without conflation or exaggeration, and as a result is less reliant upon the type of connotative imagery that defines many cinematic representations. This variance between the televisual text and cinematic treatments like *Schindler's List* illuminates the nature of TV appropriation, which at its most basic level is designed to 'tell the story'. As a result, there is no attempt to recreate the Holocaust visually; rather it is Malkin's promise to his sister and the use of documentary photographs that establish it as a shadow narrative that conditions much of what the viewer subsequently watches.

It is in the second section of the narrative that *The Man Who Captured Eichmann* provides an example of Merlin's Laugh. Much of this section works as a 'two-hander' between Malkin, played by Arliss Howard, and Eichmann, played by Robert Duvall. These scenes are shot in half-light, with Duvall prone on the bed: an inversion of the power relation in the perpetrator/prisoner roles that were inherent in Holocaust experience. They reveal the way in which the narrative, while dealing with a post-Holocaust historical

event, is defined by questions concerning the Holocaust that continue to be relevant to contemporary life.

As Eichmann, dressed in pyjamas and manacled to the bed, tentatively tries to draw Malkin into conversation, defending and justifying his wartime actions, the power of these scenes once again reveals the paradoxical nature of television Holocaust appropriations. For it is television's distinctive features, the small screen that focuses the viewer on the face and the importance of speech and sound, which condition the narrative and reinforce the visual aspects of the inversion of power at play within the capture. They also imbue the scenes with an intimacy that inevitably influences the viewer's relationship to both characters. The viewer therefore responds to Eichmann from a perspective that is affected by the shadow narrative of the Holocaust. Eichmann is never seen wearing a Nazi uniform and Duvall's portrayal is essentially a study in ordinariness. As a result, it is Eichmann's love for his family, his concern for their safety, the characteristics that humanise the stereotype that he in many ways initiated and embodied, continually challenge the viewer and their relationship to him.

The viewer's understanding of the nature of Eichmann's Nazi past is also subtly influenced by the ironies, present in the original narrative, which are transplanted to the screen. At one point Eichmann is given an injection and, fearful for his life, he looks to the doctor, who responds, "Don't worry I'm not that kind of doctor". This episode exemplifies the contribution that textual irony can make to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh and illuminates the way in which the viewer's idealisations function as an implicit part of the narrative strategy that creates this textual moment. This moment confronts the viewer with Eichmann's mindset. The confrontation is heightened as the previous scenes have challenged the reader to recognise Eichmann as a human being rather than as a stereotype. In these terms Eichmann's response illuminates the way in which his own inhumanity co-exists with his love for his family and conditions his expectations concerning his captors.

The Man Who Captured Eichmann tells the viewer little that is new or shocking. Eichmann's defence, 'I was only a soldier following orders', is well known. However, the filter provided by Malkin, the realities of Holocaust history that his lost sister represents, confronts the viewer with the explicit incongruity of Eichmann's position. Eichmann's calm facade fails once, in his passion for Hitler and his commitment to Nazism. The visual rendering of his facial tics and lost temper is symbolic of the extent to which his need to believe in his own defence defines his position as one of extreme self-perpetuation. Malkin's need to know, his questions, therefore reflect the viewer's own and provide another example of the possibilities of Merlin's Laugh within a televisual context. Malkin

functions as the voice of the viewer, as he asks the questions of how and why that continue to challenge the contemporary subject in relation to Holocaust history. The privileging of dialogue gives these scenes a confrontational aspect that challenges the viewer to recognise the tenuousness of Eichmann's defence and reveals the nature of individual choice and responsibility. The nature of choice and Eichmann's explicit denial of that choice therefore provides the viewer with an alternative perspective on the conditions that enabled the genocide of the Holocaust to happen. In these terms, the insubstantial answers that Eichmann provides also give the piece a partial closure that even the denouement of the film, Eichmann's successful transportation to Israel, cannot completely overcome. This explicitly discursive feature of the programme illuminates the way in which television can challenge the preconceptions and stereotypes of the viewer, creating Merlin's Laugh and through the experience of this textual moment, confronting them with an individual who can no longer be seen simply as the embodiment of the stereotypical Nazi.

Never Forget and *The Man Who Captured Eichmann* also provide examples of the way in which televisual appropriations function above and beyond the terms of each individual film, contributing to a mosaic of representation. Defined by the flow of television, each of these small stories adds another dimension to the viewer's understanding, presented not as the whole truth of Holocaust history, but rather as yet another piece of the complex and unending event. It is therefore possible to argue that the text as a whole can be seen as reflective of the value of a non-survivor perspective in adopting Merlin's Laugh in this context. The diversity of Holocaust experience and its continued influence in contemporary society is revealed through a flow of stories only seen by viewers as a result of television's unique features as a medium.

Thus, in its privileging of smaller stories, television is able to engage the viewer in ways that encourage discursive thought about the Holocaust, and rely inherently on the existing understanding, the uninitiated perspective, that the viewer brings to the text, shaping, challenging and altering it in ways that are yet to be truly exploited. Viewers may therefore draw from the text meanings that the contemporary nature of the programme encourages them to see in terms of their daily lives. As Robert Allen argues:

> We cannot underestimate the possibility that melodrama may, in some contexts, work to expose the problems that some critics argue it works to repress (cited by Newcomb 1994: p. 172).

While the melodramatic, domestic nature of the TV movie reflects the fact that television is not a progressive medium, the changing face of televisual Holocaust texts illuminates the effect of television as a medium that is in constant progression. The

possibilities inherent in this evolutionary, as opposed to revolutionary, development, within the terms of television's enactment of Merlin's Laugh, can also be seen in the 1997 broadcast of *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*. Originally transmitted in 1960 as a studio play (35), the remake highlights the differing values and awareness of both writer and audience, and the effects of this change on the text's visual characteristics and narrative.

Directed by Joan Micklin Silver from an adapted version of Rod Serling's original screenplay, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies* depicts life in the Warsaw ghetto prior to the Uprising. This pivotal moment of Holocaust history is used as a backdrop to the story of Rabbi Adam Heller (played by Armin Mueller Stahl) and his daughter Rachel. However, the central concern of the movie is not give the viewer a completed picture of ghetto life, but rather to interrogate the philosophical concerns that underpin the narrative as a whole. With a visual palette of muted greys and greens and exteriors shot in Montreal, the minimalist set design provides a sense of the harshness of ghetto life without attempting to recreate it. This austerity is reinforced textually through the discord between the "heightened language of Serling's play" (Shandler 1999: p. 56) and the degradation of the physical, ethical and spiritual aspects of life that the Holocaust enacted.

Serling's narrative pivots on juxtapositions, embodied in the differences between the Rabbi and his son Paul who, recently escaped from a concentration camp, returns home forever changed by the experience. The opening sequence of a selection and its aftermath defines the Rabbi's role as a spiritual leader to those around him and identifies his commitment to traditional piety and an acceptance of the increasingly harsh ghetto life. The perceived passivity that this response suggests is constantly opposed by Paul and the debates between father and son illuminate complex questions of identity and the nature of resistance, of spirituality and its perceived opposition to the active rebellion that Paul endorses.

Issues of identity are further problematised and examined through the narrative's secondary characters. Josef, a Pole, risks his life and puts on the Star of David armband to smuggle food into the ghetto. Although Paul dismisses him as an outsider who, unlike the Jews, can choose which 'side,' literally and metaphorically, he wants to be on, Josef eventually gives his life in Paul's place when a German officer is shot. His death confronts the viewer with the arbitrary nature of identity and the attendant dichotomy of good/evil that the narrative questions in relation to the Holocaust.

The concurrent narrative of Emmanuel, the Rabbi's neighbour, who is obsessed with building a place to hide, also provides another comparative narrative strand. His mania runs throughout the film and his descent into insanity mirrors the heightening

tension as it provides a graphic leitmotif of the constant presence of fear with which the ghetto dwellers lived. As a televisual creation, Emmanuel embodies the inherent possibilities of the face as a site of enactment of Merlin's Laugh, confronting the viewer, not with the reality of Holocaust history, but with a palpable sense of the effects of this experience on the individual. This performance evokes the nature of perpetual fear in a way that is both effective and indicative of television's potential power as a site of representation for Holocaust narratives.

The depiction of the Nazi in *In The Presence of Mine Enemies* also illuminates television's subtle challenge to contemporary stereotypical views and provides another possible site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh. The juxtaposition between Captain Richter (played by Charles Dance) and his young Sergeant Lott provides a locus for this third strand of narrative interrogation and is presented as an inverted mirror image of the juxtaposition of passivity and action that defines the relationship between the Rabbi and his son. Richter is a committed Nazi, a believer, who actively pursues anti-semitic policy. Lott, in many ways Richter's antithesis, is deeply disturbed by the violence he is party to and, as a result, he rebels against it.

This sympathetic portrayal of a conflicted Nazi evoked criticism after the original tele-play was broadcast and Lott's character was described as an example of "gross indecency" (Shandler 1999: p. 58). However, this criticism can be seen as reflective of the problematic nature of Lott's characterisation, as opposed to the tentative challenge to the stereotype, embodied in *Holocaust* by Eric Dorf, which his character represents. Lott is Swiss, rather than German, an educated man, not a professional soldier, and these essentially explanatory differences weaken the confrontational possibilities of his character and illustrate the text's hesitation in depicting him as deeply involved with Nazism. As a result, the essential innocence that conditions his character is never challenged or interrogated in the light of the violence to which he is party.

However, although underwritten, Lott's indecision and resultant passivity, his obedience to authority and the personal struggle that this reveals, do succeed in engaging the viewers rather than distancing them. Lott's internal conflict signifies a move away from the Nazi as the embodiment of evil that Captain Richter represents. Thus the challenge to the viewer's stereotypical view of the Nazi, created by the juxtaposition of these two characters, could provide a possible site of enactment of Merlin's Laugh. Lott's more complex character, defined by his refusal to strike Adam, encourages the viewer to identify with him, closing down the distance that the stereotype enforces between viewer and character. This identification could illuminate, for the viewer, the nature of choice and

its relationship to the individuals who became Nazis. Through this imaginative connection, Lott's passivity also implicates the viewer in its results, devastation and the dramatic crux of the narrative: Rachel's rape at the hands of Captain Richter.

This rape and its aftermath reflect a crucial difference between the 1960 tele-play and its 1997 version and exemplify the changing face of Holocaust history within the contemporary imagination. The rape is not shown and its devastation is revealed to the viewer primarily through its effect on the Rabbi. In a moving soliloquy, an appeal to God, he comments, 'I have run out of tears'. This soliloquy defines the rupture between faith and its experience under persecution. Once again the text provides a moving example of Merlin's Laugh contained within the small vista of the TV. The confrontation this moment enacts is defined by the vista of the face, the Rabbi's horror made tangible for the viewer, reinforcing the individual nature of each moment of trauma the Holocaust enacted.

However, in the original tele-play Rachel's rape results in pregnancy and when Lott visits the Rabbi, offering to take her to safety, it is the sanctification of this new life that grounds the Rabbi's decision to let her leave the ghetto. In the TV movie, it is Lott's desire for repentance and the feelings he has for Rachel that appear to influence the Rabbi's response. This shift in narrative focus is, I would argue, emblematic of the changed, yet ultimately conflicted, contemporary understanding of Holocaust history and illuminates the challenges this presents to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. The possibility of Rachel's escape draws the Rabbi back from the brink of insanity and forces him to acknowledge the extent of Nazi persecution. However the narrative choice, in this later version, to privilege Lott's somewhat mythic conversion over the realties of survival, undermines the efficacy of the piece. This episode exemplifies the way in which the privileging of redemption, often a central feature of non-survivor Holocaust narratives, precludes the enactment of Merlin's Laugh by allowing the viewer to see the history depicted in terms other than devastation.

It is this type of textual limitation that conditions the problematic aspects of *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*. The variety of narrative strands that explicates Serling's concerns appear, at times, to be overwhelmed by the issues he investigates and as a result certain characters appear one-dimensional and underwritten. This feature of the narrative is exemplified by Rachel and the mythic love that Lott claims to feel for her.

Paradoxically, it is Rachel's response to Lott's declaration of love and his expression of remorse, "there are so many things to occupy your guilt", which represents one of the most powerful and provocative ironies of the text, while illustrating the flaws inherent in both their characterisations. There is little interrogation of the reason behind

Rachel's decision to leave the ghetto, an interrogation that could have challenged viewers to reconceive their understanding of the terms of survival. As a result Rachel's rape, like Lott's inner conflict, functions primarily as a deus ex machina within the text, illuminating little about the history Serling appropriates but necessary to enact the final confrontation between father and son.

However it is the denouement of the film that marks the most significant difference between Serling's two versions of the play and reveals an alternative narrative strand that offsets the redemptive features of the TV movie and provides another example of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. While the original version united father and son, ending with their decision to join the fighting, Paul armed with a gun, the Rabbi with a bible, the TV movie denouement is irrevocably shaped by the Rabbi's essentially humanist feelings that foreground the narrative: "hate cannot cover all our nakedness". The positive aspects of this speech underpin the shock and confrontation for the viewer inherent in Paul's death at the hands of his father when he opposes Rachel's escape and tries to murder Lott.

The challenge that this scene presents to the viewer, the enactment of Merlin's Laugh, is reinforced through the final shot of the Rabbi exiting the sewers alone and returning to the Ghetto in uprising; evoked only through the background sounds of screams and gunfire. Rachel's fate is similarly left untold and this feature of the narrative is indicative not only of the realities of Holocaust history but also of a refusal to endorse closure or to allow the viewers to leave the programme with their equilibrium restored. This heightens the impact of Paul's death which, set against the backdrop of the devastation of the Ghetto uprising, is experienced by the viewer as a needless one. The unresolved tension inherent in the narrative choice to leave Rachel and the Rabbi's fate unknown shadows Paul's death and problematises any attempt to invest it with heroic or symbolic currency. Paul's death at the hands of his father can therefore be seen as embodying the confrontational aspect of Merlin's Laugh. It contradicts the viewer's fabula construction, influenced continually by the depiction of the Rabbi's love for his children and his commitment to morality, and challenges the viewer to recognise needless death as a defining feature of the Holocaust.

The effect of this denouement on the viewer is also shadowed by issues of identity and choice and the dichotomy of 'good/evil' that the text interrogates. The text's refusal to ultimately endorse a singular, unifying position in relation to this history and the rejection of closure heightens the impact Merlin's Laugh exemplified by Paul's death. *In The Presence of Mine Enemies* can therefore be seen as a breakthrough text which, although appearing to be a conventional re-creation of Holocaust history, actually occupies a more

discursive relationship to the history appropriated and reflects the issues it deals with, within a historical context, back upon a contemporary viewer.

Thus *In The Presence of Mine Enemies* is able to exploit the small screen, combining a visual aesthetic with a literate, discursive narrative that confronts the viewers with the limitations of their own stereotypes and idealisations. This confrontation, experienced by the viewers in their private space, may therefore be more effective because it is underpinned by the domesticity and familiarity that condition the medium as a whole. However, in the light of the arguments in favour of the possibilities embodied by the TV movie's shift towards a more discursive relationship to Holocaust history, it is somewhat ironic that another example of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh can be found in a mini-series that was again defined by a re-creation of the events of the Second World War, *War and Remembrance.*

The sequel to the highly successful *Winds of War* (screened originally in 1986), *War and Remembrance* signalled another stage in the development of televisual narratives. The show, broadcast in 1988 (ten years after the initial screening of *Holocaust*), continued the story of the Henry family and their composite experience of the War. Produced and directed by Dan Curtis for ABC TV, the TV movie was based on Herman Wouk's original novel (36) and was adapted by Wouk, Curtis and Earl S Wallace. Running for thirty hours, *War and Remembrance* represents the most prolonged dramatic representation of the history of the war seen on television.

The lengthy running time, a defining feature of the mini-series, is central to the efficacy of *War and Remembrance*. The text is conspicuous in its attention to historical detail and this explicitly educational feature of the narrative is reinforced through a heterodiegetic narration that frames and links the various stages of the War. This voice-over, a direct address to the audience, engages the viewer through rhetorical questioning and provides a context for the archive footage used to give a larger perspective to the personal story of the Henry family. Thus the conflation and omissions that define many of the cinematic appropriations of the Holocaust is less of a feature of the programme and enables the episodes concerning the Holocaust to be given added intensity through a comparison with the experience of war and the world-wide nature of the conflict.

War and Remembrance differs significantly from *Holocaust* in terms of its narrational detail and visual aesthetic and is reflective of the type of on-going change inherent to the medium and recognisable in the two versions of *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*. The narrative is as explicitly educational as *Holocaust* and its Holocaust representation is self-referentially partial, reminding the viewer constantly, through the

omniscient narration, that this is not the whole story but a fragment of it. The voice-over also bears the marks of the series' literary origins and is neither generalised or reductive.

Visually *War and Remembrance* also learns the lessons of *Holocaust*, depicting life in the Theresienstadt Ghetto with a natural light and a tonality defined by muted browns, greys and blues. The ghetto therefore appears more reflective of the historical reality while its visual resonance is explicitly connected to the contemporary. Thus, rather than historicising the event, the visual palette of the Holocaust narrative strand reflects a reality that the viewer recognises and also provides a powerful juxtaposition with the opulence of colour that define the scenes of wartime America.

The power and efficacy of *War and Remembrance* as a Holocaust narrative is centred on the portrayal of Aaron Jastrow (played by John Gielgud), a prominent scholar who, at the beginning of the war, refuses to leave his Italian home. This decision and its results for Aaron, his American niece Natalie Henry (played by Jane Seymour) and her son Louis, again connect the narrative to the familial dynamic that conditions almost all televisual appropriations. While their journey through wartime Europe is long and involved, in terms of Merlin's Laugh, it is within the final three parts of the series (depicting their internment in Theresienstadt and subsequent deportation to Auschwitz) that television's possibilities can truly be seen.

Throughout the narrative Aaron's journal functions as a homodiegetic narration, framing the events experienced by both Natalie and himself and providing a personal contrast to the heterodiegetic narration that conditions the program as a whole. The journal is reflective of the literary bias of the piece and is a powerful oral counterpoint to the stark visual aesthetic that governs the Holocaust scenes. Jastrow's journal also functions as a clarifying narrative device that consistently illuminates for the viewer the special position that the prominents held in the camp and makes explicit the effect of this experience. Thus Jastrow's apartment, his job teaching the Talmud and his position on the Jewish Council are all clearly defined as differing from the norm. This attention to detail is vital, as the story of Natalie and Aaron is not representative of Holocaust experience in general.

By placing Natalie and Aaron in Theresienstadt, the narrative also enables them to be a cipher through which the Great Beautification can be represented for the viewer. These episodes in Holocaust history illuminate the political climate of the war in relation to Jewish persecution and are contrasted throughout by Byron Henry's (Natalie's husband) search for information about his family. Running concurrent to this story-line is the narrative of Leslie Slote, an American government official and friend of the Jastrows,

whose attempts to draw attention to the plight of Europe's Jews proves ultimately futile in the face of disbelief, denial and governmental inactivity.

The layering of these story-lines provides a powerful indictment of the world's response to the genocide and is made tangible for the viewer as they witness the beautification, overseen by Commandant Rahm (played by Robert Stephens, another familiar face, recognisable as Uncle Kurt in *Holocaust*) within the terms of the brutality that both Aaron and Natalie experience. Aaron's journal, the viewer's guide through this period, reinforces the underlying fabrication, juxtaposing the changes to the camp with a description of the beautification as "the painting of a corpse" (37). The combination of the eloquence of Jastrow's language with the tonality of the scenes in Theresienstadt is central to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within the terms of the programme as a whole and exemplifies the inherent power of a reduced visual vista and its reliance on sound, in this case the spoken word, which when effectively combined with the visual aspects of the text can bring an added dimension to the televisual narrative.

The beautification can therefore be seen as symbolic not only of the lengths to which the Nazis went to hide their crimes but also of the effects of the will to disbelieve which, while reflecting a feature of the historical reality, may also condition the contemporary non-survivor viewer's understanding of the Holocaust. The impact of the layered story-lines and narration is reinforced for the viewer through the omniscient description of the visit by the Red Cross and their post-war justifications for the commendable reports Theresienstadt received. This voice-over addresses viewers directly and implicates their own desire for distance by making explicit the variance between the reality experienced by Aaron Jastrow and the facade embraced by the Red Cross; "how could matters be worse?" (38).

One of the most moving features of the Theresienstadt scenes is Aaron's rediscovery of his faith, given profound expression in his address to the ghetto inmates prior to a selection (39). This oration makes explicit for the viewer the senselessness of Nazi genocide and provides the narrative with a profoundly Jewish perspective. *War and Remembrance* does not attempt to integrate or ignore the essentially anti-semitic nature of the Holocaust and Aaron's lecture provides a locus of Jewish identity that emerges from his personal journey. The effect of these scenes is heightened for the viewer by the visual texture, the bleak, shadowy room where Aaron presents his thoughts, juxtaposed with the passionate, eloquent language he employs to describe Jewish experience. As a result, Aaron's address, based on the biblical story of Job, is one of the most powerful episodes in the programme, illustrating the paradox of television's structure which, while appearing to

limit the efficacy of its Holocaust representations, can create powerful textual moments through the privileging of sound and dialogue.

It is in the scenes depicting the transport to Auschwitz that the enactment of Merlin's Laugh can be seen. While Louis, in one of the more sensational narrative story-lines, is smuggled out of the ghetto, both Natalie and Aaron are selected for transport. Natalie is herded on to the cattle trucks, Aaron placed in the carriage for the Council members alongside the Nazis. This positioning provides yet another juxtaposition of experience; the Nazis drink and carouse while the Jewish prisoners in the cattle cars die of thirst and starvation. The transport is dealt with in detail and its length is significant; contributing to a sense of "realseemingness" (Allen 1992: p. 10) that defines this final section. This effect is reinforced by the nature of the medium, by the way in which "television's nowness makes suspense seem real, not manufactured and invites the viewer to 'live' the experience" (Fiske 1994: p. 145).

This section of the narrative also provides another example of the way in which television can use the face as a site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh. The horror of the transport, the lack of water and sanitation, the filth and the resultant death and misery are defined for the viewer through the vista of Natalie's face. In one scene, shot in a grey half-light, the horror of this journey is projected through Natalie as she eats an apple, tears streaming down her face (40). Experienced by the viewer in purely visual terms, this moment reflects the power of Merlin's Laugh within a visual context: confrontational, shocking and evocative of the reality of Holocaust experience.

On arrival at Auschwitz Natalie is selected to work, while Aaron and the other Council members are herded towards the gas chambers. Like Aaron's fellow council member, the viewer's reception of these scenes is continually influenced by the will to disbelieve, both that a character they have invested in could be killed, but also that television will 'show' them the end of Aaron's life. This aspect of the viewer's response functions as an implicit part of the narrative strategy that creates the moment of the Laugh within this context. The viewer follows Aaron through the process of death, witnessing him undressing and entering the gas chamber. Where other depictions have refused to go, however, *War and Remembrance* continues. The lights go out as the gas is dropped and a blue tinge colours the scene; the mass of depersonalised bodies struggles against the door. This section of the programme (41) is truly horrifying; the tangle of bodies, the hysteria is tangible. There is no way for the viewer to distance themselves from what they see and the experience of it is intensified by the relationship, conditioned by the viewer's sense of viewing in safety, which exists between the viewer and television as a medium. The

further the depiction goes, the more shocking it is for viewers watching within the confines of their own home.

Viewing these scenes is therefore conditioned by an expectation that is ruptured by the horror represented. This is not death as experienced by the Weiss family, with pleasant homilies and a cut away, but rather represents an explicit assault on the viewer's inherent desire for distance. As Aaron falls to the ground and is lost in the chaos, the scene fades to black and cuts to a commercial break. There can be little doubt that the experience of this commercial would exemplify the comments of Saul Friedman quoted earlier and reveal the ways in which textual content can influence the viewer's reception and response to the break. The discord inherent in the break, rather than distancing the viewer, reinforces the horrific nature of death during the Holocaust, overwhelming the interruption and encouraging the viewer to fully absorb the impact of the textual moment of Merlin's Laugh that they have witnessed.

The power of these scenes is not conditioned simply by the horror represented but also by the way in which they are rendered visually. Aaron's death is constantly juxtaposed with the dehumanisation of those selected to work. There is little dialogue throughout this portion, only Aaron's prayer over the subtle background score. The loss of dignity and humanity of both the living and the dying is therefore made explicit through the vista of the face, by panning shots that draw into close-ups of a now almost unrecognisable Natalie. The omniscient narration then describes the final journey of Aaron's remains as they are transferred to the crematoria and his ashes dumped in the river. In its refusal to conform to the viewer's desire for distance, this truly horrifying sequence illuminates the effect of Merlin's Laugh within a televisual context, overwhelming the viewer's defenses and confronting them with the limitations of their understanding of death and its terms under the Nazis. This response is also fostered by the extensive imaginative investment made by the viewer in the prolonged narrative that precede these scenes.

The attention to detail that conditions this section of the narrative is a result of Dan Curtis's vision and the level of control that his position as both director and producer allowed him over the production. Thus the gas chamber the viewer sees was shot on location in Auschwitz, using original plans in the museum archive (42). Curtis argued:

> Nobody had ever gone far enough in a film or television programme. To put on film the true horror was impossible. Once one false note sneaks in you're gone. And in my eyes, I felt that failing would be an absolute crime . . . It was enormously important to shoot it where it happened

(cited by Insdorf 1990: p. 26).

His words reveal the underlying aesthetic decisions and commitment that contribute to the effectiveness of these final scenes.

Although it is possible to argue that *War and Remembrance* contravenes the respectful distance that the door of the gas chamber symbolises, there can be little doubt that its depiction of the death processes within Auschwitz are the most provocative ever seen, either on television or in film. The debate surrounding the need for a respectful distance cannot ultimately detract from the shocking experience of viewing these scenes and the confrontational effects of Merlin's Laugh that they create. As a result of these scenes, the programme's denouement, Natalie's liberation and Byron's discovery of their missing son, is perceived by the viewer as conditional. Though Natalie's experience in Auschwitz is left untold, the devastation is reflected through her emotional and physical appearance and is reinforced by Byron's emotional response to her statement.

The character of Avram Rabinovitz also provides an alternative perspective on the realities of liberation, challenging the happy ending that the viewer desires as he comments on the extent to which Natalie's experiences have radically altered her life. Thus the programme illuminates the conditional nature of liberation. The horror is described for Byron through a series of incidental characters and reflected by both Natalie and Avram and their testimony.

While there can be little doubt that *War and Remembrance* is not totally free from problematic narrational devices, like the miraculous recovery of Natalie's son, the final scenes of Aaron's life embody the type of viewing in conflict that the enactment of Merlin's Laugh creates. The text is therefore able to challenge the fabula construction of the viewer and, by extension, their expectations of television as a medium. Their essential trust in the medium heightens the impact of Aaron's death and brings an added dimension to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh. It also intensifies the imaginative impact of the Holocaust on the viewer, as the text constantly refers to the reality that shadows the fiction of Aaron's life, a reality that was experienced by millions. The efficacy and effect of this aspect of the text led Annette Insdorf to describe it as "extraordinarily ambitious and moving" (Insdorf 1990: p. 27).

War and Remembrance provides an example of the possibilities inherent in television as a site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh. The crucial differences that exist between *Holocaust* and *War and Remembrance* reveal the ways in which each individual text contributes to an on-going, evolutionary enterprise, wherein even obviously

problematic programmes function as an indicator and spring-board for future texts. As Michael André Bernstein argues:

> Since learning how to tell the story is almost as significant as communicating a series of historical facts, even the more appalling lapses into exploitation and facile mythologisation can have the salutary effect of discrediting certain tones and devices, thereby forcing more scrupulous artists to rethink their own premises (Bernstein 1994: p. 124).

Television as a medium embodies this type of exchange and is exemplified by the changes, over time, which are reflected in texts like *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*. This feature of television as a medium also illuminates the role it continues to play in representing the changing face of Holocaust history to a diverse audience. Television's effect can therefore be seen as a result of its "continuing rather than singular experience" (Monaco 1981: p. 407) and it is this feature of the medium that contributes to its "extraordinary ability to mediate between the viewer and reality" (Monaco 1981: p. 407). As a result of the on-going exchange between television as a medium, its viewers and the texts it produces, television can be seen as reflective of both the limitations and questions that influence the contemporary conception of the event. However if, as Jeffrey Shandler comments, "Holocaust remembrance is a dynamic phenomenon shaped by the unfolding relationship between the rememberers and the object of recall" (Shandler 1999: p. 1), then television, with its perpetual production and presentation, may yet prove to be central to the interrogation and dissemination of the continuing influence of Holocaust history in contemporary society.

As the programmes referred to illustrate, recognising and examining the terms under which the narrative strategy that creates Merlin's Laugh can be adopted on television reveals a parallel between the medium and non-survivor literary and cinematic narratives. The negation of television's contribution to the evolution of contemporary understanding of Holocaust history, fostered by the traditional concept of both the medium and its viewers, could ultimately result in the power inherent in televisual texts going unrecognised and unused. The re-examination of television's Holocaust texts therefore exemplifies the way in which, under the cover of its perceived low-brow enterprise, televisual narratives have expanded and exploited the limits of the medium, allowing for the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within this context. Whether as TV movie or mini-series, the changing face of Holocaust representations reflects television's possibilities as a site of representation that reaches many millions of people in an inherently personal, private setting.

The enactment of Merlin's Laugh within television programmes also raises the possibilities inherent in the experience of this textual moment by an audience whose size and diversity is unrivalled either by cinema or literature. Ien Ang, commenting on the effects of television, argues:

> In a multitude of ways, sometimes routine, sometimes exceptional, television plays an intimate role in shaping our day-to-day practises (Ang 1991: p. 153).

Merlin's Laugh, enacted within the televisual context, may therefore play a significant role in confronting the preconceptions and idealisations of viewers, disrupting, exploiting and challenging their relationship to both the medium and the history represented. The possible effects, in these terms, of using the medium to ask "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) of its audience illuminates the challenges television continues to present to Holocaust representation and also reveals its potential as a site of appropriation.

Endnotes for Chapter Four

1. C. Lodziak, *The Power of Television: A Critical Appraisal* (1986; London, Frances Pinter, 1986), p. 129.

2. This view is commented on by Bruce Cummings:

> According to . . . opinion studies people watch television passively with their defenses down and with considerable . . . inattention (B. Cummings, *War on Television* (London and New York, Verso, 1992), p. 25).

3. One example of television's unique ability to provide a secondary witness to historical events can be seen in the broadcast of the Eichmann trial in 1961. For further discussion of the impact and effects of this broadcast, *see* J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 83–133.

4. The traditional view of television's limitations as a site of representation for Holocaust history can be seen in the comments of Ilan Avisar, who argues that television has,

> An inherent incapacity when it comes to dealing with a subject of the magnitude of the Holocaust. (cited by J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xvi).

5. For a discussion of the contribution made to the enactment of Merlin's Laugh by the visual aspects of cinematic texts, *see* chapter three.

6. D. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, Routledge, 1995), p. 34.

7. This argument concerning television's diversity is supported by H. Newcomb and P. Hirsch, who commented:

> In its role as a central cultural medium, it presents a multiplicity of meanings rather than a monolithic, dominant point of view . . . only so rich a text could attract a mass audience in a complex culture (cited by H. Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 506–13).

8. A dominant reading of a televisual text is identified by Stuart Hall as a reading that accepts the prevailing ideological discourse or structure of the programme. An oppositional reading will therefore reject the basic ideological aspect of the programme, while a negotiated reading reflects a personal synthesis of the viewer's and the programme's ideological similarities and differences (cited by H. Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 511).

9. W. Iser, *A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). For a discussion of Iser's work in relation to the Laugh of Merlin, *see* chapter one.

10. John Fiske discusses the importance of gossip in relation to television as a medium, arguing:

> Gossip works in two ways; it constructs audience driven meanings and it constructs audience communities within which meanings circulate (J. Fiske, *Television Culture* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994), pp. 79–80).

11. For a detailed discussion of the build-up and response to Holocaust's première, *see* J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 155–78.

12. This view is supported by Robert C. Allen, who argues:

> For the most part the production processes hide the marks of authorship (R. C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (London and New York, 1992), p. 9).

For a further discussion of televisual directorship, *see* Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'Psychoanalysis, Film and Television', in R. C. Allen, op. cit., pp. 204–38.

13. Albert Laffay, cited by D. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, Routledge, 1995), p. 62.

14. This understanding of the terms of televisual directorship as being directly influenced by the nature of the medium is supported by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, who argues:

> Television's apparatus makes us redefine the notion of the author (cited by R. C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (London and New York, 1992), p. 220).

15. The privileging of certain types of shot are a direct result of the size and scope of the medium:

> Because the television image is much smaller and . . . has a relatively low resolution and permits less detail than the cinematic image, the medium shot and close up dominate TV (H. Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 163).

16. The effects of the medium on the choice of texts used or appropriated for television in supported by Laurie Schultz, who argues:

> Stylistic intimacy is appropriate for television's reduced visual scale and for TV's normative viewing conditions (cited by H. Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 183).

17. For a discussion of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and its use of the face as a visual site of enactment for Merlin's Laugh, *see* chapter three.

18. As Laurie Schultz argues:

> TV . . . extend[s] the principle of intimacy into the narrative material as well, concentrating heavily on the personal story (cited by H. Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 183).

19. J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 176.

20. J. Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London and New York, 1997), p. 116.

21. J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 176.

22. J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 163–64.

23. J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press. 1999), p. 163.

24. *Holocaust*, Part One (USA, NBC-TV, 1978).

25. *Holocaust*, Part Two (USA, NBC-TV, 1978).

26. T. Borowski, *This Way for The Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (London and New York, Penguin Books, 1976) pp. 149–50. Borowski's story concerning the death of the Schreiber, who knows that he will be gassed but insists on taking his package with him, provides one example of the way in which survivors use these moments to reveal the variance between the reader's concept of terms like hope and the reality within the camps. Borowski's story links to a comment made in 'Auschwitz Our Home (A Letter)':

> It is that very hope that makes people go, without murmur, to the gas chambers (op. cit., p. 121).

27. *Holocaust*, Part Three (USA, NBC-TV, 1978).

28. *Holocaust*, Part Three (USA, NBC-TV, 1978).

29. *Holocaust* is discussed further in A. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and The Holocaust* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 3–6; J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 167–78; A. Kaes, *From Hitler To Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Massachusetts and England, Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 28–39.

30. A. Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Massachusetts and England, Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 30.

31. For a range of responses to the German broadcast, *see* 'Germans and Jews', *New German Critique*, 19 (Special Issue I) (Winter 1980).

32. For discussions of the critical dismissal of the TV movie genre, *see* H. Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 155–63.

33. A heterodiegetic narration can be described as the voice of a narrator who is outside the realm of the narrative, while a homodiegetic narrator is a voice-over provided by a character within the narrative (R. C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (London and New York, 1992), p. 82).

34. P. Malkin and H. Stein, *Eichmann In My Hands* (New York, Warner Books Inc., 1990.

35. For a discussion of the original studio-play of *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*, *see* J. Shandler, *While America Watches: Television and the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.56–60. All subsequent references to the original programme will be based on this work.

36. H. Wouk, *War and Remembrance* (London, Fontana/Collins, 1989).

37. *War and Remembrance*, Part Five (USA, NBC-TV, 1988).

38. *War and Remembrance*, Part Six (USA, NBC-TV, 1988).

39. *War and Remembrance*, Part Five (USA, NBC-TV, 1988).

40.*War and Remembrance*, Part Six. (USA, NBC-TV, 1988).

41. *War and Remembrance*, Part Seven (USA, NBC-TV, 1988). It is during this section of the narrative that the camp and Natalie's liberation are shown.

42. A. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and The Holocaust* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press,1990), p. 26.

Conclusion

Choosing How To Remember: The Future of Holocaust Representations

> This increasing tendency to sentimentalize, sanctify and commercialize events, severing them completely from their historical links, is in fact the greatest danger for the remembrance of the Shoah (Maechler 2001: p. 314).

> There is a distinct danger of escaping from the reality of the Nazi regime and its consequences into a nebulous general humanism, where all persecutions become holocausts, and where a general and meaningless condemnation of evil helps to draw a curtain between oneself and the real thing (Bauer 1978: p. 3).

> It will require both scholarship and art to defeat an encroaching anti-memory (Hartman 1994: p. 10).

In 1995 a slender volume of Holocaust memoirs, written by an unknown writer named Binjamin Wilkomirski and entitled *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939–1948* (1), was released by the German publishing house Suhrkamp. The narrative concerns the wartime experiences of a young Jewish child, born in Latvia around 1938. Aged two or three, the child, Binjamin, witnesses the death of a man, perhaps his father, crushed by a truck. After becoming separated from the surviving members of his family, Binjamin is taken to Majdanek concentration camp. From there he is transported to another unnamed camp. In both places the boy experiences the brutality of Nazi genocide at first hand, witnessing the deaths of other children, including his best friend Jankl, and suffering horrifying physical attacks and starvation. After his liberation, the child is sent to a series of orphanages in Poland, from where he is taken to Switzerland. He is eventually adopted by a wealthy, childless couple who insist that he forget his camp life. The child lives with the perpetually present fear that the camp continues to exist and is haunted by memories that he cannot understand. It is only much later in his life that he is able to begin to recover these memories and piece together his fragmented childhood.

By 1998 this narrative, outlined briefly here, had been translated into twelve languages and had garnered literary prizes from around the world, including the Jewish Quarterly Literary Prize, the Prix de la Memoire de la Shoah and the US National Book Award (2). Its author was universally acclaimed; radio and magazine interviews followed in abundance and he was invited to speak at conferences and meetings of survivors.

Although the book contained horrifying testimony, written from the perspective of a young child, it was, without question, a literary triumph. The response to the book is exemplified by the words of Jonathan Kozol who wrote:

> This stunning and austerely written work is so profoundly moving, so morally important, and so free from literary artifice of any kind at all that I wonder if I even have the right to try to offer praise (cited by Maechler 2001: p. 114).

Kozol's response to the text illuminates not only the degree of success that *Fragments* achieved but also the importance attached to the fact that the text was presented as a memoir. As Sue Vice has argued, the issues of authenticity and accuracy are central to the reception of Holocaust texts (3). Kozol's comments are indicative of the ways in which, even today, the marriage of literary form and memory continues to be seen as problematic. Kozol's praise for the text's apparent lack of literary artifice evokes the comments of Michael Wyschgrod, cited in the introduction to this thesis (4) and exemplifies the continuing preference for testimony over fictional representations.

Thus it was the perceived authenticity of the child's viewpoint, a perspective which, as Wilkomirski comments in the opening pages of his text, eschews "the ordering logic of grown-ups" (Wilkomirski 1996: p. 4), which contributed to the overwhelming response to the text (5). However, Kozol's analysis ignores the fact that, in spite of Wilkomirski's disclaimer, the narrative, even when read as testimony, is a literary construction. The re-creation of the child's eye-view was only possible because of the 'ordering logic' of the adult author Wilkomirski. In these terms, Wilkomirski's text and the responses to it reveal the complexities inherent in the generic classification of Holocaust texts. For as James Young argues:

> We ignore the ways in which Holocaust literary testimony is also constructed and interpretative (Young 1990: p. 51).

Thus Wilkomirski's text provides another recent example of the continued preference for testimony. It also reveals the influence of the underlying preconception that the effect of testimony is, in part, a result of its being free from literary artifice.

Then, in 1998, in an article for the magazine *Weltwoche*, a Swiss journalist, Daniel Ganzfried, revealed the unthinkable (6). Wilkomirski's painful memoir was a work of fiction. The Jewish child who had survived Majdanek and Auschwitz, who had lost every member of his family during the Holocaust was, in fact, a Swiss boy named Bruno Grosjean, who, during his childhood, had never been in a camp. He had, in reality, never left Switzerland. His life, although traumatic, was a world away from the suffering

experienced by Binjamin. The backlash that followed this revelation was intense and by 1999 the book had been withdrawn from publication (7).

Sue Vice has subsequently argued that the fraudulent claim of historical factuality should not blind us to the value of this "striking and unusual" (Vice 2000: p. 164) text as a fictional construct (8). This argument was supported by Elena Lappin in her essay *The Man With Two Heads* (9). She asked:

> Did it matter whether *Fragments* was fact or fiction? Wasn't it enough that its prose was so moving and powerful that it made hundreds of thousands of readers think about and perhaps 'feel' – if not understand – the Holocaust? (Lappin 1999: p. 15)

There can be little doubt that the effect of the text on its readers, was, as Lappin argued, very real. It is exemplified in the words of one reader, who wrote to the author:

> You, who despite all the horror and violence of your early years, still have such inner strength to turn your life into something good, something creative. A miracle that comforts us all (cited by Maechler 2001: p. 286).

The reader's comments are indicative of the degree of emotion that Wilkomirski's text provoked and illuminate the terms of the subsequent backlash, when his text was revealed as a fiction. However, I would argue that, in order to adequately address the question raised by Lappin and to begin the work of evaluating the text as a novel, it is necessary to relate the issues raised by Wilkomirski's remarkable rise and fall to the nature of Holocaust memory and the public's conceptualisation of it.

The comments of Wilkomirski's anonymous reader cited previously provide the genesis of this argument. There can be little doubt that the plausibility and narrative construction of Wilkomirski's text contributed to its popularity. However, it is possible to argue that the very elements of the story that helped make it a success reflect contemporary idealisations concerning Holocaust history that need to be interrogated and challenged. One example can be seen in the central narrating figure of the child Binjamin. *Fragments* presents the reader with a child survivor who has experienced the harshest of Nazi brutality and, unlike Anne Frank, has survived to tell us his tale. His miraculous survival lends the narrative a sense of catharsis, of redemption and relief. For the reader who undertakes the journey contained within the text, Wilkomirski's survival and the transformation of his experience into narrative represents "something good, something creative" (Maechler 2001: p. 286) that emerges from the horror. This response is indicative not only of Wilkomirski's narrative strategy but also of the reader's willingness to understand the text within the terms of the child's and, by extension, the adult's

redemption. As a result, the response of the readers to the text can be seen as a form of collusion between their own desires and idealisations and the nature of Wilkomirski's story.

This aspect of the text enabled the reader to respond to the narrative in an overwhelmingly positive way and this response can be seen as relating directly to Wilkomirski's decision to privilege the child's voice as a central narrating presence. The consistently sympathetic reading, that the innocence of the child elicits, is therefore subtly encouraged from the opening pages of the text. Wilkomirski comments:

> I am not a poet or a writer. I can only try to use words to draw exactly as possible what happened . . . exactly the way my child's memory has held onto it; with no benefit of perspective or vanishing point
> (Wilkomirski 1996: p. 4/5).

Thus, in the light of Wilkomirski's fraud, this passage can be read as actively soliciting the reader's emotional response and precluding any judgements they may make, as the text is represented not as a constructed narrative, but as the unmediated memory of a child.

In choosing to represent a child victim, Wilkomirski was also able to avoid an explicit engagement with the morally and ethically challenging issues that surround the act of survival which survivor writings like *This Way For The Gas, Ladies And Gentlemen* (10) bear witness to. The explicit relation between one man's survival and another's death, although referenced within the text in an episode concerning the murder of another child (11), is experienced by the reader through the filter that Binjamin's innocence provides. This innocence veils the challenges inherent in many survivor testimonies concerning what Primo Levi has described as "the grey zone" (Levi 1998: p. 22). As Levi comments,

> It is naive, absurd and historically false to believe that an infernal system such as National Socialism was, sanctifies its victims: on the contrary it degrades them, it makes them similar to itself (Levi 1998: p. 25).

This feature of survival is effaced in *Fragments* by the child's perspective and the 'snapshot' nature of the memories Wilkomirski recalls. This feature of the narrative relied inherently on the reader's ability to bring any prior knowledge they had of the physical reality of the Holocaust to the text to fill in the spaces that exist in the narrative. However when the text is seen as fiction:

> Lacunae previously filled by a reader with some knowledge of what is unutterably horrible are suddenly left empty. The text . . . is mercilessly reduced to its sheer material value. What remains is childish speech. The

> books is no longer an incarnation of horror. Its silences have no content; it merely means what it says (Maechler 2001: p. 281).

Thus, by using the voice of a child as a witness to the horror and relying upon the reader to 'fill in' the spaces that this narrating persona necessitates, Wilkomirski enables the reader to experience the guilt he expresses at the death of the "new boy" (Wilkomirski 1996: p. 65) from a distance that the innocence of the child-witness creates. As a result the reader is never implicated by the experience Wilkomirski details.

In these terms Wilkomirski was able to create a supposedly insuperable representation of memory. It was the memory of a sanctified survivor; a child whose extreme youth shields the reader from the moral and ethical ambiguities which, as adult survivors testify, was an explicit part of their survival. In this context, the overwhelming, "almost religious zeal" (Maechler 2001: p. 288) that the text elicited reflects a feature of contemporary Holocaust memory which, as Lawrence Langer argues, embodies the "effort to sever ourselves from its [Auschwitz's] acts and values in our ongoing search for . . . mental comfort" (Langer 1996: p. 6).

Langer's argument is endorsed and expanded by Stefan Maechler in his study, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth.* Maechler argues that Wilkomirski's text "exploited the collective ritual of remembrance" (Maechler 2001: p. 302) and the "reverence" with which his text was greeted "could also be motivated by a resistance to dealing seriously with the Shoah" (Maechler 2001: p. 289). He contends that, through the revelation of the text's fictions, the controversy surrounding *Fragments* "laid bare the weakness of this culture of remembrance, revealing the danger and excesses that threaten it" (Maechler 2001: p. 302). Maechler argues that the public's readiness to accept Wilkomirski's narrative as testimony was due, in part, to a desire to "hear the voices of the victims and save their stories" (Maechler 2001: p. 307), which is clearly central to all Holocaust remembrance. Yet the problematic nature of the privileging of survival, which Wilkomirski tapped into and which paradoxically contributed to his text's success, reveals a troubling feature of this memory work. As Maechler comments:

> Such a culture of remembrance makes it possible not only to display one's own values, but to ignore the real problems of one's history
> (Maechler 2001: p. 313).

Maechler's study illuminates a troubling feature of contemporary Holocaust memory that Wilkomirski was able to exploit in the construction of his narrative. Bruno Grosjean, like all of us who did not experience the Holocaust, comes to this history as an uninitiated reader. Wilkomirski's ability to create his narrative therefore relied inherently,

not only on research (12), but also on the types of meanings ascribed to Holocaust history within the contemporary context. Wilkomirski's child survivor can be seen as embodying his audience's idealisations and desire for redemption. He then reflected these features back upon his audience through his text. In these terms Wilkomirski did not simply impersonate a survivor, rather, he embodied an idealised, contemporary conception of survivors. "Without the audience there would be no Wilkomirski" (Maechler 2001: p. 273). The reception he received could also be seen, in part, as a result of this problematic feature of contemporary Holocaust memory. As Maechler comments:

> It can be said that the Wilkomirski phenomenon . . . is a litmus test revealing how we all . . . deal with its [the Holocaust's] aftermath
> (Maechler 2001: p. 308).

Throughout this thesis I have argued for the necessity of returning to survivor texts as a means of beginning the work of identifying and asking "the right questions" (Semprun 1998: p. 123) of both ourselves and the legacy of Holocaust history. The success of Wilkomirski's text and the subsequent backlash in the wake of the revelation of his fraud can be seen as an indicator of the challenge this work entails. Wilkomirski's story can therefore be seen as reflecting the continued privileging of the stories of survival over an interrogation into both the effects of Holocaust history and its perpetrators and bystanders.

The preference for survivor testimony over other, often non-survivor, forms of Holocaust representation also means that our imaginative engagement with the brutalities of Nazi genocide is primarily shaped by the perspective of the victim (13). As this thesis has exemplified, the figure of the Nazi, in contemporary representations, remains largely a stereotype; the embodiment of evil in a recognisable uniform. The challenge of addressing the underlying preference for this stereotype, over an honest encounter with the individuals who perpetrated this genocide, is one of the most formidable tasks that those who appropriate the Holocaust encounter. Such a representation may enable its audience to,

> Realize just how deeply we have woven the opportunities for amoral conduct into the fabric of modern life, [and] how easy we have made it for ourselves to adopt the role of the passive bystander (Rosenberg and Myers 1988: p. 84).

The survivors have provided the contemporary reader with a mosaic of the experience of the victim. It is, I would argue, now time for non-survivor writers and filmmakers to begin to interrogate the individuals and circumstances that enabled "ordinary people" (Rosenberg and Myers 1988: p. 215) like ourselves to become the

perpetrators of genocide and bystanders who, through their silence, endorsed murder. For, as Lawrence Langer argues:

> We will never understand the crimes of Nazi Germany, or the roots of the Holocaust, until we penetrate the kind of thinking that inspires a human being to regard the destruction of lives with such trifling inconsequence (Langer 1996: p. 69).

The comforting myths that surround the concept of survival, the "deceptive hope that the wounds of Auschwitz might heal" (Maechler 2001: p. 293) and the desire to overlay the realities of Holocaust history with a redemptive, and therefore comforting perspective, continue to influence our reception and response to Holocaust texts. As Wilkomirski's novel exemplifies, the interdependent relationship between contemporary Holocaust memory and the texts non-survivor authors create to document its history, means that many of the problematic features of contemporary Holocaust memory become an implicit part of the fictions produced today. The child Binjamin Wilkomirski is, in essence, a child of our time. The book's success can therefore be seen, in part, as indicative of the degree to which stereotypes and idealisations still condition both our understanding of the realities of Holocaust history and the desire to address the legacy that it has left for contemporary life.

Holocaust representations, whether, literary, cinematic or televisual, represent a primary site where the work of interrogating these idealisations and stereotypes may be undertaken. The imaginative connection created between the history these fictional works appropriate and their audiences, could result in texts that challenge the way in which we conceptualise Holocaust history and its impact on the world in which we live. Non-survivor narratives reflect the negotiation between the meanings we ascribe to Holocaust history and its realities and legacy. As this thesis has argued, this work is on-going, with each text contributing to the evolution of contemporary Holocaust memory. This reading of Holocaust representations is endorsed by Geoffrey Hartman, who argues:

> Art constructs . . . a cultural memory of its own in which the struggle of the individual with (and often for) experience – including the collective memory itself – never ceases (Hartman 1994: p. 20).

In these terms non-survivor narratives, regardless of their medium, can be seen as an authentic part of this continuing work.

Merlin's Laugh in survivor fictions provides a starting point for this work. The humbling confrontation that this textual moment enacts reflects a central feature of survivor texts that non-survivor writers and filmmakers can both experience and then

adopt within the contemporary context of their narratives. Throughout this work I have used Merlin's Laugh, in relation to non-survivor texts, as a narrative strategy that can be adapted to enact this textual moment of confrontation. Thus non-survivor writers and filmmakers can affect their audiences in ways similar to the survivor writer, without relying upon re-creation or replication.

As texts like Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* exemplify, the enactment of Merlin's Laugh is as available to the visual text as it is to a literary one. As a result, many of the works examined in this thesis, particularly in relation to television, have been texts which, although often dismissed critically, embody the types of appropriations that a large percentage of the public sees and engages with. That Merlin's Laugh can exist, even as a potentiality, within these representations is an indicator that this type of honest confrontation with our stereotypes and myths is a real possibility. As Michael André Bernstein argues:

> For the Shoah, narrative histories, survivor memories, film and poetry can all participate, alongside the novel, in telling the communal tale and each will find itself pressed by the demands of the subject matter to extend the responsiveness and responsibilities of its own idiom. In this way it is possible to imagine a series of texts (certainly no single one could suffice) that would begin the task of shaping our view of the Shoah in new ways
> (Bernstein 1994: p. 124).

I have used Bernstein's quotation in full because it outlines the preconditions of the enactment of Merlin's Laugh within a non-survivor context, regardless of its medium. His words also illuminate the possibilities that the on-going production of Holocaust texts embodies. In these terms, even a text like *Fragments* may ultimately help shape future texts, as both the narrative and the subsequent scandal reveal implicit elements of contemporary Holocaust memory and encourages us to rethink our preconceptions concerning both the historical reality and its continuing influence over contemporary society.

Each chapter of the thesis, while dealing with distinct and individual genres, has reflected the ways in which the representation of the Holocaust has altered with the passage of time. It is therefore possible to argue that, in the future, contemporary texts, regardless of their given medium, will be able to effect change and contribute to the continual work of re-conceptualising Holocaust history. As Geoffrey Hartman indicates, the marriage of "scholarship and art" (Hartman 1994: p. 10) will be central to this project. Ironically, the success of *Fragments* embodies this relationship, as it was undoubtedly the

combination of Wilkomirski's research into Holocaust history (14) with his abilities as a writer that created such a plausible narrative.

Within the terms of survivor literature, Merlin's Laugh has been used in this thesis as a means of identifying and discussing the narrative strategy that survivors use to create moments of textual confrontation that are a result of the variance that exist between their experience and their audience's conception of it. I have also argued that, in relation to non-survivor texts, the terms of narrational future knowledge must be different from that of their survivor counterparts. Non-survivor narrational future knowledge, whether applied to a visual or a literary representations, could therefore benefit from being based upon the experience of inheriting Holocaust history. Merlin's Laugh, applied to non-survivor Holocaust texts, therefore illuminates the validity of the work of interrogating the forms and shapes of contemporary Holocaust representations. It also reveals the necessity of examining the aspects of Holocaust history which continue to resist closure.

This feature of Holocaust representation is innately linked to the question of why we should continue to remember the Holocaust. As James Young contends:

> We should also ask to what ends we have remembered. That is how do we respond to the current moment in the light of our remembered past? This is to recognise that memory without consequences contains the seeds of its own destruction (cited by Hartman 1994: p. 230).

The experience of reading Merlin's Laugh in survivor narratives ultimately encourages the type of questions that Young identifies as central to the future of Holocaust memory. This type of engagement with the meanings of the past is not concerned with memorialisation or closure, but with embodying a dynamic relationship between the past and the present in the texts produced. It is a relationship that could enable Holocaust history to function as a "moving principle of daily life" (Rosenberg and Myers 1988: p. 379).

Holocaust memory is now at a crossroads (15). Museum exhibits and Holocaust memorial days testify to the continued interest that exists. However, it is possible to argue that more interrogation into the legacy of the Holocaust is needed to ensure that it does not become merely a symbol or a benchmark against which other genocides are measured. Holocaust representation has a significant part to play in revealing hidden aspects of our relationship to this history. That this challenge has yet to be fully met does not mean that it lies beyond reach. Applying Merlin's Laugh to non-survivor texts reveals the possibilities inherent in Holocaust representation as a dynamic site of future interrogation and revelation. The effects of such a representation, experienced by individuals within the

confines of their own imagination, may therefore generate "an understanding capable of determining the future we hope for" (Rosenberg and Myers 1988: p. 379).

Endnotes for the Conclusion

1. B. Wilkomirski, *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939–1948* (London, Picador, 1996). The precis of Binjamin Wilkomirski's early life is taken from this book.

2. For an examination of the publishing history of Wilkomirski's text, *see* S. Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York, Random House, 2001), pp. 111–18.

3. S. Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000), pp. 161–2.

4. A. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 14.

5. Maechler discusses Wilkomirski's rigorous adoption of the child's perspective (Maechler 2001: p. 279) and notes that this attitude was extended to include his public appearances. Maechler describes them as,

> Powerfully staged performances of this ostensible identity between author and first-person narrator. He never left room for the least doubt that he had once been a concentration camp victim (S. Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York, Random House, 2001), p. 282).

6. For a discussion of the subsequent scandal, *see* S. Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York, Random House, 2001), pp. 129–64.

7. The suspension of *Fragments* by its British publishers, Picador, was reported by Fiachra Gibbons in an article entitled 'Publisher pulls bogus bestseller', *Guardian* 11 November 1999, p. 12.

8. A counter argument against the value of the text as fiction is presented by Ruth Kluger who comments:

> A passage is shocking perhaps precisely because naive directness, when read as the expression of endured suffering; but when it is revealed as a lie, as a presentation of invented suffering, it deteriorates into kitsch. It is indeed a hallmark of kitsch that it is plausible, all too plausible, and that one rejects it

only if one recognises its psuedoplausibility (cited by S. Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York, Random House, 2001), pp. 280–1).

9. E. Lappin, 'The Man With Two Heads', *Granta: Truth and Lies*, (66, Summer1998, London), pp. 7–67.

10. T. Borowski, *This Way for The Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, (London and New York, Penguin, 1976).

11. B. Wilkomirski, *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939–1948* (London, Picador, 1996), pp. 63–7.

12. Both Elena Lappin (Lappin 1999: p. 170) and Stefan Maechler comment on Wilkomirski's extensive Holocaust archive. Maechler comments that,

> Wilkomirski says that . . . he had pursued his historical researches like a long-term hobby . . . over thirty years he has plowed his way through roughly two thousand books, plus twice as many files ((S. Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York, Random House, 2001), p. 67).

13. This argument is supported by Maechler who also argues that the "victim's experience is a central element in the way in which the Holocaust is commemorated" ((S. Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York, Random House, 2001), p. 313).

14. Maechler comments:

> Readers find in Wilkomirski's text essential historical facts that are already known or sound plausible ((S. Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York, Random House, 2001), p. 278).

15. A. Rosenberg and G. E. Myers, eds., *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988), p. 379.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

PRIMARY SOURCES:

SURVIVOR FICTION.

Borowski, Tadeusz. *This Way for the Gas, Ladies & Gentlemen*, trans. Jan Knott (London and New York, Penguin Books, 1976)

Fink, Ida. *A Scrap of Time and other Sories*, trans. Madeline Levine and Francine Prose (New York, Schoken Books, 1987)

Semprun, Jorge. *Literature or Life*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York, Penguin Books, 1998)

Semprun, Jorge. *The Cattle Truck*, trans. Richard Seaver (London, Serif Publications, 1993)

NON-SURVIVOR FICTION.

Conroy, Pat. *Beach Music* (London and New York, Book Club Associates, 1996)

Keneally, Thomas. *Schindler's Ark* (London, Book Club Associates, 1983)

Kuznetsov, Anatoly. *Babi Yar*, trans. Jacob Guralsky (London, Sphere Books, 1969)

Michaels, Anne. *Fugitive Pieces* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997)

Prager, Emily. *Eve's Tattoo* (London, Vintage Publishing, 1991)

Schlink, Bernhard. *The Reader*, trans. Carol Brown Janeaway (London, Phoenix House, 1977)

Styron, William. *Sophie's Choice* (London, Corgi Books, 1983)

Wilkomirski, Binjamin. *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939–1948*, trans. Carol Brown Janeaway (London, Picador, 1996)

FILM.

Benigni, Roberto. *Life is Beautiful* (Italy, Miramax/Buena Vista International, 1997)

Costa-Gavras. *Music Box* (U. S. A., Carolco International, 1989)

Lanzmann, Claude. *Shoah* (France, Les Film Aleph/Historia Films, 1986)

Pakula, Alan. *Sophie's Choice* (U. S. A., Universal Studios Inc., 1982)

Spielberg, Steven. *Schindler's List* (U. S. A., Universal City Studios/Amblin Entertainment Inc., 1993)

TELEVISION.

Chomsky, Marvin. *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* (U. S. A., Titus Productions Inc., 1978)

Curtis, Dan. *War and Remembrance* (U. S. A., American Broadcasting Companies Inc., U.S.A. 1986)

Graham, William A. *The Man who captured Eichmann* (U. S. A., Butcher Run Films/TNT, 1996)

Sargent, Joseph. *Never Forget* (U. S. A., Turner Pictures, 1991)

Silver, Joan Micklin. *In the Presence of Mine Enemies* (U. S. A., Showtime Entertainment, 1996)

SECONDARY MATERIAL.

Allen, Robert C. (ed.). *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (Routledge, London and New York, 1992)

Alverez, A. *Beyond All This Fiddle: Essays 1955–1967* (London, Allen Lane, 1968)

Ang, Ien. *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London and New York, Routledge, 1991)

Bauer, Yehuda. *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (London, Sheldon Press, 1978)

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989)

Bellow, Saul. *Herzog* (Greenwich, Fawcett Crest Publishing, 1965)

Belton, John (ed.). *Movies and Mass Culture* (London, Athlone Press, 1996)

Bennett, T., Boyd-Bowman, S., Mercer, C., Woollacott, J. (eds). *Popular Television and Film: A Reader* (London, B.F.I. Publishing and Open University Press, 1981)

Bernstein, Michael André. *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley, London, University of California Press, 1994)

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994)

Braham, Randolph L. (ed.). *Perspectives on the Holocaust* (Boston, London, The Hague, Kluwer Nijhoff Publishing, 1983)

Braham, Randolph L. (ed.). *Reflections of the Holocaust in Art and Literature*. (New York, Institute For Holocaust Studies, 1990)

Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, Routledge, 1995)

Brecher, Elinor J. *Schindler's Legacy: True Stories of the List Survivors* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1994)

Cantor, Muriel G. *Prime-Time Television: Content and Control* (Beverley Hills and London, Sage Publications, 1980)

Caughie, John (ed). *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (London and New York, Routledge in association with the British Film Institute, 1993)

Cesarani, David (ed.). *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994)

Corner J. and Harvey, S. (eds). *Television Times: A Reader* (London, Edward Arnold, 1996)

Cummings, Bruce. *War and Television* (London and New York, Verso Publishing, 1992)

Dawidowicz, Lucy S. *The War against the Jews 1933–45* (London, Penguin Books, 1990)

Delbo, Charlotte. *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995)

Donat, Alexander. *The Holocaust Kingdom* (New York, The Holocaust Library, 1978)

Ellis, John. *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997)

Ezrahi, Sidra Dekoven. *By Words Alone: The Holocaust In Literature* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1980)

Feldman Shoshana and Laub, Dori. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis And History* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992)

Fensch, Thomas (ed). *Oskar Schindler and his List: The Man, the Book, the Film, the Holocaust and its Survivors*. (Forest Dale, Vermont, Paul S. Eriksson, 1995)

Fiske, John. *Television Culure* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994)

Fiske, John and Hartley, John (eds). *Reading Television* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994)

Fowler, F.G. and Fowler, H.W. *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966)

Friedlander, Saul. *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsh and Death* (New York, Harper and Row, 1984)

Friedlander, Saul (ed). *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 1992)

Friedman, Saul S. (ed.). *Holocaust Literature: A Handbook of Critical, Historical and Literary Writings* (Connecticut and London, Greenwood Press, 1993)

Gilbert, Martin. *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London, Fontana Press, London, 1987)

Gill, Anton. *The Journey back from Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors* (London, Grafton Books, 1988)

Gilman, S.L. and Zipes J. *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1997)

Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah. *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust.* (London, Abacus, 1997)

Gourevitch, Phillip. *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda.* (Picador, London, 1999)

Green, Gerald. *Holocaust* (London, Corgi Books, 1978)

Hart, Kitty. *Return To Auschwitz.* (London, Panther Books, 1984)

Hartmann, Geoffrey H. (ed.). *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Massachusetts and Oxford, Blackwell, 1994)

Hartmann, Geoffrey H. *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indianan University Press, 1996)

Hayden, Torey. *The Sunflower Forest* (London, Grafton Books, 1986)

Hersey, John. *The Wall* (London, Panther Books, 1979)

Hilberg, Raul. *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York and London, Harper and Row, 1961)

Hilberg, Raul. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (London, Seeker & Warburg, 1995)

Hirsch, David H. *The Deconstruction of Literature: Criticism after Auschwitz* (Hanover and London, Brown University Press and University Press of New England, 1991)

Insdorf, Annette. *Indelible Shadows: Film And The Holocaust* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response.* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976)

James, Clive. *The Crystal Bucket: Television Criticism from The Observer 1976–79.* (London, Picador/Pan Books, 1982)

Jung, C. J. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconcious, Collected Works*, vol. 9, part 1, ed. Herbert Read (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968)

Kaes, Anton. *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1989)

Kushner, Tony. *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994)

La Capra, Dominick. *Representing The Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994)

Landy, Marcia (ed.). *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama* (Michigan, Wayne State University Press, 1991)

Lang, Berel (ed.). *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York and London, Holmes and Meier, 1988)

Langer, Lawrence. *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1975)

Langer, Lawrence. *The Age of Atrocity: Death in Modern Literature* (Toronto, Beacon Press, 1978)

Langer, Lawrence. *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and Human Spirit* (New York, State University Of New York, 1982)

Langer, Lawrence. *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996)

Langer, Lawrence. *Pre-empting the Holocaust* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998)

Langer, Lawrence (ed.). *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995)

Leak, Andrew and Paizis, George (eds). *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable* (London, Macmillan, 2000)

Leitner, Isabella. *Fragments of Isabella* (London, New English Library, 1980)

Levi, Primo. *Moments of Reprieve*, trans. Ruth Feldman (London, Abacus Books, 1989)

Levi, Primo. *If Not Now, When?* trans. William Weaver (London, Abacus Books, 1990)

Levi, Primo. *If this Is a Man/The Truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London, Abacus Books, 1996)

Levi, Primo. *The Periodic Table*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London, Abacus Books, 1996)

Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London, Abacus Books, 1998)

Lewis, Stephen. *Art out of Agony: The Holocaust Theme in Literature, Sculpture and Film* (Toronto, CBC Enterprises, 1984)

Lipman, Steven. *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humour During the Holocaust* (New Jersey and London, Books International and Jason Aronson, 1991)

Lodziak, Conrad. *The Power of Television: A Critical Appraisal* (London, Francis Pinter Publishing, 1986)

Loshitzky, Yosefa (ed.). *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997)

Lusted, D. and Geraghty, C. (eds). *Television Studies Book* (London, Edward Arnold, 1998)

Macabe, Colin (ed.). *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1986)

Maechler, Stefan. *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth*, trans. John E, Woods (New York, Schoken Books, 2001)

Maier, Charles S. *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 1988)

Malkin, Peter and Stein, *Harry. Eichmann in my Hands* (London, Muller Publishing, 1990)

Marrus, Michael R. *The Holocaust in History* (London, Penguin Books, 1993)

Milosz, Czeslaw. *The Captive Mind*, trans. Jane Zielonko (London, Penguin Books, 1980)

Morris, Robert K. (ed.). *The Achievement of William Styron* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1981)

Newcomb, Horace (ed.). *Television: The Critical View* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994)

Patterson, David. *The Shriek Of Silence: A Phenomenology of the Holocaust Novel* (Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press, 1992)

Rashke, Richard. *Escape From Sobibor* (London, Sphere Books, 1987)

Rollins, Peter C. (ed.). *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context.* (Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press, 1983)

Rose, Gillian. *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Rosenberg, Alan and Myers, Gerald E. (eds). *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988)

Rosenfeld, Alvin H. *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988)

Rosenstone, Robert A. (ed.). *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press 1995(a))

Rosenstone, Robert A. (ed.). *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*. (Princetown, Princetown University Press, 1995(b))

Rubenstein, Richard L. and Roth, John K. *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Legacy of the Holocaust* (London, S. C. M. Press, 1987)

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London, Granta Books, 1991)

Sacks, Oliver. *Awakenings* (London, Picador, 1991)

Schoenberner, Gerhard. *The Yellow Star: The Persecution Of The Jews In Europe 1933–1945*, trans. Susan Sweet (London, Corgi Books, 1969)

Sereny, Gitta. *Into that Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (London, Pimlico Press, 1995)
Shandler, Jeffrey. *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999)

Steiner, George. *Language and Silence* (London, Penguin Books, 1969)

Steiner, George. *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture* (London, Faber and Faber, 1971)

Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1975)

Styron, William. *This Quiet Dust and Other Writings* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1983)

Thomas, D.M. *The White Hotel* (New York, Pocket Books, 1981)

Toplin, Robert Brent. *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of The American Past*. (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1996)

Vice, Sue. *Holocaust Fiction* (London, Routledge, 2000)

Williams, Raymond. *Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings*, ed. Alan O'Connor (London and New York, Routledge, 1989)

Wouk, Herman. *The Winds of War* (London, Fontana Paperbacks, 1983)

Wouk, Herman. *War and Remembrance* (London, Fontana Paperbacks, 1989)

Young, James. *Writing and Rewriting The Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Blooington and Indianoplis, Indiana University Press, 1990)

JOURNAL ARTICLES.

Amis, Martin and Cheyette, Bryan. 'Writing the Unwritable: A Debate on Holocaust Fiction.', *Jewish Quarterly*, 170 (Summer 1998), pp. 12 - 15

Blumemthal, Michael. 'Of Rest and the Weary', *Time*, 28 February 2000, p. 116

Gilman, Sander L. 'Is Life Beautiful? Can the Shoah Be Funny? Some Thoughts on Recent and Older Films', *Critical Inquiry*, 26 (Winter 2000), pp. 279 - 308

Gordon, Robert S.C. 'Primo Levi's 'If this is a Man' and Responses to the Lager' (1945-1947 ed. M. Baumgarten, New York) *Judaism*, 189, (Volume 48, No: 1), (Winter 1999), pp. 48 - 57

Gross, Linden. 'Steven Spielberg's Close Encounters with the Past', *Reader's Digest* (June 1996), pp. 49 - 53

Herf, Jeffrey. 'The "Holocaust" Reception in West Germany: Right, Centre and Left', *New German Critique*, 19 (Winter 1980), pp. 30 - 51

Hoberman, J. 'Dreaming the Unthinkable', *Sight and Sound*, 10 (February 2000), pp. 20 - 23

Karpf, Anne. 'Life is not really Beautiful in the Midst of Atrocity', *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 February 1999, p. 32

Lappin, Elena. 'The Man With Two Heads', *Granta: 'Truth And Lies'* Summer 1999 No: 66 London/New York, pp. 7 -67

Markovitz, A.S. and Hayden R.S. '"Holocaust"' before and after the events: Reactions in West Germany and Austria', *New German Critique*, 19 (Winter 1980), pp. 53 - 80

Viano, Maurizio. 'Life is Beautiful : Reception, Allegory and Holocaust Laughter', *Jewish Social Studies : History, Culture, Society*, Vol 5. No. 3 (Spring/Summer 1999), pp. 47 - 66

Vice, Sue. 'The Holocaust Without Jews', *Jewish Quarterly*, 169 (Spring 1998), pp. 76 - 77

Vice, Sue. 'Fragments As Fiction', *Jewish Quarterly*, 178 (Summer 2000), pp. 51 - 54

Zielinski, Siegfried. 'History as Entertainment and Provocation: The TV Series "Holocaust in West Germany"', *New German Critique*, 19 (Winter 1980), pp. 81 - 96

Zizek, Siavoj. 'Camp Comedy', *Sight And Sound*, 10 (April 2000), pp. 27 - 29

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES.

Borger, Julian. 'Israeli triumph for Holocaust comedy', *Guardian*, 4 July 1998, p. 15

Boxer, Sarah. 'Giving memory its due in an age of license', *New York Times*, 28 October 1998, pp. E1 E6

Cartwright, Justin. 'Why the Holocaust is no laughing matter', *Guardian*, 29 March 1999, G2, p. 9

Cesarani, David. 'History On Trial', *Guardian*, 18 January 2000, G2, pp. 2-3

Dowdney, Mark. '1939 or 1999?', *Mirror*, 1 April 1999, p.1

Freedland, Jonathan. 'Let's close the book', *Guardian*, 12 April 2000, p. 21

Gibbons, Fiachra. 'Publisher pulls "bogus" best seller', *Guardian*, 11 November 1999, p.12

Johnstone, Ian. 'The man with a monster talent', *Sunday Times*, 25 May 1997, Culture Section, pp. 2 - 3

Judt, Tony. 'The reliving of death', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 February 1998, p. 10

Julius, Anthony. 'After Auschwitz', *Guardian*, 27 November 1997, G2, p.11

Langley, William and Fielding, Nick. 'The victim who never was', *Mail On Sunday*, 18 October 1998, pp. 30 - 31

Logan, Brian. 'Does this man really think the Holocaust was a big joke?', *Guardian*, 29 January 1999, G2, pp. 6 - 7

Naughton, John. 'Never to be forgotten', *Radio Times*, 27 January to 2 February 2001, p.52

Romney, Jonathan. 'Camping it up', *Guardian*, 12 February 1999, G2, p.6

Shone, Tom. 'Not Nazi enough', *Sunday Times*, 7 March 1999, Culture Section, p.7

TELEVISION.

Dickson, J. and Wall, I. *The Learning Zone: Cinema and History, the Holocaust on Film* (BBC 2, 29 April 1999)

Yule, Paul. *Battle For The Holocaust* (Channel Four, 27 January 2001)

INTERNET.

Ebert, Roger. 'Music Box', *Chicago Sun Times*, 19 January 1990, at http//www.suntimes.com

Granrose, John. 'The Archetype of the Magician', PhD thesis, C. G. Jung Institute, Zurich, 1996, at http://www.phil.uga.edu/faculty/granrose/granrose.htlm

Kempley, Rita. 'Music Box', *Washington Post*, 19 January 1990, at http://www.washingtonpost.com

Rhodes, Steve. 'Music Box', at http://usimdb.com 1996