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Exile:

The implications of separation from language during genocide

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As a legacy of World War II, we have harrowing fictionalized and fictional stories from survivors and novelists, such as Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness*. *Fatelessness* chronicles a year of Georg Koves' life, a year he spends in various concentration camps. Prior to his deportment and subsequent incarceration, Georg lived in Bucharest, a normal fifteen-year-old with a total indifference to his Jewish heritage. The first few chapters of the novel detail equally his sense of awkward sadness when his father goes to a labor camp, and the excitement of his first romance. Georg is an almost boring teenage boy, prone to obedient behavior. His divorced parents fight over custody ceaselessly, with Georg rarely objecting; his needy stepmother's demands make him feel exceptionally awkward, but he rarely questions her instructions. When captured by Nazis on the way to his factory job, Georg submits quietly. He never attempts to escape the camps and wonders at those who do. While he lies about his age at the advice of another prisoner in order to fulfill the working age, he does so because he wants the opportunity to work—not from a canny survival instinct. Georg spends most of his time in the camps feeling tired, and deeply appreciates a stint in the infirmary. Freedom arrives when the camps disintegrate at the end of the war, and Georg, in some clothes stolen from a farmhouse, returns to Bucharest. The closing chapters of the book show his deepest contemplations on his time in the camps, as a journalist and some old family friends question him about his experience and receive answers they do not expect—and do not want—to hear.

Western culture remains to this day inundated with novels and plays about the genocide perpetrated by Germany's Nazi government. As a culture, perhaps we feel that this saturation atones for a collective failure to recognize and halt crimes of humanity. The art we discover from forays into the Holocaust provides a window not only into that moment in history, but also into the history of genocide in other areas of the world. Both art contemporaneous with and art created after the Holocaust possess the potential to open the history of genocide to an audience, including those from other areas of the world: Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia. The total disruption caused by genocide is more defining and

indelible than any other experience or individual characteristic; thus an authentic narrative about the Holocaust reflects the same utter disruption as an authentic narrative about the genocide in Sudan would, and vice versa.

Along with physical damage and dislocation genocide causes a mental wound that alters the most fundamental ability of most people—language. After systemic persecution and systematic extermination victims find themselves bereft of the ability to use the languages they know, especially when discussing or describing the experience of genocide. When a survivor such as Georg attempts to use his native tongue, a language that has been used to categorize and destroy him, he finds himself unable to speak as he wants to—he is an exile from language. Lacking language, survivors can still create authentic narratives. Yet robbed of the fluidity of their native language and armed only with their own grim memories, these survivors and their narratives do not possess the reach of more popular, commodified narratives. Imre Kertész's novel *Fatelessness* provides an example of one such authentic narrative, the exploration of which can help determine a way to look at other narratives of genocide, particularly in relation to exile from language. When we instead privilege highly visible, commodified narratives set during the Holocaust, we sacrifice a crucial lens for gazing at the Holocaust's forgotten stories—and at the authentic narratives of other cultures affected by genocide, losing the stories of scores of people. If we ignore authentic narratives such as *Fatelessness*, we risk burying the narratives of survivors in a second systematic extermination, that of their experience.

“Authenticity”, an ambiguous term at best, applies resoundingly to some narratives and not others due to the fact that some narratives dealing with genocide have become commodified, over-exposed, and altered for greater appeal to the audience by the dominant institutions, detracting from the attention given to more realistic, less romantic narratives; thus even the creator of a work of art may not have the authority to credibly speak for the subject. The definition of “authentic” I use also proves imperative to my essay because it provides a way to distinguish between narratives that may exploit genocide and narratives that use an inadequate language as skillfully as possible to obey their own

overwhelming need to narrate the story of genocide. The difference between the commodified narrative and the authentic narrative begins with an older definition of “authenticity” that forces an examination of who possesses the authority to speak. If the motives of the commodified or over-exposed narrative lie in the accumulation of profit or the reinforcement and propagation of a singular ideology, it seems plausible that the commodified narrative does not qualify as authentic, as it essentially usurps the authority of another narrative for purposes that may not reflect the desires or experiences of the individuals from whom the narrative originates. Kertész discusses the concept in the essay “Who Owns Auschwitz?”, mentioning that authenticity does not lie in the material details often meticulously added to commodified or over-exposed narratives for the pretense of authenticity (271). “Material details” refers to the tangible specifications of life in the camps, which contribute vastly to the quality and character of the work but not necessarily to the authenticity. Both Kertész and his contemporaries Jean Améry and Primo Levi suggest that an authentic Holocaust narrative does not presume to understand the experience. “Authenticity” throughout this essay partially signifies the textual acceptance of the disruption of the Holocaust and a resignation to the unreasonable nature of the camps, an experience impossible to convey fully. A fictional account of the Holocaust warrants the tag “authentic” as long as the fiction (or the non-fiction, for that matter) does not assume or provide an explicable heroism. While this does not rule out the possibility of heroism during the Holocaust or during any other situation of genocide, it does eliminate the possibility of an anticipated heroism, motivated and manifesting in the expected ways. The revocation of heroism except as an improbably rare reaction in a bizarre time comprises part of the characteristics of authenticity within the literature of genocide.

Thus, the character who fails to act in a traditionally heroic manner—for example, by attempting to mobilize his peers, by sacrificing himself for others—is not a coward because genocide rearranges these meanings. Genocide completely disrupts the normal patterns of life, and thus disrupts the normal definitions of words within that life. The authentic narrative of genocide acknowledges this disruption and refuses to fit the stories of the experience of genocide to the stories outside of the

genocide, since the two cannot coincide. A commodified narrative of genocide would perhaps use the experience of the Holocaust as a stirring tale of heroism under the violence of the Nazis. In the tale the protagonist would find romantic love, come of age, or realize our shared humanity, etc.; essentially the plot of the 2008 film *Defiance*, the children's novel *Number the Stars*, et al. People do exhibit heroism during times of genocide, but these actions cannot bear the word “heroism” because the time of genocide proves too abnormally barbaric. The authentic narrative of genocide by nature reflects the absurd.¹

Apart from constituting an “authentic” narrative, *Fatelessness* stands apart from other Holocaust novels because the novel refuses to restate any of the issues a Western audience may expect from art that deals with the Holocaust, such as the dyadic system of oppression created by the Nazis. Instead, the protagonist Georg spends most of his time describing the camps themselves with extreme realism and an utter absence of sentimentality. While *Fatelessness'* author Imre Kertész survived Auschwitz, *Fatelessness* is not a memoir of heroism. The linearity of the plot leaves little room for the protagonist to ruminate on the future or the past. He thinks mostly about his daily life in the camps, and occasionally dives into more philosophical musings about the significance of what occurs. These musings, which I close read and discuss, provide significant material for an exploration of language during a period of genocide. For example, the protagonist's clarity and rare bouts of curiosity often center around his inability to speak a foreign language, and his disengagement from his native language of Hungarian.

This absence of intentional defiance or hope on the part of the protagonist, while disheartening for the reader, presents an entirely new vision of the concentration camps as separate from public

¹ Here, I use “absurd” to refer to the tradition of twentieth-century literature that often implies “humanity's loss of religious, philosophical, or cultural roots.” Most of the art regarding genocide is not stylistically absurd (Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* provides an exception) but rather encapsulates the quality of the absurd that emphasizes “the lonely, confused, and often anguished individual in an utterly bewildering universe.” The key here lies in the “bewildering universe” that comprises the world for victims during a time of genocide. Yet the absurd provides an excellent context for understanding the authentic in literature about genocide: absurdist literature often alienates and confuses the reader just as the protagonist of the text struggles with the world, and authentic literature about genocide *should* alienate and confuse the reader. The crimes are so vast in scope, the justification thereof so mad, and the experiences of the victim so alien, that the reader can never approach full understanding (*The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* 2).

assumptions about the camps both before and after the experience. Georg's matter-of-fact final message essentially states that society forces fates upon individuals, destinies which have no inherent relationship to their bearers yet which still irrevocably rob them of freedom. To Georg, freedom lies in “fatelessness”—rejecting the future expected of oneself. This diverges sharply from what the audience may expect, as it comes accompanied by the idea that everyone, not simply the obvious oppressors, bear responsibility for allocating arbitrary fates to each other. In an effort to dismantle fate, Georg notes that if ever asked about the camps, he “ought to speak about...the happiness of the concentration camps,” a conclusion that both Georg and the audience can acknowledge defies expectations (262). In turn, this indicates that the author of *Fatelessness* has not succumbed to the expectation to produce the same narratives as other survivors and other authors, but instead seeks to produce a narrative that reveals his experience of happiness. Thus, from *Fatelessness* we receive a new narrative, one that may unearth a perspective that simultaneously defies and helps define anew the relationship between language and genocide.

Much of Georg's story displays the difficulties of using language to communicate with the other prisoners, and in using language to express the experience of the camps to his family back home. Language circles back and confronts him as he hears from his audience what he should say about the camps, proscriptions that contradict his most memorable recollections. He also suffers from a lack of words capable of encapsulating his time in the camps. The language barrier between him and the other Jewish people in the camps renders him a non-entity among the same ethnic group to which he unwittingly belongs under the Nazi system of categorizing. The Nazis also use language to categorize Georg and the other prisoners into a few broad groups of formerly distinct sub-groups and individuals. Yet this does not indicate that language has failed Georg entirely. Instead, the camps have turned Georg's mother tongue of Hungarian hostile to him, robbing him of the language he had. This new version of Hungarian innately opposes Georg's existence, and therefore cannot replace his original tongue. Georg suffers not because language has failed, but because his mother tongue has exiled him.

As a prospective means with which to communicate experiences to other people, “language” denotes both written and spoken discourse. Discourse in turn “denotes language in actual use within its social and ideological context and in institutionalized representations of the world...” (*The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*). Thus the following discussion of *Fatelessness* and language revolves around the actual uses of language within a highly ideological, highly institutionalized situation. Georg's story provides a particularly apt illustration of the limits of discourse since much of the struggle here arises from the actual, not abstract, use of language. The political actions of the Nazi regime led slowly to changes both in the abstract use of language, through the alteration of meaning, and in the institutional changes that damaged the relationship of others to their language. The manifestations of this damage appear in the actual changes in language suggested by *Fatelessness*.

For this essay, I use Tim Wilkinson's translation of *Fatelessness*, a translation that has met greater acclaim than the previous English language translation. Yet even the best translations lack the same elusive nuances of the original text. These acknowledged limitations of translation heighten the inherent irony of reading a novel that addresses the limits of language in translation (Kertzer 111). *Fatelessness* discusses how genocide renders the native language of the speaker foreign to the speaker, in a language now foreign to Kertész through his own experience with incarceration, and in translation, an attempt to render a tongue twice foreign (to the author and to the translator) natural to the reader. Also complicating the notion of translation in the novel, Kertész deliberately keeps some of the dialogue in the various languages of their speakers, followed by no translation or a partial translation. Kertész additionally adds phonetic interpretations of Georg's amateur attempts at foreign language. Wilkinson then translates only the original Hungarian fully. Using different languages, as well as Georg's clumsy attempts to speak them, heightens the sense of divide between the language Georg uses naturally and the languages inaccessible to him. Justifications of reading Kertész in translation may initially seem worthless, given the material's explicit elucidation of the limits of language. However, because ultimately *Fatelessness* shows an individual's dispossession from language, the novel itself

indicates that the original Hungarian proves as much a foreign language to the fictional first-person narration of Georg Koves as the language of translation.

When considering this fact, along with the overall importance of examining this alternative text as an example of one of the Holocaust's authentic texts, reading *Fatelessness*—even in translation—ceases to be a futile attempt at understanding and becomes instead a useful mission if readers hope to pursue a narrative alternative to the mainstream and institutionalized narratives that characterize the bulk of Holocaust literature. This in turn contributes to the overall sense of Georg's struggle with language, even his mother tongue. Georg cannot wrestle and best a foreign tongue *or* his own in order to convey publicly what he can barely articulate internally. Georg's linguistic exile and subsequent difficulties with communication raise questions as to whether his audience—and in the larger sense, the total audience for Holocaust literature—actually hears his narrative, or whether the Holocaust possesses a set of buried narratives like Georg's beneath the popular and predictable narratives, both fiction and non-fiction, that dominate Western culture. How can the audience recognize authentic narratives if these stories must struggle with inadequate language over the clamor of the dominant narrative? The Holocaust's importance as *the* contemporary normative case of institutionalized persecution means that it is imperative for the subsumed narratives to emerge if a Western audience can ever reckon with the other crimes that have occurred elsewhere and everywhere.

For the purposes of this essay, which focuses on a Western reaction to genocide, “Western culture” denotes the first world nations of the Western hemisphere that draw upon a similar intellectual, political, and social history. The general influence of Hellenic and Roman culture, the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment on Western Europe and the United States have established a common set of broad ideological and cultural assumptions. Politically, for example, Western culture shares a proclivity towards liberal republicanism. Culturally, the West has worked exclusively from the same literary canon up until very recently. The shared cultural history of every developed Western nation has logically led to a shared set of norms; although each country differs from

the other in specific minutiae, each country still works from the same fundamental cultural basis. This shared foundation underlies the repeating pattern of actions, reactions, and wants in “Western culture”. Imre Kertész considers the Holocaust, metonymically indicated by Auschwitz, as an inevitable end in Western culture: “What I discovered in Auschwitz is the human condition, the end point of a great adventure, where the European traveler arrived after his two-thousand-year-old moral and cultural history” (“Heureka!”). The West cannot share a moral and cultural foundation without also sharing the Holocaust. Additionally, in an increasingly globalized world still in many ways determined by the legacy of colonization, the standard established by the Holocaust—a crime occurring during one of the last major efforts at colonization, World War II—applies not only to the West but to the West's perception of any other global crime against humanity.

To inform my textual analysis of *Fatelessness*, and what the novel indicates about language I have consulted a variety of theoretical sources. The ideas I find myself most often referring to lie within a post-structuralist framework in the sense that I do not deal with the idea of truth as a determinate; rather, my exploration of *Fatelessness* and the broader idea of language during a situation of genocide relies on the assumption that the development and use of language remains subjective. Language here has no fixed meaning or power, but instead reflects the power structure. Power can consciously or unconsciously use language to limit, dismiss, and aid in the extermination of minority groups. However, language is not a simple weapon—any group or individual has power through language if capable of influencing through social or institutional means the actions and capabilities of another group or individual. Also in the vein of post-structuralism, I consider the world and language inseparable; as Geoffrey Hartman claims, “nothing can lift us out of language” (*The Bedford Glossary of Literary Terms* 299-241). I consider language a key factor in shaping the events of the Holocaust both in *Fatelessness* and in actuality. Whether or not the Nazis wielded language intentionally as a weapon, they did gain power from how and what discourse they used. It proves impossible to trace a direct line from one event to a discursive practice; instead, I consider power (and thus language)

complex and subject to tension within itself, creating an undeniable but ambiguous correlation.

I also refer to Imre Kertész's explications of his own ideas, many of which inform my discussion of *Fatelessness*. Of course, Kertész's post hoc explanations do not constitute fact. While generally useful in elaborating on the relationship between language and genocide, his authorial explanations sometimes limit the possible interpretations of the novel and thus I do not consider them the final authority on *Fatelessness*. A few texts from other survivors also speak to different aspects of *Fatelessness'* attitude towards incarceration in the camps. The connection between the attitudes of one former prisoner to the next suggests both the multiplicity of non-mainstream narratives and the possibility of certain shared reactions unfettered by the expectations of the audience. Thus, the experiences and reflection of Primo Levi and Jean Améry often inform different qualities of and themes in *Fatelessness*.

My exploration of language begins under the heading “Telling” with an explanation of why Western culture desires to know more and more about the Holocaust, and the reciprocal desire of survivors to relate their experience. I begin with this question because I feel that the phenomenon warrants further explanation before the bulk of the paper seems worthy of attention; if I do not establish the importance of the audience's fascination with the Holocaust, then the relevance of the following discussion diminishes. The second section, titled “Refusing”, discusses the actual disjuncture between the seemingly compatible desires to narrate the Holocaust and to listen to stories about the Holocaust. The second section seeks to disprove the assumptions of the subjects in the first section; essentially, why reconciling society with the events of the Holocaust remains impossible despite the tantamount desires to consume and produce narratives about experiences during the Holocaust in an effort towards healing and forgiveness. Reconciliation proves impossible partially because authentic narratives rarely become known due to the limitations of language. Language provides the tool for fate's imposition, here the imposition of an identity, a history, and a future upon an individual that does not necessarily cohere with the experience of the individual. Since language provides the mechanism for the

unwinding of fate, a fate ultimately hostile to victims of genocide, the old language (the native language of the victim, whether it be French, Yiddish, Hungarian, etc.) becomes an inadequate vehicle of communication—but one with no alternative. Thus, with few ways to communicate, survivors have no choice but to succumb to using the old languages hostile to themselves. Declaring language utterly incapable or, conversely, completely without fault, represents a gross oversimplification of language's more subtle intersection with society. The conclusion of my essay contextualizes these ideas, focusing on the concept of the subsumed authentic narrative, with *Fatelessness* as an example of such a narrative, and the subsequent importance of authentic narratives in light of the fact that the Holocaust shapes the normative standard for genocide.

I TELLING

Art as Atonement

Every tragedy seems to pale in comparison to the Holocaust, regardless of the unique and terrible nature of every mass tragedy in the history of humankind. Instead of seeking out a variety of narratives regarding the Holocaust—or indeed any major tragedy—Western audiences tend towards consuming vast amounts of the same type of narrative. In Kertész's words, we watch the “saurian kitsch” of *Schindler's List* and believe that by watching or reading or listening we absorb fully the story of genocide, when actually we see only one closed narrative determined more by the culture in which the movie was filmed than by the circumstances of genocide (“Who Owns Auschwitz?” 269). Genocide affects too many people to compartmentalize the way Western culture has done, privileging usually the most easily adaptable of the competing narratives. Regardless, the Holocaust has become our normative standard for understanding and qualifying genocide, and from there our standard for understanding mass tragedy. The discourse of the majority victims of the Holocaust—ethnically Jewish civilians—provides a bar for measuring and defining subsequent mass tragedies. Yet this standard is spurious if the discourse reflects not the authentic narrative of the victim but the

institutionalized ideas producing the discourse.

Despite the Holocaust's importance, the origin of the commodification and proliferation of Holocaust narratives remains ambiguous. A partial explanation arises from the fact that the Holocaust represents a great failure on the part of the West; moreover, it has a strong political lobby that occasionally reminds the Western powers of their failure to intervene, a theme generally present in art around the Holocaust. A Jewish lawyer named Raphael Lemkin coined the term “genocide” specifically to integrate the Holocaust into the legal world and from there into public consciousness (Power 29). Despite the fact that use of the word rarely prompts the swift action Lemkin hoped for in later conflicts, the word “genocide” still carries some strength—a fairly large grassroots coalition exists to combat contemporary genocide, specifically the ongoing genocide in the Sudan, whereas no mass consciousness exists regarding the war over resources in the Congo. Although many factors undoubtedly play a role in the consciousness about genocide, it remains true that genocide compels the audience of international tragedy in a way no other crime does. This in part lies in the fact that the first visible genocide, the Holocaust, seems to trump all other disasters, from historical genocides to non-genocidal atrocities.

Why is Western culture so obsessed with the Holocaust? Apart from the vast amounts of Holocaust paraphernalia, this obsession has emerged from a desire to shuck off the guilt for the event. The political considerations of Western governments during WWII attempted to justify nonintervention, and embarrassing examples of complicity abound in the American and European politics of the time; for example, Chamberlain and Daladier's acquiescence to the Munich Agreement's revocation of the Sudetenland. Apart from the strictly political aspects of nonintervention, many countries espoused a milder, sometimes non-institutional form of the Nazi's extreme racism and prejudice towards Jews, Communists, Roma, other ethnic and racial minorities, and homosexuals. This prejudice contributed to an ongoing endemic indifference towards international suffering. Historically, prejudice appears everywhere; perpetrators of genocide merely forced this prejudice to a murderous

extreme, what they believe constitutes the logical end as indicated by their alternate title for the Holocaust: “The Final Solution”. Such indisputable and shameful manifestations of Nazi-esque racism in daily life heighten the public need for reconciliation with the Holocaust both for victims and for larger society. Philip Roth's novel *The Plot Against America* examines an alternate America in which the heroic figure of Charles Lindbergh successfully runs for public office on an pro-Nazi platform, betraying the possibility that the American people could have supported the Nazis. The collective dim realization of this same possibility compels the collective need to compensate. This desire for forgiveness ultimately proves selfish; it has the intent of cultural absolution, not the intention of listening to the real concerns of the survivors and concluding that reconciliation may prove impossible. Proof of this selfishness lies in the selective listening powers of the audience, as the desire to hear the truth is nothing more than a desire to hear the truth that the audience expects to hear.

Given that the Holocaust occurred half a century ago, why do Western audiences still seek to understand and reconcile with it? The Hegelian drive towards reconciliation helps explain the West's ongoing desire to atone for the Holocaust. Since the Holocaust constitutes a major historical event, the genocide requires situating within a theoretical historical framework, which Hegel's dialectic provides. Hegel's synthesis considers the negative force of the dialectic the driving power behind the unfolding of history. This force seeks to come to terms with the discord within its own processes; thus, the push and pull of chaos and stability in history is little more than the endless attempt to reconcile history with itself. Since the dialectic deals explicitly with the historical movement towards reconciliation, it can help explain the unremitting (but ineffective) attempts towards reconciliation. Applying this idea to the Holocaust, the Holocaust should represent the continual, inevitable assertion of negative forces before the eventual recycling of stability and the reconciliation of society with the genocide. However, genocide exists outside of the dialectic because of the completely non-reciprocal wielding of power, which creates a situation of total authority and total helplessness in which the victims cannot surmount the oppressor and continue the dialectic because the authorities seek to completely eradicate the victim.

While many other examples of non-reciprocal power exist, oftentimes the perpetrators seek to exploit the victims as opposed to completely exterminating them. The perpetrators' goal of erasing the victims from history and remaking society differs from other crimes, such as slavery, in which the perpetrators force the victims to become part of a sprawling system of violence and oppression, with more varied and less centralized oppression. Genocide stands apart due to the singularity of the perpetrator's vision of liquidation. Yet the drive to reconcile persists. Philosopher Vladimir Jankelevitch states "...let us reconcile because history urges us to do it, because such are the exigencies of life and necessities of good neighborliness..." (Jankelevitch 57). Society wants to explain, understand, and account for the events of the Holocaust somehow. The means for understanding lies in locating information about the Holocaust, located in history and art. For the West, reconciliation may come with the full payment of collective intangible reparations—when the West can forgive itself for indifference. Whether deserving of self-forgiveness or not, the movement towards reconciliation proves unremitting.

The drive for atonement manifests in the demand for truth or what appears authentic. In

Fatelessness, Georg faces this urge upon returning to Bucharest when a journalist confronts him:

But anyway, the most important aspect right now, he [the journalist] considered was not that so much as "the healing of still-bleeding wounds and punishment of the guilty." First and foremost, however, "public opinion has to be mobilized" and "apathy, indifference, even doubts" dissipated. Platitudes were of not use at all here; what was needed, according to him, was an uncovering of the causes, the truth, however "painful the ordeal" of facing up to it. (251)

Here, the journalist expresses this desire for atonement; after the fact, the community finds itself willing to face the truth "however 'painful the ordeal'". The journalist symbolizes the entirety of public opinion, as he literally communicates with the public and thus represents the collective expression. His emphasis on the truth as "the most important aspect" therefore illustrates the public's desire for the truth. The journalist also seems to place himself in that role by advocating for the mobilization of public opinion; he now clearly wants to work against the reaction of apathy that he may have expressed during the war period. His righteous indignation and devotion to publicizing the genocide seem sincere,

but what prompts the sincerity? When the journalist and newly freed Georg meet, the journalist upbraids the conductor and passengers on a streetcar for refusing the penniless Georg a free seat, saying “More to the point, some people ought to be ashamed of themselves...” (246). This indicates that the journalist believes that shame constitutes the appropriate response to public indifference towards the survivors. As a journalist, his mechanism for inspiring that public shame are personal accounts of “the hell of the camps” made public (248). This passage hints at the public feeling that reading narratives about “the hell of the camps” begins the process of healing for former prisoners and for society. For the public, this healing consists of casting off the shame incurred as a result of indifference. This in turn hints at the larger desire of post-WWII generations to rid Western culture of shame incurred because the genocide was permitted to happen, yearning for a clean slate. The journalist suggests that the process must remain open, since a newspaper provides the most public means of disseminating information; and collective, as indicated by the reference to “public opinion”. Continuing for half a century now, public opinion in Western culture still wraps itself around the Holocaust for the same reasons, and still finds it useful and necessary to atone by consuming art that plays at replicating “the hell of the camps”. The journalist's desire to affirm his vision of the camps, which he deems authentic, symbolizes the wider society's similar need.

For example, the film *Schindler's List* attempts total visual authenticity of “the hell of” Auschwitz. As another contributor to art around the events of genocide, Kertész's view of the film provides a critique of commodification as well as an acknowledgment of the popularity of such mainstream movies. Kertész states: “It is said that Spielberg has in fact done a great service, considering that his film lured millions into the movie theaters, including many who otherwise would never have been interested in the subject of the Holocaust. That might be true” (“Who Owns Auschwitz?” 269) Although Kertész later lambasts the film, the initial sentiment indicates a truth about Western culture: that art provides an intriguing, often accessible entry into historical events that might elude the audience otherwise. Kertész indicates that despite his poor opinion of the film, a robust

audience exists for the Holocaust. Furthermore, some people consider it important that this audience has access to the Holocaust, even through the eyes of those who may not authentically portray its history and instead reflect the culture of the film's creation. To continue demonstrating this fascination with the grim details of the Holocaust, some reviews in mainstream publications of *Schindler's List* shed light on the reception of the film. A *New York Times* review asserts that “Mr. Spielberg has made sure that neither he nor the Holocaust will ever be thought of in the same way again.” With similar praise, a *Variety* review deems the film “...not, strictly speaking, a concentration camp movie but a densely woven personal drama with the most striking of historical backdrops, which is what will get mainstream audiences through it” (Maslin 1; McCarthy 1). Both publications suggest the importance of this film as a channel to view the Holocaust or to hook mainstream viewers, and generally demonstrate the prevailing view that the trend regarding the Holocaust leans towards more exposure, more material, and more fiction about the Holocaust. The *Variety* review in particular (though perhaps inadvertently) speaks to the commodification of genocide by considering the Holocaust “the most striking of historical backgrounds”, which trivializes the situation as little more than scenery, and privileges the appealing and heroic plot. All of this fiction staves off a need in Western consciousness for an eventual sense of redemption or forgiveness for complicity. However, when the material consumed proves overexposed or commodified, the process of seeking reconciliation results in an endless subtraction of knowledge, as if each overexposed piece detracts from the total substance of what the audience consumes. Occasionally narratives of genocide become devalued through overexposure and commodification, and thus cease to speak for the victims; as Kertész mentions, “More and more often, the Holocaust is stolen from its guardians and made into cheap consumer goods” (“Who Owns Auschwitz?” 268). The new narrative—for example, *Schindler's List*—may have good intentions, but ultimately perpetuates the commodification of tragedy.

The Urge to Narrate

While the audience may feel compelled to hear the narrative, the victims also feel an innate

drive to narrate in order to “keep death at a distance” (Foucault, “Language and Infinity” 59). For those who suffer mass tragedy, there intuitively arises a much greater need to further stave off the death formerly so intimately around. Additionally, survivors long for freedom from the burden of memory (Kertész, “Who Owns Auschwitz?” 269). Recollections of their experiences during genocide may seem all-encompassing, a shadow over their lives, but relating this experience helps survivors feel that their suffering may inspire understanding, and may confirm that the experience matters and has received recognition from others. Many authors/survivors struggle to engage in catharsis meaningful to both author and reader; for example, in the preface to his memoir Levi expresses that his public memoir allows him the chance for “liberation” from the burden of memory (Preface). Despite the reluctance of his audience to listen, Georg experiences this overwhelming urge to narrate his memories and thoughts when he returns to his old home. Even when met with an unfavorable reaction from the audience—his uncle—Georg continues speaking, “possibly to no avail and even a little incoherently” (259). His compulsion to talk about his time in the camps surges forth with such intensity that his uncle's friend restrains his uncle from interrupting him, sensing that they must accommodate Georg's need: “Leave him be! Can't see he only wants to talk? Let him talk! Just leave him be!” (259). However, Georg recognizes the likely fruitlessness of his speech. Liberation, then, can easily evade the prisoners. While Georg may hope for his speech to liberate him of the burden of memory, he remains pragmatically aware that talk could fail, and the effort could amount to nothing. Such is the nature of the prisoner's narrative—it overtakes the speaker; the listener must listen patiently; both eventually succumb to the force of the story.

Language creates a mirroring effect in which it confronts an individual with his past, his future, and his own identity; this sense of replication occurs because of the reduplicative nature of language in which the individual hears what should happen to him, or how he should act, and accedes to the structure created by language. Kertész's protagonist Georg is no exception to language's formative powers. Georg's later self-proclaimed “fatelessness” occurs because he considers himself outside of the

fate others might expect him to endure in the camps. In Foucault's exploration of Ulysses, a hidden Ulysses hears a bard telling the story of Ulysses' own life. Ulysses treats the bard's retelling of his story as tragic, especially since the tale contains his own death and the subsequent mourning of his wife Penelope. Ulysses weeps as if hearing of a literal death because hearing his life narrated by a bard constitutes death—or fate. Says Foucault: "...Ulysses must sing the song of his identity and tell of his misfortunes to escape the fate presented to him by a language before language ("Language to Infinity" 54). Like Ulysses, Georg escapes the exact fate of his peers in the camp because his recounting of his own misfortunes arises organically and in keeping with his experience, as opposed to retelling his own story as told by the bard, or in this case the journalist who confronts him as he makes his way home after liberation from the camps. The fate of his peers lies in the unwilling capitulation, through outside pressure or forgetfulness, to believe that their experience in the camps mirrors what they have heard about their experience in the camps, as opposed to their own memory; thus they assume the fate placed upon them. The journalist asks Georg for an account of his experiences in "the hell of the camps", and after expressing his inability to imagine hell, Georg presents the journalist with his own description of life in the camps (249). Dulled by Georg's description of the slowness of time in the camps, the journalist says "No, it's impossible to imagine it" to which Georg thinks "For my part, I could see that, and I even thought to myself: so, that must be why they prefer to talk about hell instead" (250).

Here Georg is confronted with the story of his own fate—hell—which he must reject in order to assert his own identity and have freedom. Freedom and fatelessness entwine in Georg's mind as he clearly envisions the fate thrust upon him by society as driven and determined not by himself or by the real sense of fate as unstoppable, but by each individual himself: "Why did they not wish to acknowledge that if there is such a thing as fate, then freedom is not possible? If, on the other hand...if there is such a thing as freedom, then there is no fate; that is to say...then we ourselves are fate" (260). While Georg lived through the fate imposed upon him, he thinks of it as not rightfully belonging to him, and he remains aware that others—not simply the Nazis, but his family and friends—accepted his

fate on his behalf and helped place it upon him (259). In regards to his family and friends Georg says “They too had known, foreseen everything beforehand, they too had said farewell to my father as if we had already buried him...” (260). For Georg, fate does not come from a higher power, but from humans themselves, and thus the notion of “fatelessness” comes from a desire for the freedom he remained bereft of both before and after the camps. Georg anticipates upon returning home that his mother would dictate the “inescapable” course of his life (262). His only recourse, then, lies in telling the truth about his experience in the camps—the unexpected happiness. Georg can only remain in a state of “fatelessness” if he can also remember the camps the way he wants to; as he concludes, “If indeed I am asked. And provided I myself don't forget.” To avoid death—his expected fate—Georg must narrate his surprising experience of realizing that “even there, next to the chimneys, in the intervals between the torments, there was something that resembled happiness” (262). Yet even with the desire to stave off fate through narration, Georg may find himself subsumed beneath the expectations of the audience and chained once again to a fate he never asked for.

II REFUSING

The Impossibility of Reconciliation

Truth and reconciliation, long a desired destination in healing the political wounds of a country, provide a possible intention behind the proliferation of Holocaust literature. In many ways the exploration of narrative around conflict does allow some first steps towards reconciliation. Hegel's dialectic, as mentioned before, asserts the drive for reconciliation and forgiveness over time, an inevitable recurring process towards the “dialectical must of reconciliation” (Friedland 57). Yet the mass tragedy of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides have rent the dialectic, and now exist outside of time and history. Firstly, genocidal regimes seek to remove the victims of the genocide from history, as Primo Levi suggests in his memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*: “For us, history had stopped” (117). Once removed forcibly from their homes and lives and marked for extermination, the normal flow of history

halts for the victims partially because the oppressors alter the passage of time for the prisoners, seeking to exhaust and exploit the victims until extermination. The loss of the prisoner's history also occurs because of the numbering system. Described as a “baptism” in Levi's memoir, which implies a birth or rebirth, and remaining with them till death, the numbers tattooed or given to the prisoners suggest that entering the camp forces upon the prisoners a new history, the new history of the camps. Essentially the camps birth them anew into the world of incarceration until extermination, reordering their identities and lifestyle beyond recognition. For Georg, time itself begins with the earliest numbers on the prisoners. When asked his name towards the end of the novel, Georg replies “64921” in German, giving his new name in the language in which the Nazis gave it to him. Georg later requires quite a bit of time to recall his real name, demonstrating how successfully the new history of the camps subverts the most fundamental details of the prisoners' first lives. Georg characterizes his return home only in relation to when he left it for the camps (237). For the prisoners, time's boundaries are the boundaries of their incarceration.

The numbering system, apart from removing the prisoners from their self-identified names and thus the linear structure of their own history, also constitutes a violent act of renaming. Naming, says Dawes, “is authority's attempt to categorize and control difference” (192). The authority cannot use renaming flawlessly, but authority can attempt to control difference by using different names to sort individuals into larger faceless entities. Numbering people demonstrates one way of renaming the prisoners, shown by Georg's inability to remember more than his number. Numbering also removes the prisoners from language and renders them a commodity, as numbers dehumanize the individual. Naming prisoners as part of a few broad groups—i.e. Communist, Jew, Criminal—demonstrates the control of difference. Exerted through naming, this control seeps successfully into the ideology of the victims, who begin to view themselves in these groups and by their numbers as opposed to by their own previous identities.

Thus, the Holocaust denies the dialectic necessity of reconciliation (Friedland 57). As

mentioned earlier, the dialectic of history moves towards reconciliation. However, the Holocaust—and any genocide—stands outside of history because of the totality of the disruption both practically and in the minds of the prisoners. Genocide completely upends the lives of the targeted group; it causes confusion and anguish related to identity that proves completely insurmountable. Afterwards, members of the oppressors and the victims must often continue living side by side, expected to recreate a society after the destruction of the original society. Genocide confounds all expectations; each event horrifies anew. Like colonization more than war, at the conclusion of the genocide victims must regain normalcy despite the inherent strangeness of acquiescing to barbarity in their own homes, and later remaining in the same place where the barbarities first occurred—endlessly haunted by the genocide. The only other option for victims lies in fleeing their home completely and creating yet another life somewhere new. For example, imagine the cognitive dissonance arising if a victim (as has happened in Rwanda) goes to a store and recognizes the grocer as a murderer. Or, as in Bosnia, moving from a refugee camp back home, and realizing that the new neighbors belong to the ethnic group of the perpetrators of genocide who have capitalized on the murder of the previous owners to inhabit the abandoned home. These bizarre situations seem unlike anything else that would arise after other situations of conflict, and quite unprecedented historically. It is as if the society affected by genocide were a completed puzzle, shaken apart and then put back together with several pieces missing and some new pieces; no one believes that the second puzzle and the first are the same, but everyone must pretend the opposite. Thus genocide does not belong in the normal cyclical progression of history, as it disrupts history so thoroughly that the dialectic tendency towards reconciliation fails to suture the wounds.

However, the same tearing away from history caused by genocide that completely removes the victims from history can also provide solace to the victims when the genocide ends. Says Kertész: “The experience was about solitude, a more difficult life, and the things I have already mentioned - the need to step out of the mesmerizing crowd, out of History, which renders you faceless and fateless” (“Heureka!”). “Mesmerizing crowd” refers to the audience, demanding a certain narrative; “History” is

the same history that ceases for the prisoners. In the aftermath of genocidal events, remaining outside of history—rejecting another fate—can provide more comfort to victims than trying to reintegrate entirely into society and attempting the total stability urged by the process of reconciliation. Kertész suggests that for former prisoners, the attempt to reenter history might prove impossible, and may deny them any chance of freedom. Since they experienced an event that exists outside of history, they must remain outside of history in order to avoid having their freedom and their memories of the event altered by the “mesmerizing crowd”. This in turn privileges the truth of the mesmerizing crowd, which reinforces the dominant institution again at the expense of the victims. This would not free the victims from the burden of memory—it would bury the truth.

The Alternate Experience

Georg's experience defies the expectations of audience and provides an example of why authentic narratives should not disappear, as his experience lends insight into the mechanisms of language and the formation of identity during genocide, insight that does not emerge from the dominant narrative. Kertész's humble protagonist Georg undergoes a brutal imprisonment because of the Jewish identity ascribed to him, and undergoes further marginalization from the Jewish community within the camp. Why is Georg isolated by his own people, all of them equally targets for extermination? Holocaust literature has bifurcated all those who lived through World War II into oppressor or victim. *Fatelessness* shows that the limited binaries of German/Jew, Axis/Allies, guard/prisoner fails entirely to show the subtlety of any experience. The audience—the inheritors of mass tragedy—presumes to divide experience as if tragedy as horrific in scale as any genocide can be compartmentalized. Fiction—the West's attempt at atonement—has squeezed the nuance from the Holocaust in a blind, reductionist search for reconciliation. *Fatelessness* does not deny in any way the horror of the camps, but it does beg the question as to whether the contemporary idea of the victims encapsulates all the victims, or whether this idea still privileges one narrative at the expense of others.

Georg initially seems only cursorily concerned with the current political implications of his

ethnic identity, which he stays constantly aware of only because of discrimination and the unremitting reminder of the yellow star on his lapel. Georg rejects the forced dichotomy that the Nazi institution creates:

It was a slightly uncomfortable feeling going around with them like that, as a trio, yellow stars on all three of us. The matter is more a source of amusement to me when I am on my own, but together with them it was close to embarrassing (9).

The passage initially suggests a repudiation of the group, here applying to his stepmother and his father. At first glance Georg's embarrassment with his family seems understandable as the natural awkwardness of a teenager. Yet this discomfort merely serves to demonstrate Georg's larger discomfort with placement within the context of Jewish identity. Use of "trio" and "three" suggests Georg's aversion to groupings in general, and implies his sense of individualism. Alone, he does not regard with much seriousness the submergence of his identity beneath a larger identity. With others, it becomes embarrassing, and Georg's discomfort arises in part because he cannot access his individuality in a trio, let alone an entire religious group he barely associates with. Of course, this star is not simply embarrassing; rather, it marks him for the concentration camps. Like the numbering system, the yellow stars and prison identity badges represent authority's attempt to rename and reshape existing identities in an effort to control them within the logic of their institution.

Georg recognizes the ideologies dictating his new, infallible characterization as a Jew, as in this transaction with a gentile butcher :

Somehow, from his angry look and his deft sleight of hand, I suddenly understood why his long train of thought would make it impossible to abide Jews, for otherwise he would have had the unpleasant feeling that he was cheating them. As it was, he was acting in accordance with his convictions, his actions guided by the justice of an ideal, though that, I had to admit, might of course be something else entirely (12).

Here Georg's assumption about the butcher evokes an older stereotype of Jewish merchants cheating their clients. This interaction, in addition to Georg's hyperawareness of the yellow star's symbolism, indicates that Georg, if not the reader, understands the potentially disastrous consequences of ideologies attached to reality with no inherent ontological significance. The stereotype, indeed,

constitutes an object both separate from reality, and subject to varied thoughts; it possesses an existence above the attitudes of both Georg and the butcher (Prado 131). Kertész's use of “thought” and “feelings” to characterize the butcher's prejudice highlights the autonomous nature of the bias—it has no foundations in reality but arises from the mental state of those exposed to it. Georg's identity in part arises from the imposition of such an intersubjective object as the Jewish stereotype upon his own person, as suggested by the butcher's worry that he cheats Jews. The gentile butcher dislikes associating himself with a Jewish stereotype in his own mind because he may notice that he cheats them out of prejudice; cheating them renders him similar to the stereotype he has of them; he cannot stand to resemble them, thus he becomes angry towards them and the hostility becomes cyclical and ingrained. Even knowing this, Georg ascribes to this stereotype when first meeting the Jewish camp prisoners, whom he recognizes by their yellow triangles. Says Georg, “Their faces did not exactly inspire confidence either: jug ears, prominent noses, beady eyes with a crafty gleam. Quite like Jews in every respect. I found them suspect and altogether foreign-looking” (78). This demonstrates that the intersubjective idea of the Jew permeates the minds of everyone—a shared concept passed down through Western culture, instinctive to many, including Georg.

Part of the subtlety of Georg's experience arises from his contradictory, occasionally thoughtful reactions to situations like this, which differ greatly from the extreme horror or fear of many fictionalized victims. Apart from embarrassment, Georg's emotions fluctuate from boredom to discomfort and occasionally to contentment. While a contemplative protagonist, he neither wants nor demands much from his life. The binary of oppressor/victim, German/Jew in the case of World War II relies on the properties of the binaries falling into place on either side; Georg falls into neither. The audience may deem him a victim, but he does not deem himself a victim. Clearly, he does not consider himself a Nazi either. Yet he does not actively *or* passively fall into the category of the victim. In a situation of recognizable oppression, in an existence determined by the specific targeting of the racial identity to which others have assigned him, Georg is the truly marginal character because of his

rejection from all sides. His position demonstrates the weakness of the prevalent binary.

The characters who reject Georg have subscribed to the dichotomy, abandoning smaller units of identity and past experiences to reduce themselves to the identity their oppressors have forced them to shoulder. Thus, many of the Jewish characters in the novel treat Georg with very little compassion (though with few tangible means of oppression). Partially, the disruptive force of genocide completely changes normal reactions; thus certain unifying ties between people become more and more important, and diversity less tolerated even among victims. The most obvious and crucial determinant of identity as well as the unifying characteristic of these prisoners is language, as shown the following passage in which Georg meets some Jewish prisoners:

When I told them that no, unfortunately I didn't [speak Yiddish] that was it as far as they were concerned, I become a nonperson, they looked at me as if I were thin air or rather didn't exist at all. I tried to speak, get myself noticed, but to no avail...That day I learned that the discomfiture, the skin-crawling awkwardness which at times took hold between us was already familiar to me from back home, as if there had been something not quite right about me, as if I did not quite measure up to the proper ideal, in short as if I were somehow Jewish—a rather odd feeling to have after all, I reckoned, in the midst of Jews, in a concentration camp (139).

Language, thus, becomes the means to define identity in a reality where that identity has been marked for eradication. Foucault states that “historians have constantly impressed upon us that speech is no mere verbalization of conflicts and systems of domination, but that it is the very object of man's conflicts,” and nowhere does this seem as true as in the camps (*The Archeology of Knowledge*, 216). Not only do the prisoners use an inability to speak Yiddish as a reason to ignore Georg, but Georg himself feels shocked that not all Jewish people speak Hebrew (78). Here, language and culture manifest themselves the same way, and thus culture under attack becomes language under attack and vice versa. Genocide, as opposed to other crimes of war, revolves around this idea of eradication based on identity—the dyadic polarization and concentration of an identity for the purposes of obliteration. Georg's experience throughout the novel demonstrates the key position language holds in crystallizing the nature of identity, which here leaves little room for characters like Georg. He does not speak

Yiddish, the language of solidarity for the Jewish people during this crisis—a language separate from the linguistic tradition of the Nazis and transcending above state boundaries, linking them as a people in the same way that the Germans pushed aside the considerations of their literal nation of Germany in favor of the transnational connections of their racial identity. Georg, able to speak only Hungarian and some rough German, has no place in the binary reinforced by shared language ability on the side of the oppressors *and* the other victims. All other obvious manifestations of institutional discrimination arise from this fundamental ideological and linguistic construction of identity. Language has created the division and also the justification for extermination, and provides the institutional mechanism for oppression. Language also allows the victimized group a way to express solidarity, and through that solidarity exclude others in the same position as they.

In another event, a Finnish Jew sells Georg some potato peelings at a high price because “Di bis nist ki yid,” or “You no Jew” (164). Georg responds with “So why am I here, then? Lousy Jew!” (164). The episode points to Georg's stress over the irony of his situation, and how he fails to benefit in any way from his Jewish identity. His angry retort of “Lousy Jew!” illustrates further his isolation and inability to become part of the group. Use of Yiddish in this situation heightens audience awareness of Georg's stress; since the audience also cannot understand the Finnish Jew, the audience can more strongly sympathize with Georg's inability. However, this event signals some of the entrapment of the assigned identity. Georg interacts again with the most pervasive stereotypes about Jewish identity, that of the stingy and profit-concerned Jew. His reactions consist of affirming this stereotype, and the event's inclusion in the novel again reinforces the stereotype. His failed attempt at haggling underscores this difference as well, since he clearly cannot negotiate in the same seemingly skillful or crafty way that the Jewish Finn can. Yet Georg, trapped in the camps, does not recognize his absorption of the determinants of identity, and chooses to express instead the same stereotypes that prejudice has fed him.

The adherence to a dyadic view of identity on the part of the Jewish victims represents the final

capitulation to the German binary. Within the camps, all prisoners found themselves relatively equal in powerlessness based on their religious identity, regardless of national background. While in their home countries the Nazis may have selected them based on many things—ethnic or religious identity, political affiliation, sexual orientation—to their jailers in the camps they are all prisoners slated for death. To put it differently, the Germans view most of the prisoners alike, with only a few exceptions for higher skill-based camp labor. The prisoners group together in their own version of the binary—each specific group the victim, with even other prisoners considered inimical. Jean Améry speaks specifically of the prisoner's absorption of the SS logic: “After a certain time there inevitably appeared something that was more than mere resignation and that we may designate as an acceptance not only of the SS logic but also of the SS system of values” (11). Although an intellectual such as Améry may have a more sophisticated awareness of this internalization, all prisoners—including Georg—inevitably fall prey to the ideology of the oppressor.

Of course, the binary espoused by the ideology does not exist. Rather, through the tools of discourse the Germans foster an opposition of no ontological significance but a great deal of practical significance. Yet though Georg occasionally questions SS values, as demonstrated by examination of his own Jewish identity, he also unconsciously espouses the same SS ideology. The conclusion of the novel speaks somewhat to his eventual rejection of the SS values, but during his time in the camps Georg accepts both the logic and the values of the SS. As Améry suggests in *At the Mind's Limit*, genocide provides few alternatives to this acceptance. The disruption and barbarity of genocide leads often to such weary resignation. When moving from one camp to another, Georg remarks with all seriousness:

Despite all deliberation, sense, insight, and sober reason, I could not fail to recognize within myself the furtive and yet—ashamed as it might be, so to say, of its irrationality—increasingly insistent voice of some muffled craving of sorts; I would like to live a little bit longer in this beautiful concentration camp (189).

The “muffled craving” arises from Georg's slow dwindling into the territory of hopelessness and the

abandonment of his creativity and rationality. Yet at the same time it demonstrates a total assimilation of SS ideology for Georg to reconcile himself with living in a concentration camp. Use of the word “voice” suggests the connection between the absorption of ideology and language, as “voice” indicates a speaker who presumably would speak some form of language. Internally, Georg's language has changed, and now even his inner discourse reflects an absorbed hostility. However, it does not constitute a battle; the “muffled craving” *is* Georg. Although one set of desires demonstrates a backwards adherence to the mechanism of his own end—the Nazi ideology—this set of desires comprises as much a part of Georg as “all deliberation, sense...” etc. The integration of the institutionally dominant ideology proves extremely hard to ignore, especially after the torments of the camps.

How does Georg respond to this complete marginalization? Largely, with indifference and the assimilation of a hostile ideology. Unlike the powerlessness of the Jewish victims, Georg's powerlessness seems total because he does not possess the ability of language (Yiddish) that would allow him to enter into a group with a shared language uniting them in some social solidarity. Thus for Georg the clear divide of oppressor and victim blurs, as both groups shunt him to the side (Amery 53-54). His narrative, then, constitutes a true unheard narrative in the larger set of narratives around the Holocaust, as he has experienced rejection based on ethnic purity from both the Nazis and the Jews.

Limits of Language

It seems, finally, that two warring extremes face each other. On the one hand, Western culture adamantly believes that narrating or telling the Holocaust remains possible, as shown by the consistent appetite for stories around the Holocaust. On the other hand, many scholars of the Holocaust assert violently that in fact telling the Holocaust is impossible; it is, as Blanchot declares, “the limit of writing” (7). These two poles stymie a more subtle exploration of the issue at hand, which relates more to the entwining of culture and language than of a total failure of language. Georg's problems in assimilating with the Jewish prisoners lies in his inability to speak their language. Yet his native

language, Hungarian, fails him later when he finds himself unable to speak about the time he spent in the camps, as demonstrated by his inability to construct metaphors to facilitate his audience's understanding of the experience (248). In essence, Georg has been exiled from his mother tongue.

One initial reason for language's increasing hostility towards Georg lies in his body's hostility towards him. *Fatelessness* routinely suggests a strong connection between language and the body, together the most fundamental elements of a person. Georg's indifference in the camps is not the “slack boredom of repression” but rather a total disintegration in the face of an overwhelming horror and the usurpation of authority, especially authority over his own body (Kristeva 2). Such physical disintegration, in turn, helps explain why other aspects of a person dissolve. Compassion ceases to exist and hope disappears when the tangible vehicle of one's self cannot obey self-will. Georg's feeling of powerlessness mirrors closely the reaction Julia Kristeva locates and calls “abjection.” States Kristeva: “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order” (4). Georg experiences this disruptive experience when a knee wound troubles the tenuous order he creates for himself within the camp:

There was no way I could shake off my knee, however, and an increasingly persistent pain in it. After a few days I inspected it, and for all my body's accommodation to many things by now, I nevertheless thought it advisable to promptly shield myself from the sight of this new surprise, the flaming red sac into which the area around my right knee had been transformed (173)

The knee represents the increasing feeling of helplessness that rises in Georg during his incarceration. He must hide his knee from himself, as the infection has transformed the physical locus of normalcy, his body, into something disorderly and uncontrollable. While Georg alludes to other accommodations his body has made because of the superior institutional authority of the oppressors (for example, horrible lice), he cannot face his physical troubles entirely. He must turn away because he cannot fight the physical problems that torment him. The infection of his knee and the subsequent transformation of his body are physical manifestations of the same disease of his mind—pain in his knee and the hostile ideology of the Nazis seek to disrupt him the same way, upending Georg's control

over his own world.

Georg's changed relationship with his body thus helps explain his changed relationship with language, as the physical stress of the camps drastically damages his self-perception: "Every day there was something new to surprise me...some new unsightliness on this ever stranger, ever more foreign object that had once been my good friend: my body. I could no longer bear looking at without a sense of being at war with myself..." (165). Georg's statement firstly indicates the powerlessness and abjection arising from the disturbance of his physical identity and the sense of beauty and order his body originally inspired. This horror and revulsion at his body's pain represents the disintegration of language; in Elaine Scarry's words, "physical pain is not only itself resistant to language but also actively destroys language..." (172). The ensuing physical separation Georg feels with his own body reflects the separation he feels with language. He characterizes his body as "foreign" and "stranger", a direct response to the fact that his body's disintegration has occurred because of a foreign authority. His body now represents that foreignness, rendered unrecognizable to his self-characterization.

The bridge between language and the body arises because physical pain such as Georg feels destroys every other sensation and all ability to reason, including the ability to speak. "Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject" (Scarry 35). The contraction of Georg's world to his knee provides an example of this disintegration; as the pain occupies his world, he cannot concentrate on any other aspects of his existence. His identity, dislocated from his body by physical pain, spins off from the physical locus and becomes unanchored. Since language structures this world, his dislocation from his body also contributes to his dislocation from language.

As the camps destroy Georg's body, so do they destroy his language, through pain both physical and mental. Georg suffers ultimately from what Jean Améry explores as homesickness for the mother tongue, a tongue that rejects the speaker. As a native German-speaking Jew, after World War II Améry

found himself languageless and exiled by a tongue turned hostile towards him, a language embedded now with hatred towards some part of his identity: “Every language is part of a total reality to which one must have a well-founded right of ownership if one is to enter the area of the language with a good conscience and confident step.” This implies that a lack of ownership may lead to a sickly or ineffective use of language, a problem Georg eventually suffers from but that has foundations in his life before incarceration. Prior to the camps, Georg still does not have a “well-founded right of ownership” to the reality of Bucharest by dint of his yellow star, which disturbs his normal activities: “I was about to unbutton myself but then had second thoughts: it was possible that...my coat lapel might flap back and cover up my yellow star, which would not have been in conformity with the regulations” (5). His inability to exist in the Hungarian reality manifests in his “second thoughts”, which show that he cannot behave normally because of the reality of Hungary, rife with regulations that constrain his typical actions. The reality rejects specifically him, as indicated by the “my” before “yellow star”.

Georg's reluctant bearing of the Jewish identity attributed to him leads to an utter lack of the “right of ownership” to Hungarian, since he assumes responsibility for the Jewish identity attributed to him. The Hungarians as well as the Germans have rejected the Jews, and thus the language of Hungarian now proves as hostile to the newly-categorized Georg as speaking in German would be. Later in the novel, Georg tells some fellow inmates that he comes from Hungary and subsequently finds them laughing at him, to which he thinks,

That was unpleasant, and I would have liked somehow to inform them it was a mistake, since Hungarians did not consider me as one of them...but then I remembered the farcical barrier that, to be sure, I could only tell them that in Hungarian, or at best possibly German, which was even worse... (197)

This moment constitutes a sort of postmodern irony in which Georg finds himself trapped by the language of the groups he does not want others to associate him with. Bleakly demonstrating his linguistic exile, it seems clear that Georg's issue lies not in an absence of independent thoughts that he can mostly articulate to himself, but in an absence of an independent language unfettered by stigma

with which to articulate these thoughts to others. He has neither his own language, nor the language of his ethnic group.

Since language remains so bound by convention and by reality, it seems impossible to escape and form a new language with which to communicate with utter authenticity and authority. Even above the issue of his own tongue's new hostility comes the problem of common objects assuming new meaning counter to their original meaning. Such troubling of original associations begins the process of mutating an original language to a language that contains the hostile meanings of the Nazis. Although Kertész asserts that the Holocaust cannot have an “exclusive language” as that “would destroy those who speak it”, in many ways the Holocaust did successfully appropriate the languages of the camps (“Who Owns Auschwitz?” 271). Many mundane signifiers acquired meanings that forever damaged the original meaning; in the universe of the reader, “ovens”, “showers”, and “soap” have all accumulated grim configurations because of the Holocaust. For the prisoners, entire languages were transformed because of the camps. Although the Holocaust does not have an exclusive language, the events of the Holocaust have altered the languages that existed before. This alteration leads to a grim conclusion— with no language, how does someone like Georg speak?

CONCLUSION: The Narrative Subsumed

When the question of testimonial arises after crimes against humanity, the audience commonly assumes that the oppressor's narrative remains preeminent in history. In World War II, the oppressors were the Nazis, and the victims predominantly (at least half) Jewish. But the assumption that history represents the experience of the oppressors does not reflect reality. The discourse of the Holocaust mostly represents the experience of one set of victims, and in this way has become the dominant discourse. Many pieces of fiction about the Holocaust reinforce and enhance the dichotomy created by the Nazis; us against them, German against Jew. Georg's experience, as illustrated by his linguistic limitations and the implementation of his Jewish identity, exceeds the binary by placing Georg outside

of either of these categories. Although *Fatelessness* is unique, Georg's experience does not constitute the only situation of an indifferent, normal civilian persecuted for qualities he barely realized he possessed. Essentially, through the subsumption of popular representations of the Holocaust to this binary, authentic narratives and the testimonials of the victims become devalued. Fictionalizations are sometimes no more than institutionalized capitulations to the underlying ideology of the oppressor. Additionally, the narratives of privileged victims leaves out the experience of many—not simply Georg's experience as an indifferent adolescent, but the experience of a wealth of characters overlooked by the dominant experience. For example, Georg mentions several non-Jewish prisoners in the camp, including Communists, criminals, and normal citizens arbitrarily interned. The repetitive, institutionalized narrative no longer aims to stave off death, but rather becomes the new tool of power; the authentic narrative disappears beneath the false narrative. The institutionalized, commodified narrative may lay claim to the authentic narrative, but often cannot accurately or honestly speak for the true victims of genocide (Blanchot 7).

It may seem as if the art around the Holocaust demonstrates the exact opposite of this phenomenon; that, contrary to expected human patterns, the survivors possess the stage upon which to narrate their vision of the truth unfettered by the perpetrators of atrocities. Yet commodification has rendered this impossible. The truth known about the Holocaust—about any genocide—arises from the manufacture of truth by the structures of power (Prado 115). A plethora of material does not render the art of the Holocaust truthful; rather the generation of such material creates a reinforcing effect in which greater and greater amounts of art feed the desire for more and more of the commodity.

Part of this commodification lies in the literal world of the all books. This essay focuses on a Holocaust narrative not only because of the Holocaust's reality as a normative standard for later mass tragedies but also because of the simple fact that very few publishers choose to nurture or consider the narratives from other mass tragedies. Very few English translations exist of the memoirs and fictional stories of survivors of other genocides; Kertész himself struggled under Hungary's Communist

government to have *Fatelessness* published. So of the multitude of novels, plays, films, art installations, etc., few authors seem to have unique and personal vision of the experience of incarceration. In a strictly practical sense the book, the audience, and the market operate cyclically and in tandem with each other. The audience expects certain narratives and alters these expectations very reluctantly; the market for books reflects, guides, and capitalizes on these desires; and the book must then either function seamlessly within the market or disappear unread. Who knows how many new truths have vanished beneath the literary bulk of what commodification in part has engineered? The publishing industry, like fashion or services, both dictates and follows the will of the audience. Very rarely does a mainstream publishing company produce a novel about a crisis that might meet with indifference from the audience. And if the novel fails to sell, the narratives meet a second death in the acidification pulping process, in which unsellable books become inferior paper products. MIT Press Editor Roger Conover describes this process as a “holocaust” for books—the term fits, as the literal disintegration and the literal rejection or apathy towards the unheard narratives of genocide represents a second Holocaust, a second sequence of institutionalized violence (Conover).

The ability to use language during times of genocide propels such material consequences as the absence of alternative narratives by mainstream publishers. Each narrative that vanishes disappears for one reason—the constraints of language—but the manifestations of these constraints prove manifold. The reduplicative nature of language drives expectations, both initially of the victim's identity and later of the audience's assumption about the style of narrative. Strong ties between culture and language render language hostile to those who have suffered through genocide. The combination of these restraints leads to the literal, logical progression into tangible occurrences: the authentic and unexpected narrative's rejection by publishers either afraid of indifference from the audience, or publishers intent on encouraging the propagation of one type of anticipated narrative.

These tangible occurrences have rendered painful stories of the Holocaust the dominant language of suffering in the world, and this dominant language arises not from authentic narratives but

from institutionalized narratives—the stories that the audience expects and desires to hear. The importance of this discussion of language relates intimately to the idea of the Holocaust as a normative standard for crimes against humanity. Awareness of the Holocaust develops nowadays comes from exposure to “saurian kitsch” and the occasional authentic narratives. Of course, the argument could arise that very little more can be learned from the Holocaust, or that the perception of the event proves too solid for alteration. Yet many new terrors arose with the Holocaust, terrors that have not disappeared and indeed which occur over and over again in different places, as ignored as the Holocaust during its unfolding. Cambodia witnessed a similarly bizarre and proportionately huge institutionalization of violence; Rwanda and Bosnia experienced a similar sharp polarization of identity. The lasting importance of the Holocaust lies in the preeminence of the events of the genocide. No language can arise to discuss or hear the narratives from another if the victims of the most prominent, recognizable international crime have no forum to voice their own subsumed narratives.

The events of the Holocaust relate specifically to and can inform other genocidal situations due to the relatively unifying intentions and practices of the perpetrators. Thus, an exploration of the Holocaust can shed light on aspects of other events; for example, the issue of language during genocide, as in this essay. Instances of genocide diverge from instances of war; while discussions of the language of war can inform discussions of the language of genocide, the former discussion proves too broad to apply directly to the specific conditions of genocide. Thus, the literature of the Holocaust informs only a particular subsection of war, restricted mainly to post-WWII events. While there are cases of historical genocide; the term's advent in the wake of the Holocaust demonstrates again the importance of the Holocaust in shaping this concept. Technology and organization fueled the Holocaust in a manner replicated in Rwanda and Cambodia; of the major instances of genocide after the Holocaust, both Rwanda and the crisis in the Balkans mimic the skillful incitement of ancient and embedded ethnic hatred. Only in genocide does the keen and cruel targeting of civilians within the same country as the perpetrators occur. Otherwise, the event could become a war across state borders

and different both legally and conceptually. Genocide involves a population within a state, exterminated by the state. Regardless of the legitimacy of the government (as with Cambodia and Rwanda) the effect remains the same: unlike war, where the threat to life comes from outside sources, during situations of genocide the threat comes from the very institutions obliged to protect even minority citizens. Just as faith in the mother tongue shatters when the language becomes hostile to the speaker, so do the physical events of genocide shatter the ability of survivors to exist within the same political structure. War, a much larger category, does not come with the presumption of systematic targeting based on race, religion, or ethnicity. These categories, as mentioned earlier, find definition through and by language, and prove crucial to the definition and implementation of genocide. Thus, genocide as a violent crime incorporates the linguistic dictates of identity in a way no other mass crime does—genocide relies on the formation and imposition of identity, and systematic extermination by institutionalized power structures.

Given the critical importance of the Holocaust as a normative guide in the West's psyche, it is crucial that the narratives do not suffer oversimplification until they dwindle down into one essential story. Kertész points here to a formalized language of the Holocaust: "...it is institutionalized, and around it is built a moral-political ritual, complete with a new and often phony language. Certain words come to be compelled by public discourse, and almost automatically set off the Holocaust-reflex in the listener or the reader" ("Who Owns Auschwitz?" 269). Kertész speaks to the institutionalization of narratives of mass tragedy, and how the subsequent language fails to reflect the experience of the victims. A critic even of the word "Holocaust", Kertész wonders at the development of a collective adherence to an institutional discourse around the events. One step further, this "Holocaust-reflex" not only conditions the Western audience to one pervasive and predominant idea of the Holocaust, but also has affected the Western perception of subsequent crimes against humanity. At one extreme, Western audiences reject the notion of any other crime bearing the weight of the Holocaust, or being as important as the Holocaust culturally, politically, etc. Yet the Holocaust does not constitute an extreme

of genocide; instead it is the normative standard for the crime.

Who knows how many Georgs remain from the time of the Holocaust, seeing an vision of their experience on television or in novels? And how many might exist from other countries? The Western audience has a version of the Holocaust; a version of the genocide in Cambodia; a version of the genocide in Rwanda, in Bosnia, in the Sudan. Georg's story in *Fatelessness* demonstrates that the lack of a language with which to speak may render the authentic narrative of genocide difficult, if not impossible, to find and hear. The commodification of genocide provides another explanation of the burial of authentic narratives. However, we in the audience must find and hear these subsumed narratives if we hope to truly see genocide. Reconciliation may indeed be impossible to achieve, but we have no chance of understanding if we listen only to the institutionalized narrative of genocide. This reinforces the powers already in place, essentially creating their fates—recreating their past experience, forging the rest of their lives. If we fail to listen to the subsumed, authentic narratives of genocide, we succeed in keeping the victims of genocide endlessly in a second prison of the fate we have imposed upon them.

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