

# **Anne Frank and the Irony of the Subverted Victim**

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“My cousin Helen, who is in her 90s now, was in the Warsaw ghetto during World War II. She and a bunch of the girls in the ghetto had to do sewing each day. And if you were found with a book, it was an automatic death penalty. She had gotten hold of a copy of ‘Gone With the Wind’, and she would take three or four hours out of her sleeping time each night to read. And then, during the hour or so when they were sewing the next day, she would tell them all the story. These girls were risking certain death for a story. And when she told me that story herself, it actually made what I do feel more important. Because giving people stories is not a luxury. It’s actually one of the things that you live and die for.”

- Neil Gaiman

## Introduction:

In the last twenty odd years there has been a change in the way we talk about memory—in the way we relate, it seems, to memory. Chris van der Heijden, in his extensive reflection on the effects of WWII on contemporary culture (*Dat Nooit Meer*, 2011), talks of a certain popularisation of the concept of ‘memory’. The genre of testimony and the fictionalisation of history have become normalised within literature—within media at large—in a manner unprecedented. With this particular ‘popularisation’, a question of ownership arose, of claim and of who gets to speak to whom. With that in mind, the narrative concerning one of the most controversial and problematic events of recent history—the Holocaust—has come to claim a centralised and difficult position in society. Beyond representing a period in time, an event in history and the ethical issues involved in trying to reproduce a memory, there is a new element to be considered in this age of digitalised media: language. The language we use when we speak of the Holocaust, or Holocaust-related language used when we speak of contemporary conflicts. The context in which we speak of it and the way we use it to evoke particular associations plays a huge role in the new forming collective memory of this generation. Jewishness, as a loaded term on its own, has in recent years come to grow and shift in what it represents. With the problematic role of Israeli politics in international discourse and the uneasiness of Holocaust memory being overshadowed by a Holocaust-centric industry, identities and power dynamics are at a constant friction. In this thesis, I will expand on the role of Holocaust memory in the contemporary West, and how that influences the shaping of Jewish identity in the media. I

will do so through analysis of one particular recurring icon in the overall narrative of Holocaust memory: Anne Frank.

I will first sketch out the course of Anne Frank's story as it entered the historical canon throughout the forties and sixties, continuing with the reintroduction of the Holocaust as a central event of the war from the eighties onward. I will follow that with a brief analysis of current identity politics concerning Jewishness, Israel and the term third-generation. To contextualise my conclusions I shall then turn to two recently published works, Shalom Auslander's *Hope: a Tragedy* and Nathan Englander's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*. In critically analysing the themes of identity and belonging through the symbolism of Anne Frank, I hope to demonstrate how a shift in the power dynamics of contemporary Jewish identities is problematizing Holocaust memory as we know it.

## **Anne Frank: a story, not history**

### *It Had to Be Heard: the publication of Anne Frank's diary*

It was in the summer of 1945 that Otto Frank was given the scrapped together notes of his daughter's found diary. He read it, thought about it, and did not take long after that to decide that his had to be read—to be published. True to the setup of the classic success story, the work was by no means an instant hit. The manuscript had gone by mostly unnoticed by publishers until historian Jan Romein published a review in *Het Parool*. Romein saw Anne Frank's story, above all, as a reflection on the fictiveness of what we think is 'our democracy'. The fact that a talented young girl like Anne had murdered in the manner that she did—he argued—was a true testament to the end of democracy, if it has ever existed (van der Heijden, 292).

This review was not only the very first, but also quite unique in its nature. Romein's sentiment in reflecting on the diary would not be echoed for at least two decades—two decades that would determine the discourse surrounding Anne Frank to this day, the way the theme of her story would come to be known in collective memories of later generations.

The diary, as known and read today, was published in book form at the end of June 1947. It only started to attract significant attention a scant decade later, in 1955. The reason for its breakthrough lay in the United States, where the story's reception resounded and paralleled an overwhelming post-war mentality that preferred optimism over melancholy. After the book's English publication in 1952, the overall American (and by proxy most of the Western) reading of the story did very little in reflecting on Romein's original analysis—more than that, the public appeared to receive it with a moral of dubious nature: a report of a disaster that could, in a way, happen to anyone.

Despite the diary's eventual success and the role it would maintain as “virtually the only Holocaust narrative that mainstream American audiences were familiar with” (Anderson, 4) for several decades, its popularity was not an instant phenomenon. Gaining a slow-burning degree of fame, the diary was advertised as an unexpected read, a promise that one might get out of it the opposite of what was the norm for war novels. With the publication of the diary, and later on in the form of its many adaptations, the message it

seemed to carry for the post-war generation was that ‘life goes on’. A life, moreover, not necessarily tied to the war or to Jewishness specifically, but the idea that hardships must not get you down, that childhood ends eventually, and that all is possible if met with a winning smile. Simply put, in the American discourse in the years following the war the diary inspired a reading as opposing from Romein’s first interpretation as possible, one in which the story was not a politically coloured piece, but rather something far more general and optimistic.

The diary became established as a timeless document, opening it up for all forms of interpretation. The one that overpowered them all, however, was the interpretation that put at its foreground an extreme form of optimism. This state of mind reflected quite neatly the post-war framework which hurtled America into the next decade. It was an “*aggressively upbeat*” (van der Heijden, 295) reaction to a horrifying event in a society that craved for a collective feeling of resolve, of a way to look back on the war as something inevitable and, in the end, the only possible means to a better future. Within that environment of anxious progression and a desire to forget, or at least to remember differently, young Anne’s story could only be read as a one—in Eleanor Roosevelt’s words—of *courage and faith*. In a gradually globalising world with the United States as the glorified last-superpower-standing, the European collective was loud in resounding this desire for optimism.

### *Playing with Optimism: theatre adaptations*

It was to this backdrop that novelist Meyer Levin began negotiations with Otto Frank to recreate his daughter’s story into a stage adaptation. Though Levin himself reviewed the book in the *New York Times* as a work of ‘human nature as it comes to its own, wherever in the world’, he would soon face the extent of the generalising, universal character attributed to the story. From that moment on, Levin would be tied into a conversation that would last a lifetime—*his* lifetime—and that continues on today: how much is Anne Frank’s story a Jewish one? (van der Heijden, 295)

Levin’s script, in the end, was not picked up by the producers. After a substantial number of hit and miss attempts to get Levin’s version produced, Frank eventually made the decision to collaborate with a different writer. He ended up with Goodrich and Hackett, two playwrights whose version, in a way, went beyond emphasising the optimism of the story. What happened was that this ‘aggressively upbeat’ stance, rather than being bound to

the story's context, or in other words, *Anne's* context, instead was linked to a certain universalism completely stripped of Jewish characteristics. The story would no longer simply be read as one that could happen to anyone, at any time—it would now be *retold* as such. One example that brings this problematic adaptation into focus shows in a particular translation of a crucial sentence. In the original story, Anne at one point states that, “We’re not the only Jews that’ve had to suffer. Right down through the ages there’ve been Jews and they’ve had to suffer.” Goodrich and Hackett version argued the writing to be an “embarrassing piece of special pleading” (Meyer, 89) and therefore changed it into, “We’re not the only *people* who’ve had to suffer. Right down the ages there’ve been *people* and they’ve had to suffer. Sometimes one race . . . Sometimes another . . .” (emphasis mine).

There was, however, more to this somewhat bizarre interpretation than post-war stubbornness. The universalism and optimism of America in the fifties were not only born in the war, but by the very nature of American politics at the time, the very structure of its society. Following large waves of immigration, the country was still lacking a coherence, a certain unity. With a great part of its people still identifying with a great variety of nationalities, not having lived there for much longer than a generation or two, the lack of a grand national identity had, in a way, *become* its unifying denominator. America was universal, America was about the individual, about equality and freedom—stories of someone’s identity being defined by the minority they belonged to instead of their value as an autonomous human being (Margalit, 66), were the last thing a recovering America was holding out for. Moreover, with the rumbling of the Cold War in background, and the quiet resurfacing of the Jewish-Communist stereotype, any emphasis on what ‘the Jewish character’ would or should be was staunchly avoided. (van der Heijden, 296)

All in all, the general consensus was that the public would simply not take to a particularly singular—that is to say, Jewish—story. Especially not if it is a sad one (van der Heijden, 297). Anne Frank’s story was vehemently argued as *not* being a war-story, *not* a Jewish story, but a human story—for which the war, as well as Jewishness, formed a backdrop.

It goes without saying that any story, including Anne Frank’s story, can be interpreted in many different ways. Those who looked for romance in it, found a story about love. Those who looked for grittiness, for a story of the holocaust, for a story about Jewishness—had the space and context to find that. However, there is no getting around

the fact that a *willingness* to read a particular story in a particular way is not the only thing at play when the story at hand is infused with political, social and ethical issues. The loudest and most powerful source of media was focusing mostly on rebuild, on optimism, on clarity and power—and so the public, in turn, focused on those elements in tandem.

Complementary to that is the image of a young woman who, despite all, never loses her sense of hope. The post-war West was no place for a story of a sad Jewess who is brutally put to death.

### *Our Responsibility: the German reception*

A similar trajectory of reception took place in the German market, though the reasons for the slow growing popularity was somewhat different. In Germany, the Holocaust was not a far-off happenstance, much less something to be either discarded in conversation, a topic one should shrug away. While there was no grand conversation reflecting on the events, no instant reflection, this absence of dialogue was different to the positivist denial of the United States. This silence served as an alienating tool, distancing the recent events by a lack of discourse. What could have possibly been better to break that silence than a story that told of the misery without denominating it? A story that gave the event an almost comforting, optimistic aftertaste? A narrative to remember the Holocaust by was only just being- woven , with Anne Frank as a first, painless and gentle chapter to a very painful and brutal story (van der Heijden, 299).

Despite the overwhelmingly positive message the Anne Frank narratives attempted to portray, ten years after there was still very little reassurance and peace to be found in memories of the war. Where the play, the movie and the story could not undo a war by rewriting its moral, they *could* create a collective sense of a need for change. This is where the so called 'Anne Frank' movement finds its origin, in the summer of '57: an idealistic, scattered and vague collection of manifestos in an age of a rising pop-culture. They expressed themselves by means of dressing as the by then iconic depiction of Anne Frank, by hanging up posters and organising pilgrimages—as though her image were something comparable to a star celebrity, her appearance something to be emulated. It was during that summer that this movement converged before Anne's birthplace to install a plaque stating: 'Ihr leben und ihr Tod – unsere Verpflichtung'. Her life and her death: our duty. While the

collective emotion behind this is rather straightforward, what is peculiar is the mentality that drives a statement like that. This is not an apology, a singular, collective apology—this is, just like the play was, like most readings were at the time, an appropriation of the notion of who Anne Frank was. The collective that the movement formed were not taking on the burden of sins of a previous generation, but rather claiming the identity of a victim. By saying ‘our’ duty, what is being said is, in fact, ‘she is ours’. By voicing a sentiment like ‘duty’ in the possessive sense, by directing it at a victim of war, an element of mutuality is taken away in the process of a possible understanding, forgiveness. In this a sentiment becomes much less about deeds of atrocity, much less about the pain and trauma of those who suffered, and begins to dangerously lean toward centralising the importance of those who are doing the apologising, ‘taking’ the responsibility.

This does not go to say that Anne Frank’s diary created some sense of a general processing—an acceptance—of the war in Germany during the fifties. At best one can speak of a budding phenomenon. That is, the from thereon growing trend of universalising the events of the Holocaust, creating a narrative that would make it not quite as big a challenge to put those events at a distance. This distance creates a feeling of the Holocaust being just an event, awful yes but one that one that is possible to oversee, a single event that could have happened at any time in history.

### *The Most Recognisable Symbol: the Americanising of Anne Frank*

Toward the end of the fifties, the reassuring, positive messages that surrounded the war-narratives had reached their peak—and a darker, much more critical era was on the rise. One voice that contributed to that is that of the Bruno Bettelheim, a well-known psychologist who—in the sixties—published an article in *Harper’s Magazine*. In this article he put forward the notion that the only conceivable reason for the Anne Frank story’s success was a collective need to forget the traumatic events of the Holocaust. By glorifying and romanticising her story, he argued, we give ourselves the option to retreat, to take a step back from the terrible history and return to individuality, into small logics and sensibilities—a world that allows us to hold on to everyday details, anchoring us down. Anne Frank, in other words, is an escape. (302). Bettelheim went on to suggest that the trend of ‘Americanising’ the Anne Frank story has simply gone too far—achieving, in that process,

exactly the opposite of what the diary's publication was intended for: raising awareness of the suffering, the horrors that took place during the Nazi occupation of Europe. This issue capped, in a way, the essence of the war-sentiment of the sixties and onwards: the experience of war as a source of education, not glorification. This point of view would be often opposed, especially in discussions concerning exploitation of war-memories from the late nineties (to today), where the understanding of intention and origin stand central. David Wertheim, in his 2009 article on representations of Anne Frank, argued for trepidation when discussing and arguing the subject surrounding the economic exploitation of Anne Frank's story. Too much of a focus on how sacralisation and politicisation of the diary grate against "the search for the most authentic representation of her history", he writes, overlook the larger truth that is that all reproductions were at least partly caused by "a desire to represent the past as authentically as possible" (Wertheim, 161). However, what both Bettelheim and Wertheim fail to acknowledge in this discussion of authenticity and intention—for the latter mainly in the argument regarding the good-naturedness of the Goodrich & Hackett play—is the element of the conversation that does not concern itself with authenticity. That does not necessarily turn toward investigating an intention 'behind' a representation or the truthfulness of a document, but rather concentrates on *representation* on its own. The consequences of what happens when a particular representation, be it authentic or not, enters the general discourse and shapes the audience's constructed reality when it comes to the subject at hand. Or, to make it more tangible, I would like to argue that looking at the mediatisation of Anne Frank is not a criticism on how the morphing of the original story has made it so the audience is unaware of the 'true' story—but rather that the repeated and recreated use of her image in the media has formed a dialogue that allows for constant remembrance, but on the other side of that coin there is also appropriating and trivialisation. The issue at hand is not one of whether or not we are *retelling* her story properly, but one that concerns with the question of, 'in what *context* are we telling this story, and what does that say about how we have come to remember our history?'

The Americanised Anne Frank, as experienced and portrayed in the years following the war, a symbol for optimism and a hopeful future is argued to be a thing of the past these days. However, as I will argue through further historical and literary analysis, Anne Frank can still be seen as an Americanised, or globalised, symbol. It is the context in which we discuss the story that appears to have changed.

“The most recognisable symbol of Jewish suffering and death” Shalom Auslander bluntly speaks through Anne’s voice herself in his recent novel, *Hope: a Tragedy* (265). Through the rise of a universal Holocaust awareness and the industry around it, through the slow entering of Israel as a Jewish state into Western discourse, the symbol of Anne Frank no longer stands for a vague, positive future but rather a globalised *shifting* Jewish identity. An identity that is formed not only by culture or history, but through media, through texts and a society where politics are ruled by economy—constructs which I will come to explain in the following chapter.

## Testimonies and the rediscovery of the Holocaust

### *Reflection, Not Mediation: Holocaust narratives of the 80s*

The complicated web of events, of circumstances, of identities and political interconnections caused directly and indirectly by the war, had—by the eighties—become so intricate that there seemed to be a general loss of an ability to turn this into a narrative. The loud silence that followed the war directly throughout the 40s, then the pasted smiles of the forced positivism of the 50s and 60s gave way—over the course of the 80s—to a new form of fascination. The realisation that there was no form to oversee what had happened, to file it in the easy chronology of causality within history, made for a resurgence in the interest surrounding the event: the output of media concerned with, or discussing the subject of second World War, peaked to an unprecedented high in 1985, only to double ten years later—along with the necessary discussion concerning both the deeply problematic nature of trying to represent a trauma as well as the ethical element of what should be represented and what not. Theorists such as Lawrence Lang and Sue Vice, until the nineties mostly concerned with making the event accessible (*The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, xii), less of a distanced fiction, would come to deal with the backlash of both accessibility and distance—the issues of the augmenting nature of over-representation.

NBC's nine-hour docudrama *Holocaust* (1978) is often noted as not only a catalyst for the flood of memoirs, academic studies and popular representations (Anderson, 2) that would come out of the woodwork in the following two decades, but also as a reflection of a certain change in the attitude of Western media. Where previously the aim of war and Holocaust-centric sources had mostly been a result of a society eager to move on, of shaping the event into something easier to compartmentalise, the eighties seemed to demand something 'truthful'. Not the key to understanding the riddle—but a story that would serve as a reflection, rather than a mediator. From this combination of a collective sense of haplessness as to understanding what happened, and a need to find out what *really* happened, rose a slow but certain industry. During the last two decades of the twentieth century the amount of books, films, shows and general plethora of media output created because or about the war is nearly impossible to qualify or compare. History as a

personalised memory becomes a trend toward the twenty-first century, memories become popular. With that in mind, the course of Anne Frank's ever changing image has, over the years, come to run parallel to this development in the rise in memory studies. That is to say, as the role of memory in relation to truthfulness—to history—began to shift toward emphasising meaningfulness over factuality, the story of Anne Frank began to morph from a representation of history to a means of evoking a particular sentiment concerning history (Wertheim, 158). It is, of course, not only the shades of receptions that have been documented over the years that define Anne Frank's story as we know it. It is the very mediatisation of the story that has contributed to the shift in memorisation. The media, in both their traditional and digitalised forms, neither "simply reflect nor determine collective memory but are inextricably involved in its construction and evolution" (Kasteiner, 195). With this in mind, the argument is to be made that Anne Frank's story is so imbedded and alive in cultural memory not merely because of the availability of the diary—but also for its continuous adaptations, its daily presence in mediatised Western discourse in film, museums, documentaries and, not to forget, the internet (Wertheim, 159).

Within this growing industry surrounding the war, a clear theme was taking centre-stage: the Shoah, the Holocaust. This was not a new trend by any means; as occasionally marginalised a role the events of the Holocaust had during the two decades following the war, (though the exceptions—such as the Jewish-American "tacit, unorganised and unofficial boycott of German-made goods"—must not be overlooked nor downplayed), in the seventies they became central to the discussion surrounding it. By the time the war had once again entered the general discourse in the eighties—now partaking in a media which, in the forty years since, had changed considerably in power and size—the subject had not only boiled down to a centralised vision of the Holocaust, but most of all the memory had become privatised. In the 2009 article, *The Privatization of the Holocaust: Memory, Historiography, and Politics*, by Daniel Gutwein, a distinction is made between three main periods in Holocaust memory in Israel. These, I believe, can—in the context of international Jewish identity—be extrapolated to reflect on the change within Holocaust-related narratives. The three periods Gutwein mentions are the divided memory period, the nationalised memory period, and the *privatised memory* period—the one most relevant to the discussion at hand. The privatisation of Holocaust memory, according to Gutwein

Redefined the parameters of the term “Holocaust” in [ . . . ] public and academic discourse. From a historical description of the Jewish experience under Nazi occupation, the Holocaust has been transformed into an overall concept for numerous emotion-charged and morally ambiguous themes [ . . . ]. While ideologically, privatized memory claims to underscore the universal lesson of the Holocaust, in practice, privatisation has transformed the Holocaust into an essentially [Jewish] matter (38-39).

There is an important difference to be made between the Holocaust as an understood event within history, the systematic persecution and murder Jewish and other ethnic identities as well as deviating ideologies and non-heteronormative sexual identities, and on the other hand the Holocaust as experienced through the media, a traumatic event focalised through a centralised Jewish identity. This, in effect, did not only have an outward effect: the somewhat abstract, vague concept of Judaism as a central topic of the war, of the Holocaust, also enters the narrative of the post-war Jewish identity itself. In other words, as the war becomes symbolised by the Holocaust, and by proxy by *Jewishness*, the forming of the Jewish identity of the next generations is shaped by a certain Holocaust-centric overtone.<sup>1</sup>

*Popular Memories: Holocaust-centrism from the 90s onward*

Beginning nineties the public role of retelling and remembering the war had only become more complicated. The main concern in analysing both the production and reception of Holocaust fiction has shifted from spotlighting the ethics of creation to a paradox of sorts: the realisation that the more time separates the Holocaust from the present, the less it becomes available in terms eyewitness testimony, the more *accessible* it becomes to readers and writers. That is to say, a new need developed to reaffirm the tenuous link between the

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<sup>1</sup> By using the term Holocaust-centric I do not mean to undermine, or in any form question manner in which the traumatic events of the Holocaust shaped identities of those in any way involved. I aim, however, throughout this thesis and the analysis of works to follow, to point out examples in which the media centralises the Holocaust around Judaism, and Jewish identity around the Holocaust, and how that influences and contributes to shaping contemporary Jewish identities as they develop.

new generation and the events of the war—filling up that non-connection with narratives, giving it shape, be it a fictional one or not.

However, despite the fact that the new interest in Holocaust-centric narratives concerned with Jewish identity and Jewish *life* during the war, the idea of Jewishness linked to it was, as it very much was in the fifties and sixties, somewhat of a fictionalisation of the Jewish culture. In the Anne Frank adaptations of those early years her Jewishness was a backdrop, a vague frame of reference—now, though mentioned and notified, the identity and religion were still presented through strongly Christian themes: the sacrifice of the individual for the greater good, the acceptance of misery as a ‘part of life’, inherent in a way and necessary to appreciate the beauty in the end. Take, for example, Etty Hillesums’ diary, published with a great success in 1989. Her story centres around a gradual mindset of brave acceptance, of smiling in the face of ‘travesty’, its popularity building on the positivist narrative set in the fifties. The issue at hand is not one of whether or not Hillesums, or Frank’s diary for that matter, are truthful to the event or not—their experiences were wholly their own and are not to be questioned or subverted. That which is questioned is the notion of selective publishing, of the media constructing a narrative along with a public which desires a particular memory of meaning and eventual redemption.

Around the beginning of the twenty-first century there was a growing concern for the production and symbolism around the Holocaust—the industry that was coming together around it, as political scientist Norman Finkelstein argued in his controversial book on the Holocaust industry. There was, and still is in fact, a certain uneasiness around the idea of the ‘Americanisation’ of the Holocaust as a symbolic as well as factual event. The phenomenon had entered the Western dialect in an intrinsic way—somewhat through the coming and going of the subject as a hype within international discourse, and partly from the vague but passionate idea that the memory of the Holocaust would prevent a possible recurrence. Though often genuine, the manner in which this ‘never again’ disposition manifested itself could, and still can, create unfortunate results when the movement is unfounded or simply somewhat ignorant of the history behind the narrative. A bizarre example of that occurring is the “Paper Clip Project”, which started in 1998 and was made into a documentary by Miramax in 2004. The feature follows a group of children in a middle-school in Whitwell, Tennessee, set out to “confront the prejudices and lack of diversity in their own community” (Paper Clips Press Notes). The school’s principle comes with the initiative, wanting to make it

into a collective school project to study the Holocaust so that they could “learn about evil, about [a] whole other culture” (Anderson, 15). However, that aspect—the informational, historical aspect—of the project is soon traded for a more emotionally significant and symbolic experience. Extrapolating from the story that Norwegians had, during WWII, fastened paper clips to their lapels in protest of the Nazi occupation, the school began collecting paper clips—from their own environment but also from friends, relatives, writing letters to politicians and celebrities and eventually collected a whopping 30 million clips. The problematic element of this approach is worded best by Mark Anderson, who points out that the lesson learned by such a project is not so much a celebration of diversity but a certain “no-cost multiculturalism”, providing the illusion of diversity without requiring that anyone or anything actually change (Anderson, 17). In the end of the documentary the students have interacted with Jewish filmmakers, have talked to survivors, have talked *about* survivors, but the community is still the same as it ever was: ninety percent white without people of Jewish, Muslim, or even Catholic faith. “Identifying with Jews who died 60 years ago in a foreign country is safe,” Anderson argues. “No living Jewish community threatens Whitwell’s religious and ethnic homogeneity” (17). This particular brand of no-cost multiculturalism presents itself best when historical perspective has to be accounted for. Not only did the documentary fail to touch upon the problematic associations of the project title (during the Cold War, CIA operatives smuggled high-ranking Nazi scientists into the United States under the code name “Operation Paperclip”), but the fact that the project culminated in putting eleven million of the thirty paperclips in an ‘authentic’ German railcar that had actually been used for deportations—closing this off with the words, “Now they have come home”—shows the extent of removal from the historical and cultural context of the Holocaust.

*Making the Holocaust Accessible: symbolism and self-exploration*

Despite the difficulty in qualifying the plethora of Holocaust-centric works of the last decades, the many books, movies, shows written and produced around the event, there is one clear theme that has stretched from the very first publication of Anne Frank’s diary to the recent airing of Miramax’s *Paper Clips*: that theme is children. Children as victims, children as narrators, children as the lens through which we gaze upon the events of the

Holocaust. While there have been exceptions, the theme of the child is the most recurring and significant one when overseeing Holocaust narratives from the past eighty years. Linking this trend to the phenomenon of internationalising—*Americanising*, if you will—of the Holocaust, the child-victim theme seems quite an easy one to explain. Non-Jewish audiences, American audiences, world-wide audiences with little knowledge of European history might, when faced with the complex political ideologies and geographical mazes inherent to this event (Anderson, 3), come away feeling nonplussed—distant, in a way, from the event by a general lack of framework to interpret it with. From this point of view, the figure of the persecuted child can “turn the Holocaust into a moving and accessible story” (Anderson, 3), one with religious and mythic associations. With this, the story of the child in wartime allows the audience to cope with the factuality of the Holocaust in the easiest way possible: placing it outside of the specificity of history by making it into a tale that could have taken place any time, could have happened to anyone, relatable by all—appealing to personal memories of one’s own childhood, identities as parents, sisters, brothers: approaching the audience on an existential and moral terms, and only secondarily in historical or political ones (Anderson, 3).

The problem with that form of representation, however well-intentioned the motive, however legitimate the story is in the end—is that it runs the risk of prioritising the emotional experience of the audience (the readers, the viewers) over the representation of the actual victim. In *Paper Clips*, it manifests itself as the students begin to focus on themselves—their own identity, their own emotional development *though* a victim’s experience of the Holocaust—and the names and histories of the individual victims disappear in the sea of paperclips kept in the German wagon. In Anne Frank’s story it recurs time and time again, as her symbol is used repeatedly for the self-exploration and validation of other people’s—other *communities’*—identities. That of the American family life of the 50s, where she was stripped of her Jewish identity and any or all form of despair at the war around her. That of the second generation’s (a term which I will return to later) connection with the war, a poster child of Jewish suffering where ‘Jewish’ signified a vague notion of minority rather than a factual identity. That of a wholly new generation as well, a generation coined the third by some, and empathically not named *anything* by others—a generation that, as I will continue to argue, moves on from a Holocaust-centric historical perspective to a political one, overshadowed by an Israel-centric Jewish identity. This movement, as it

subverts and changes the power dynamics inherent not only to Jewish identity but the manner in which society at large experiences the notion of 'Jewishness', once again appears to play out on that worn but familiar narrative: the story of Anne Frank.

However, to understand the role the Anne Frank narrative plays in this political and cultural game of chess, I will first expand on the up until now missing element in the equation: Israel. Israel and its role in creating a discourse by which the Holocaust has come to be spoken of. Parallel to that, I will sketch out the development of Holocaust-centric literature over the course of three generations, creating an overview of how—and why—the symbolic Anne Frank is returning to our narratives once more.

## Why the Eighties and Why Right now?: Israel and the third-generation

### *Finkelstein on the Holocaust Industry*

In the previous chapter, I briefly discussed the discernable gap between the post-war reactionary media and the once again growing popularity the subject of the Holocaust gained in the eighties. The reasons given—the complications of politics and the need to reach back to a singular catalyst event, the fear of losing a direct link to history, the shifting centrality of the war toward the Holocaust—are all equally significant in the discussion. However, to involve the role of Israel, we must take a momentary step back from the elements mentioned above and consider a different approach to the phenomenon. That is to say, a more *politicised* approach that aims to contextualise and explain the rise of the Holocaust industry, a notion that has been argued to a certain success by names such as Norman Finkelstein, Noam Chomsky, and—to a degree—Peter Novick. To briefly review this theory I will mainly use Finkelstein's work on the subject, *The Holocaust Industry* (2000)<sup>2</sup>

When reviewing the long list of movies, novels, and shows produced from the eighties onward, the one that seems to list as one that 'birthed' the rest is the documentary *Holocaust*, broadcast for the first time in 1978. The question unearthed by Finkelstein, however, is not *why* this trend started with the eighties but rather *why not before?* Reflecting on the silence around the Holocaust after the war, then the quiet indifference into which this silence turned, Finkelstein argues that the change in tune can be traced back to the summer of 1967, the Arab Israeli war of June that year. The generally accepted interpretation of the role the June War played in the re-emergence of Holocaust awareness in American Jewish life comes down to Israel's "extreme isolation and vulnerability" during that time, and how those circumstances reawakened memories of the "Nazi extermination". This reading of the American-Israeli history, Finkelstein says, is a faulty one. More than that,

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<sup>2</sup> Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry* is first and foremost a politic-theoretical work. It reflects on deeply complicated relations and events of causality over the past fifty years and theorises as to a possible deeper truth beneath. It does not, however, serve as an accurate source for literary analysis. With that in mind, I will aim to reflect on the theories presented as thoroughly and clearly as possible, avoiding the hyperbolic language Finkelstein is wont to use in order to present a set of ideas on which I will base my eventual analysis. However I will not treat the text as an academic or historical document, but rather as an extrapolation on a myriad of political and historical question marks.

it misrepresents both the reality of Mideast power relations at the time and the “nature of the evolving relationship between American Jewish elites and Israel”.

By relating America’s previous reactions to several conflicts and, indeed, wars fought in and about Israel from the very beginning of the nation’s first developing steps, Finkelstein points toward the unlikeliness of the June War being *the* war that would ignite a reaction to such a revival of the Holocaust memory—where other circumstances, such as the ’48 declaration of independence or the ’56 Suez war, where Israel was at a great disadvantage and fighting for its very existence, would seem far more of a reasonable origin for such a transcontinental shift in historical awareness. Yet a resounding silence surrounded the Holocaust for years. More than that, the overall sentiment in regards to Israel among Jewish “elites” and politicians in the West was almost resoundingly indifferent or opposed. Finkelstein explains this odd waiting game between the West and Israel for the first thirty years of the latter’s existence by pointing out Israel’s initial lack of a status in America’s strategic planning in the Middle East. During the June war, he writes, Israel showed an unexpected display of force—this, along with the fact that the Egyptian and Syrian regimes became more and more unwelcomingly independent, suddenly put Israel in a position of interest. After the war of Yom Kippur in ’73, the influx of Holocaust-related works—from articles to everything we have come to associate with the industry today—duly peaked. The goal seemed to be to create a narrative where the present overlapped with the past—where victimhood became victorious, and a war was necessary to prevent a “second Holocaust”. An appropriation of the past, in a way, to facilitate support for political and military actions.

### *Saddam as Hitler*

While the memory of the Holocaust was becoming gradually Americanised, the Middle East began to revolve around a continuous comparison between any form of oppression, suppression, and WWII. In 2003, a particular form of comparison was gaining popularity among the general press. With the post 9/11 approach to Middle-eastern politics, along with America’s more valued than ever alliance with Israel, a line of thought began to sound through the general discourse that took to linking Saddam Hussein to Hitler (van der Heijden, 675). The evolving narrative of American forces in the Middle East became tangled with that of the re-written Holocaust. The developing language and hyperbolic reporting surrounding

the conflict made sure that there was enough emphasis on the notion that the century's most terrifying tyrant was not Hitler (or Stalin, within the given Cold War discourse), but Saddam Hussein.

During the first Gulf War, the American Simon Wiesenthal centre announced to the public at large that there was, apparently, reason to believe that gas chambers were being built in Iraq. Though unfounded, the message created a wave of shock—of, were it true, valid indignation—and helped to reinforce the slowly embedding association of a new Holocaust in the Middle East. The circular, empty logic of Saddam Hussein = Hitler, Hitler = gas chambers, therefore Hussein = genocide, served in the process of de-contextualisation the Holocaust (van der Heijden, 701). The heavy politicising and re-appropriation of the event landed it in the moral position where it finds itself entering the second decade of this century: untouchable and yet at the centre of the historical identity of the West, belonging and not-belonging to communities and individuals according to a logic that often seems based on a roll of dice.

This approach to the politicised popularity of memories is, while truthful and providing a new angle from which to approach history, is also somewhat lacking. While Finkelstein's analysis of the gradual rise of the Holocaust industry is accurate in the associations he makes, the links he provides his audience with, it seems to also overlook certain minor (but crucial) elements in the production of information: it is not a one-way movement. There is no such thing as a consistent production of output—of information, of sources—by a government and its elite. Yes, matters such as selective publishing, censorship and emphasised/popular language absolutely influence the discourse. Though the divide between producer and consumer is not that straightforward: being part of a society in part includes being a consumer of someone else's product—be it a product of thought, of visual information or material worth. In turn all consumers are able, if not already actively participating, to contribute to the process of producing. Of course, there is the issue of who gets to speak, whose voice is suppressed and again—though there are clearly distinctions between those who have access to means of productions and those who do not, the separation is not dichotomised. In other words, there is an aspect of both agency and generationality that Finkelstein seems to overlook. There is a difference between a generation who either experienced the war or the Holocaust, a generation that has grown up in the silence that followed it, and the one that was raised in the latter's highly

fictionalised ‘breaking’ of that silence. A collective memory of an event is not only mediated by one’s relation to that event, or the active popularising of the event, but all the narratives that converged to form one’s puzzled-together understanding of a shapeless and traumatic chapter in history. As Wertheim has been quoted before, it is not the availability to an original source or the reproduction of it that forms its presence in contemporary memory—but the continuous reinventing of both the *media* through which a story is told as well as the *context* in which a story is told. This complex relationship of fictionalised history and, for a lack of a better term, meta-history, is especially interesting in the case of Anne Frank, since “one of the remarkable elements of that afterlife” is that it is “so highly mediatized” (Wertheim, 159).

*New Narratives: stories of stories and third-generation*

The argument put forth by Finkelstein, that the second generation’s return to the ‘remembering’ of the Holocaust was generated by an economic drive to ally Israel to the American narrative, does not, I believe, take away the validity nor the authenticity of individual experiences in relation to the war. It has changed the manner in which memories are passed on, it has created an international sense of remembering where the original memory is a patchy, collage-like canvas which—in trying to oversee it—it seems impossible to tell what part is hard factual truth. It has even forced a re-evaluation of ethics concerning the idea of the publicity of memory, of trauma and the agency surrounding it. The belief, however, that trauma can be capitalised to the degree to which Finkelstein thinks it has been is, I would argue, unfounded. In his writing, one of his main concerns is the normalising of the Holocaust, making it accessible and easy for misuse (think, for example, of the previously discussed *Paper Clip* project). While he, as many others have, notes that this ‘accessibility’ is a false one—serving only as an entry to a fictionalised memory—what is not noted is how this fictionality affects new narratives. That is to say, the more these ‘unauthentic’ memories—shaped by movies such as *Schindler’s List*, by the many stories of children at war—become the only *original* form of remembering for new generations, the more *reflexive* this memory becomes.

This manner of remembering, this collage, meta-like form of talking about the Holocaust, shows nowhere better than with the work of third-generation writers (or any

other form of artistic expression, for that matter). Before I expand on that, first a few words on generational memory and the term, 'third generation'.

The first shift from a direct—or, rather, as direct as memory permits—representation of experience appears in second generation writing. I use the term 'second-generation' not in its literal meaning, but instead as a more abstract concept, an adjective—referring more to *second-generation* novels, discussions, movies. By doing this I will stray from referring to a child of a survivor or someone born after the war, and try to more broadly speak of artists who can only experience the event they are reflecting on through related accounts. This second-generation writing, or at least this attempt at reconstructing a memory not experienced by the self, expresses what Geoffrey Hartman calls "the trauma of memory turning in the void" (18). These creators of second-generation information face the challenge of confronting the Holocaust, an event that is still very much a presence and an influence on their cultural identity, at one remove. The reason the second-generation can better be defined in their relation to the trauma rather than their position in time reflects the best in their manners of representation: in their writing, events of the Holocaust remain pressing, but the portrayal is less immediately proximate, more abstract (Lang, 45).

This abstraction of representation has expanded and developed over the years, and especially in the fiction of the last decade there is a broader range of themes written by authors who are both personally—and thematically—difficult to quantify. The more distanced our current present is from the events of the Holocaust, the larger the diversity in the generations who—in whatever way—relate to that event. Or in other words, the blur in the classification and broadening of themes in a way reflects the distance of the temporal as well as the emotional sense. According to Jessica Lang, what marks the largely unquantifiable 'third generation' would be their writing, a third degree of separation from the event: a relation to the Holocaust that is mediated by both first-hand and second-hand memories of the event, a coming together of re-creation and imagination (45).

The third-generation, as defined so far, uses the means of fiction to refer to—and incorporate—events from the Holocaust. However these references are not given as self-explanatory, singular instances of information. The inauthenticity, the fictional elements, the magic-realism that recur are emphasised to represent a removal from the truth: the events themselves and the ethics of whether or not they are portrayed properly or at all, are not subject to the same sort of analysis as they would have been a few decades earlier. This is

where the meta-approach of the third generation comes in: authors, along with their contemporary audience, are coming to experience the notion of the Holocaust indirectly, through a twisted narrative of an industry and from a distance. The particular imagined Holocaust that is portrayed in third-generation writing is, Lang argues, both explicit and obscured, both “memorial and method” (46). The indirect representation of the Holocaust within a novel seems to be the signature mark of a third-generation writer, a combined reaction to accumulated knowledge gathered indirectly—a retelling of a retelling, a criticism, part in respect to that which they do not know, part reflecting their own blurred identity. Where the second generation is marked by their attempts to repopulate an empty memory (Lang, 49), the third generation is faced with crossing two gaps, that of experience as well as memory. Where the second-generation literature was a reply, the third-generation is both a reply on text and an imagined text, a critical reflection of the industrialised creation of a collective narrative.

*The Unravelling: present factuality vs. past fictionality*

A narrative that, I believe, cannot help but unravel. The fictional elements, the *constructed* foundation of the contemporary Holocaust narrative cannot help but show. The reason for this, beyond the fact that the patchwork-like nature of the way we have learned to remember history is resulting in awkward and unfortunate ‘tributes’, is that the role of the Jewish identity in the narrative of the Holocaust simply does not comply with Jewish identity in the twenty-first century. The victimisation of Judaism, the emphasis put on anti-Semitism, quite simply and factually does not correspond with most Jewish identities today. To emphasise beforehand, however: the conclusion made here is in no way a notion that since the Jewish people are not ‘as persecuted’ during and leading up to WWII, the Holocaust need not be remembered, but rather that the role of Jewish suffering can no longer resound as it did in ’78, when the act of remembering the Holocaust was in comparison a new tradition and Israel’s image was still heavily supported by survivor-symbolism (Gutwein, 39). With political and military actions of the past decade tending more and more toward the right-wing, Israel’s position in the international discourse has shifted from its associated victimhood and more toward the question of oppression and violence in regards to its

occupation of Palestinian areas. An issue which, in fact, has been playing since the beginning of Israel yet has not been this much a part of the discussion since the late 40s.

To conclude, contemporary Holocaust memory is still alive—however, the role of victimhood does not, and *will* not fit in a lot of the Western discourses in which both Israel and diasporised Jews find themselves in. With that in mind, we find yet a new revival in Holocaust narratives—however, rather than trying to reconnect to an original true event, these narratives are in compliance with a friction between representation and identification. Between the role of victim and perpetrator: they inspect the identity that is represented as victim, yet learns it cannot identify as such. New stories are entering the discourse in which the position of victimhood, of fictionality, of truth and history is questioned. A new way of approaching Jewishness, of approaching the Holocaust and history at large—and what better way to create irony, create that somewhat uneasy feeling of teetering on the edge of what is ethically sound—a feeling that so many authors are so very fond of—than to question the discourse of the Holocaust using the oldest, most widely known symbol of the Holocaust?

In the coming chapter, I will support the thesis of third-generation writing reflecting a shift in Jewish identity by turning to (two) recently published works centred around or dealing with the theme of Anne Frank. The first will be Shalom Auslander's *Hope: a Tragedy* (2012), which I will compare and contrast to Nathan Englander's short story, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank* (2012).

**Anne Frank in *Hope: A Tragedy* and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank***

*Misery Olympics*

Shalom Auslander's novel, *Hope: a Tragedy*, published in early 2012, takes on the task of problematizing—of basically inverting contemporary Holocaust memory. Questions such as How does this event define us, or How would we act if (or when) it would happen again, are woven into the narrative—sometimes bluntly and directly addressing the reader, at other times as sharp-edged subtext, begging contemplation while the characters dryly dance around the subject with quick and often noxious dialogue.

The story tells the tale of Solomon Kugel, a middle-aged, somewhat paranoid character, Woody Allen in nature—so stereotypically Jewish from the paranoia to the ridiculous mother issues that the comical elements are turned frightening in their exaggeration. Kugel, referred to by his last name for most of the story—unless addressed by his mother, or wife—has phobias. The novel starts with an excerpt that seems to be plucked right out of the stream of consciousness of a manic mind, without any indication whether this mind is the narrator's or the main character's. Within those first few pages the prospect of dying in a fire—as opposed to all other options—is analysed, with the eventual conclusion being the ultimate irony of dying of the unexpected. That fires, rather than kill as a result of the heat, actually suffocate first—the smoke being too thick to breathe. From thereon out, the reader meets the sleepless Kugel, husband to Bree, father to their son Jonah, son to his Mother—just Mother, capital letter M, mother. It quickly becomes clear that they have just moved into a newly purchased farmhouse in the rural town of Stockton (“population twenty-four hundred, [ famous] for nothing” (12)), are renting one room to a nameless tenant, that Kugel's mother is living with them, and that Bree disapproves—and that Kugel wants to keep her there, close to them, as she is said to be on the brink of death. Throughout the slow exposition of the first few chapters, the voice of professor Jove is continuously called on—a strange figure that is said to be an advisor, a source of ultimate reason and intelligence for Kugel, often quoted yet never appearing in person—or over the phone, for that matter: Kugel only ever gets his voicemail. The driving force behind the unfolding of the plot is a

particular noise from the attic, a ticking at night that is keeping Kugel awake. He hopes for a mouse, a burglar at worse, but, as he creeps up the stairs in the early hours of the morning, finds something of an entirely different nature: an old lady, hiding her makeshift nook of a home behind a wall of boxes, typing away. Anne Frank, she claims to be, asking to be left alone—she is trying to finish her next book.

Kugel does not believe her right away. It is somewhat of an obscured thought within his overly analytical, neurotic mind whether or not he believes her ever—at times he tends toward yes, other times no, but the overall question never seems to come down to that. The authenticity of Anne Frank is, almost from the very beginning, quite trivial next to the ultimate question: will he let her stay, or will he kick her out? As Kugel worries over this in a gradually and more drastically self-sabotaging manner, several elements are starkly contrasted to the old lady in the attic: Mother, who—while having had a perfectly peaceful life, full of privilege and happiness—has somehow twisted her memory to believing she was in the Holocaust, that her entire family was in the Holocaust, and that she suffers extreme post-traumatic symptoms because of that. Bree, who *has* had a very difficult life at a young age but chooses very firmly to identify as someone who has suffered, but “not a sufferer” (41). And the fires, as well, the slow spread of pyromania all around Stockton—the burning down of deserted farmhouses by an (for the most part of the story) anonymous criminal.

In worrying about what would happen were he, Kugel, *a Jew*, to kick out *Anne Frank*—who is quite unkind in her old age, angry and bitter and extreme in her opinions—in worrying about what it says about him *as a Jew* that he wants her out of his house, Kugel loses track of his life. He falls down stairs and breaks several limbs when Anne throws blunt items at his head to get him out of her attic, he lies to Bree, he angers the tenant, he loses his job and spends far too much money on buying things he thinks Anne needs. Throughout this the smell of rot and decay lingers through the house, a smell that Kugel cannot get rid of no matter what. At first it is the remains of animals Anne has eaten throughout the years, hiding up in the attic, then it is his mother defecating in the ventilation duct—“Ever since the war” is her teary reaction on being caught, “Those sons of bitches” (130)—and Kugel pours more and more industrial cleaner down the shafts, hoping it would go away, though it never does. He goes through these bizarre motions while making lists, thinking up ‘last words’, hypothetical instances of death and escape, spiralling into a frazzled state of confused obsession. Anne Frank delivers one-liners and words of angry wisdom, Jove will not pick up

his phone, Mother is doing better than ever when the secret comes out and it turns out they have the most famous of all survivors hiding in their attic. The story culminates awkwardly and painfully: Bree leaves with Jonah, the pyromaniac turns out to be the son of the house's old owner—though he is not the one who burns down the house. It is Mother, who has just read Anne Frank's new manuscript and hates it so much she tries to set it on fire—sheets catch flame, walls catch flame, and soon the whole farmhouse is alight. Kugel tries to save his mother but cannot, he tries to go after Anne but fails—she is saved by Alan Dershowitz, who has swooped out of nowhere to whisk her out the window. Kugel dies in the fire, Mother dies in the fire, and the story ends with an epilogue of a different couple moving in to a new house. On expressing doubts with the prospect of having to renovate, Eve, the real estate agent, gives them a wordy speech—as she tends to do throughout the story—on the fiction of it all. On how, no matter how awful or wonderful an event was, we always rewrite it in memory: some glorify it, some tear it down, but “one way or the other [ . . . ] fiction will return, if only because the nonfiction is too damned much to bear” (291).

The subject of truthfulness, of history as an event and history as a memory, seems—in the end—to be the story's most central one. Mother, who rewrites her American, post-war childhood as a mid-European, Holocaust memory, is one of the most blatant examples of the problematizing approach Auslander takes to Holocaust memory. A particular scene that portrays this notion with a high level of shock-value, is when Kugel recalls himself as a child and his mother sitting at his bedside holding a lamp. “This is your grandfather,” she had said. He took the lamp, inspected the bottom, quips, “It says Made in Taiwan.” “Well they're not going to write Made in Buchenwald, are they?” (64-5). Kugel grows up thinking every household item is a lost relative who died in the Holocaust, dares not use or touch any furniture, and only learns of his mother's imaginative way of passing on a history in school, when—after pointing at a widely recognised picture of three naked men at a concentration camp and saying, That's my uncle!—he is told that this is not the case. His mother's reaction, that day and every time her identification with the trauma is questioned, was—*What's the difference?* What is the difference, this narrative begs of the reader time and time again, between something horrible happening to *you*, to a family member, to a friend—and something horrible happening to someone, somewhere, at one point or another? This question is put forth time and time again when characters, while discussing the Holocaust, or defending their relation—their *right* to identify with it—repeatedly demand, How many

relatives did *you* lose? The scathing reflection on a society that cuts and compares misery, that constantly aims to *quantify* misery, is right below the surface of the story's comically bizarre fabric.

The irony is evermore emphasised through Anne Frank's character herself—the most well-known, most public, most *rewritten* symbol of the Holocaust to date. Her story has been passed from hand to hand, from play to movie to icon, not so much woven into the contemporary Holocaust narrative as in part defining its shape and content. Everything about her, all that has been used to create her paradigmatic image, is subverted: instead of a child she is eighty, instead of hopeful and optimistic she is bitter and hateful, instead of universal she is clearly identified as foreign—occasionally speaking in half-German—and Jewish, too, ordering Kugel to get her *mazoh* and *gefiltefish* from the shop, for that is the only thing she will eat. And, most importantly perhaps, alive instead of dead—escaped from Bergen-Belsen at the last moment, living in the attics of guilt-driven Germans who would not dare to kick her out. Once, Anne tells Kugel, she went to the publisher in Amsterdam—tried to explain who she was, what she had written, and how she had claim to the rights. The response was not positive. “No one wants a live Anne Frank,” the publisher told her. “They want a martyr, they want to know we’ve hit rock bottom. That it gets better, because it can’t get worse” (60). Bree, at another point, asks Kugel mid-argument whether he thinks that “anyone would have read that fucking book if she had survived?” Kugel, apprehensive and weary of Anne Frank listening to their discussion, asks Bree what her point is, exactly, and she answers that “death is more tragic than life, than any life, because every life has hope of some kind. She’s alive, Kugel—and she needs to go” (163).

Auslander creates a harsh and critical narrative, not shying away from—if not actively looking for—ethically dubious statements, symbols and themes. The reader is at never at one point sure whether the sole act of quantifying suffering is criticized, or rather the fact that this is how far we have come—or perhaps both, or if what we are witness to is the narrator's own inverted self-criticism. One thing is clear, *becomes* clear despite the novel's many paradoxical statements and running themes: there is something wrong about the way we talk about death. There is something wrong with the way we talk about *this* particular death.

In grounding this notion, this twisted uneasiness with the subject matter of the story (“The diary of Anne Frank, read Anne, [has] becomes a symbol for all the children who died

in that genocide. [ . . . ] I am, she said, become death” (265)), Auslander creates a very clear distinction between two kinds of people: those who have suffered, and those who are sufferers. Those who have suffered, who are perhaps defined by it but do not define themselves by it—and those who, whether or not they have actually suffered, have become their suffering: they are constantly, continuously, suffering. Mother, for example, is the greatest sufferer of them all, taking part in a particular “misery Olympics”, as Kugel calls it at one point, one he “didn’t want to compete in, the losers of which lost all claim to their legitimate pain, the winner of which won nothing but pity” (76). Kugel, for his part, is also a sufferer—unable to step away despite the fact he can see, can actually comprehend the ludicrous nature of his behaviour: going with in his mother’s imaginings, throwing fruit and vegetables out into the garden each morning so she thinks she has grown them. Anne Frank is a sufferer who does not want to be one, who refuses to go with in the ‘Industry’ (“I think never forgetting the Holocaust is not the same thing as never shutting up about it”(266)), yet is intrinsically a part of it. More than anything, she is a symbol of suffering itself, how the subject has become tired of its own role in society—has grown heavy and cynical of itself. In contrast to those three, Bree and Jonah are a completely different story—almost literally, their presence an alien and odd voice that if invoked (which is not often), reads as misplaced and awkward. It remains unclear, throughout the entire story, whether Bree actually believes Anne Frank is in the attic or takes the whole idea as one of her husband’s guild-driven fancies—a symbol, as it were, for a life she does not want to be a part of. “You want to live with Anne Frank over your head,” she tells Kugel at one point, “be my guest. But I’ll be damned if my son will” (164).

### *The Anne Frank Game*

If it were not made clear enough by the characters’ positioning who was on what side of the moral dilemma, the symbolism certainly does the job. The names are laden with it: professor Jove, the distant and cryptic professor who never answers his phone—filling an appropriately absent role of a God-like figure. Eve, the evilly inclined real estate agent with her smooth talk—offering unsavoury homes in a town without a history. The tenant without a name, only remembered as ‘something biblical’, Bree—derived from the Hebrew word for health, or birth. Jonah, too, decidedly resides on the more positive end of the naming

spectrum: Jonah means dove, and the adjective of 'peace' seems silently implied. The town is an odd mix of biblical references, of ancient figures dressed in modern clothes, history running wild and aimlessly through a place that is said to hold no history. Those who cannot let history go, who cannot place themselves in a future that does not revolve around it, are doomed to come to their end—are doomed to grow mad, to suffer bowel-problems whenever ingesting a food that is linked to their past (Kugel, on getting stomach cramps after eating Ezekiel bread and later a mazoh, declares his stomach to be anti-Semitic), Anne throwing up in the ventilation shaft, mother defecating in them, Kugel with his irritable bowel syndrome unable to hold back and diving behind a bush by Eve's office to do his deed. It is crass, yes, it is problematic and it does not let the reader off easily. Involvement is inevitable, through either sympathy or anger, agreement or disagreement regarding the stylistically questionable choices Auslander has made in criticizing the conversations we have when we talk about the Holocaust.

He is not alone in that. Nathan's Englander's collection of short stories, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*, published in the same month, seems to reflect a new trend that literary works concerning the Holocaust have been building up to over the past few years. The first story of the collection, identically titled, concerns itself with the same subject of problematic Holocaust discourse. Only where Auslander tends toward the shock-value induced surrealism, Englander's strengths lie in his characters' realistic dialogue. The story itself is quiet in the sense that not much actually *happens*; the plot revolves around two couples who used to know each other years ago, and meet up again one summer's day. They do so in the Florida home of one of the couples, that of the narrator and Deb, his wife, both Jewish but secular. Mark and Lauren, their guests, are on a brief vacation to find proper housing for Mark's elderly father, a survivor. They have come over from Jerusalem, their home for the past twenty years; Mark and Lauren moved there all those years ago, or rather—have made the '*aliyah*' (which means "*to go up*, [. . .] the idiomatic term used to describe immigrating to Israel" (Auslander, 139)), as well as converted to a strictly orthodox lifestyle. To symbolise the change they have undergone, the two have also changed their names: Lauren is now Shoshanna, Mark is Yuri. The differences are, as such, clearly made. Two Jewish families who seemed to have started out more or less at the same place in life, yet ended up in very different destinations. The one, children of survivors, reformed religious and newly Israeli, the others coming from a Jewish American household,

now secular and Floridian. Over the course of the afternoon they spend together, the four talk—drink, smoke, reminisce, and play the *Anne Frank game*. A game where the player mulls over the loaded question of who will hide them were there to be another Holocaust—whether their friends, their significant other, would be prepared to risk their lives for them. A game that, not quite calling it a ‘game’, Auslander incorporates throughout his narrative as well: Kugel would interrupt his train of thought to wonder at his neighbours, at his co-workers, at quite anyone’s willingness to hide him and his family were it necessary. To hide himself, in a way, hide in his own attic. In much a similar way, in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*, Deb and her husband’s conclusion of the game is the idea that they can close off a part of their own house were it necessary, create a space behind the pantry for them to hide. Soon after that, as the conversation and mood of the day shift toward something slightly darker, the four turn the game in on itself, directing the question of ‘would you?’ at their significant other. Deb stares at her husband, the narrator, for a long, thoughtful moment before confidently declaring: if he was not Jewish, and she was, and a situation would arise where she needed to hide, he would be the ‘kind of person’ who would help her. Shoshanna and Yuri play the same version of the game, directing it at one another, yet their conclusion is silent and significantly sombre. The story ends on the unspoken note of Shoshanna who, the reader is made to believe, has concluded her husband not to be ‘the kind of person’ who, in a different life and a different time, would have helped her.

While the styles of storytelling are different, and the feel of each of the two tales is uniquely their own, the themes resound a great deal in thought and even in the paradoxes they create. “It’s like she’s a survivor kid, my wife,” the narrator tells Mark (Yuri) at one point, explaining her reaction to an unsatisfactory end of a Holocaust-related story just told.

It’s crazy, that education they give them. Her grandparents were all born in the Bronx, but it’s like, I don’t know. It’s like here we are, twenty minutes downtown from Miami, but really it’s 1937 and we live on the edge of Berlin. It’s astounding.  
(14)

A passage that could have just as easily been written by (albeit a milder version of) Auslander. On the one hand, the issue of the presence of Holocaust memories in families, in

individuals who were very distant from the actual event is pervasive. It is a question most often recurring in the voice of Mark,

What I'm trying to say, whether you want to take it seriously or not, is that you can't build Judaism only on the foundation of one terrible crime. It is about this obsession with the Holocaust as a necessary sign of identity. As your only education tool. Because of the children, there is no connection otherwise. Nothing Jewish that binds (21)

In the voice of Auslander's Bree, in the voice of his old-lady Anne Frank, in the voice of 'those who have suffered', the non-sufferers, the *born again*—Mark and Lauren are born again in religion. In name, in identity; Bree, birth and renewal being quite literally *her name*. The theme of the shifting centre of Jewish identity, of *Israel* in that equation, is inescapable and often wrapped up in confusion and indignation. In *Hope: a Tragedy*, Kugel at one point thinks back to an old lover, Aleeyah, "whom Mother disapproved of for not being Jewish". Aleeyah represents, in the most obvious ways, a different kind of Jewishness, one that is bound to a different, far more nationalistic cause. This, Kugel explains, made him want her even more. "So much did he want her," in fact,

he was willing to overlook the fact her name, in Hebrew, mean *to go up*, the idiomatic term used to describe immigrating to Israel; Kugel hated the superiority and judgement implicit in that term, and though he loved Aleeyah and thought the world of her, he was concerned that a part of him, however small, just wanted to "fuck Aleeyah" (139)

The crass, blatant irony through which Auslander confronts issues of identity and belonging is then pushed even further into the realm of ethical dubiousness when the narration goes on to say that unfortunately,

Aleeyah was an intensely political member of the African American community, and all she seemed to want to speak about with Kugel was the suffering of her people, of slavery and Tuskegee and Birmingham (139)

The metaphors within Auslander's narrative are abundant and tend to overlap, to cross and to discontinue at will. Here, the presence of Israel presents itself as a distant character within the story—though it is not the kind Israel Kugel likes to identify with too much, nothing that represents Jewishness or Jewish suffering as such. There is 'superiority' in the word Aleeyah, and then the reference to the bothersome need to only 'talk about the suffering of her people'; the reader is presented with an uneasiness dealing with the question of belonging, and a confusing terminology in dealing with identification. Aleeyah, both the character and her name's phonetic meaning in Hebrew, represent a non-connection with Israel, a redirection of a victimised identity. This theme is reinforced in Englander's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*, where Yuri argues that Israel as it is now, has become a society that has supposedly transcended the Holocaust-centric forming of collective memory—of private memory. Though other characters within the two stories counter these points of view, a general perspective is presented here: Israel, with its new role in the political power dynamics of the Middle East, in its supposed post-Holocaust-centric collective identity (which, I would argue, can only possibly seem that way from a non-Israeli point of view), can no longer represent the kind of Jewishness with which these characters wish to identify.

### *Who is Right, Anyway?*

However, this disposition—though presented by the writers, the narrators and characters involved as a somewhat morally superior stance—is not made to stand unopposed. The voices and thoughts that counter each grand statement are not vapid and are allowed genuine (though in Auslander's case, somewhat extreme) content and contemplation. Rather than providing the conventionally 'cleverer' characters with shallow arguments meant only to reinforce the overarching theme of memory re-appropriation, characters such as Deb—Englander's narrator's 'like a survivor's kid' wife—enter the discussion uneasy yet demanding a certain middle-ground on which they can talk. Deb takes offence, for example, when Mark in the conversation following his statement that for people who are not religious there is "nothing Jewish that binds", goes on to say that the Jewish culture does not exist. That culture is imaginary, a construction of modern culture, and continues with

claiming that in Israel, in *religious* Israel, life and marriage is better because there, people do not centre their lives around the Holocaust. They “live as our parents lived before the war” (22). Deb’s retorts is quick and to the point,

Are you saying your marriage is better than ours? [ . . . ] Really? Just because of the rules you live by? That makes a marriage stronger—just between any two random people? (22)

Mark’s reply is that their marriage is *welded* together, rather than ‘glued’. This statement is easily subverted toward the end of the story, where—in playing the ‘Anne Frank’ game—it is made clear for both couples, as well as the reader, whose relationship would ‘withstand a Holocaust’. The issue seems to be one of a generation, a society torn between imaginary futures: one where the Holocaust is incorporated into the grand narrative and left behind, a horrific yet finite event that need not be insisted on, and another where—in the case of history repeating itself—we must constantly be prepared, be reminded, make plans as to where we hide, who will help, who will abstain from saving others.

What defines the two stories the most, in the end, is the fact that in this fork-in-the-road narrative of thought-games and what-ifs, it is never clear who is to be the victim—and who the perpetrator. While Kugel often wonders who will hide *him*, who would help his family in case of a sudden American Holocaust (an event which Finkelstein ominously hints at in the case of Israel becoming obsolete in America’s politics), throughout the story the situation never once arises where he has to call in for that form of aid—for protection, for someone to risk their lives. He is, in fact, the only one put in that position: he is forced to face the literal actualisation of the Anne Frank game, made to face the question of whether or not he would do the ‘right thing’ when in a privileged position. There is, however, no Holocaust: just a society that, Auslander seems to say, prefers her dead.

*Anne Frank: the ultimate irony*

In both stories the presence of the Anne Frank story, its many versions and its iconic symbolism, serve as a tool to relate to a cultural identity, to Jewishness where it seems that there is “nothing Jewish that binds” (Englander, 21), to a history that is not directly

accessible. A history that is not only defined by a single factual event, but by receptions, stories and reactions of the generations that followed. Kugel's identity, for example, is formed by the notion of the Holocaust as history as well as the knowledge that for the decades that followed, that history has forever remained problematic within the narrative of both his national and ethnic identity. Anne Frank represents that perfectly: her story is unreachable, but has been changed, debated over, questioned and problematized making it accessible in its fictional nature.

She has become, in a way, forever a symbol of the state or development of a collective identity. In the fifties she took on the role of the American hope, its future—she was the German guilt, the Jewish trauma, standing centre-stage to the renewal of memory toward the twenty-first century. Formed as a sounding board to allow self-exploration, Anne Frank's symbol has become intrinsic to the way any certain community positions itself in relation to the Holocaust—a representation of whatever the reader chooses to project, be it a hopeful vision of the future (thereby negating any sense of responsibility or repercussions), an empty character from which one can obtain a sense of forgiveness (again, negating responsibility while ignoring the victim's autonomy), or as seen in the two works discussed: a representation of the shifting dynamics of Jewish identity in relation to world politics.

In a 1988 article, *The Need to Forget*, Yehuda Elkana warned that “Any philosophy of life predicated solely or mostly on the Holocaust would have disastrous consequences.” Though acknowledging the cultural importance of history and collective memory (Gutwein, 41), he argued that, “The past is not and must not be allowed to become the dominant element determining the future of society and the destiny of people.” Beyond that, while anti-Semitism is still very much prevalent in certain ways, in certain societies and presents itself insidiously at times—the Jewish community, or simply Jewish-identifying persons, are finding themselves in certain positions of power unprecedented in modern history. That is to say, with the political rise of Israel and its connection to the United States, the Jewish identity has slowly gained a narrative of middle-eastern power politics that seems in conflict with the institutionalised narrative of victimisation. In conflict because, while at first popularised with the intention of normalising the supposed idea of Israeli military assertiveness, the Holocaust-centric identity does not easily correspond with the problematic nature of transforming the “construction of the Holocaust's memory into a political act”, in particular one aimed toward the Arab world and the Palestinians (Gutwein,

40). The roles of victimhood and perpetrator are being subverted, not simply in a general manner but physically as well: skirmishes in and around the border are often reported with an odd sense of this many Israeli soldiers versus that many Palestinians, questions of identity, of belonging, of literally crossing lines are being overturned and restored every day. In relation to that, the sacred and inaccessible nature of Holocaust memory—the obsessive manner in which we still *try* to rewrite it, to access it—seems almost incompatible.

Of course, overarching statements such as that are not absolute—not that black and white. In practice, it is all shades of grey when it comes to modern Jewish-Israeli power politics, but in forming and coming to terms with one's identity the questions seem to be somewhat more pronounced: is this society, in coming to terms with a recent history in which violence and power are to be claimed, accounted for, inserted into the narrative of world history, losing its sense of togetherness—or perhaps losing its understanding of suffering, be it ours or that of others? The answer is ambiguous. Kugel and his mother, sufferers and keepers of the past, die in a fire. Englander's narrator and Deb come out better, secure in that they will fight for each other if the time comes. What also remains in the dark, seems to be the larger issue of which one of the two is it that we are striving for? Do we truly want to *never* forget what suffering meant—or would we rather forget, if only because it means that we gain the chance to define ourselves by other means?

## Conclusion

The conclusion to this all is, I am afraid, not so much an answer as an awareness of a question that is being asked louder and more often than before. A question of identity, of the ownership of memories as well as the responsibilities that 'ownership' brings with it. Identity politics concerning Jewishness are coming to a culmination that has built up over the course of over seventy years, tipping and trying for balance between two wildly different but major events that have shaped and defined Jewish identity today: the founding on Israel on the one end, and the Holocaust on the other. The shift from Holocaust-centrism in not just Jewish identity, simply *Western* historical identity, to a far more middle-eastern focus of identification (how does *my* community place itself in relation to Israel, to the Middle-East), is showing in the changing direction of discourse within the media. The roles of victim and perpetrator are, if not subverted then at least given more depth—more room to present themselves as not as clear-cut, as occasionally overturned, as not clear-cut.

This trend is overtly found in recent works of third-generation, their themes and topics already approaching and playing with the notion of the fictionalising history. Magic realism, generationality, and distance in belonging are all recurring elements within third-generation writing. The removal from a history over two degrees (the actual event, then the texts written as inspired by the event, followed by the interpretations of those texts), is acknowledged and problematized through self-reflexive styles. Irony through symbolism, as well, is an often recurring method of introducing certain themes. Anne Frank, it seems, is the most popular of those ironic symbols.

The irony in using her character, or her story in a third-generational context, comes from the highly re-appropriated nature of her story from the moment it was published. Anne Frank has, over the years, been used as a poster child for many a collective movement within a society: the American, post-war drive for positivism, the focus and claim of a guilt-ridden post-war German youth, the centralised core of reclaiming the narrative of the Holocaust in the seventies—and many more. Though each instance is different, the common ground is the nature of her character: she becomes a vehicle, a representation of an imaginary set of characteristics through which a reader, an audience or a narrator can explore their own identity.

Reviving her presence once more, two contemporary writers—Shalom Auslander and Nathan Englander—join in the tradition of the re-appropriation of Anne Frank. In their novels, *Hope: a Tragedy* and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*—respectively—they both touch on the subjects of how we remember the Holocaust, and whether there is something intrinsically wrong about the way we do it. And what better way to invoke the issue, the ironic edge it has, the way one cannot escape an institutionalised and collective narrative of memory, than to do it through the voice and presence of the most famous and *famously appropriated* character of them all—Anne Frank?

In his novel, Shalom Auslander calls into question the shifting victim-identity by creating a character—Solomon Kugel—who greatly struggles with the fact he has to literally hide Anne Frank in his attic. Anne Frank who is old, who is not nice, and who regularly defecates in his ventilation shafts. Englander, in his short story, calls on her in the form of a game—the *Anne Frank game*—or rather, simply describing what a couple talks about *when they talk about Anne Frank*. Would my husband, my wife, my significant other—my neighbour, co-worker, grocery clerk—would they help me, hide me, risk their lives for me in the case of a Holocaust? Within the two stories, there is always a clear divide between characters who refuse to play this game—or eventually play it, only to be deeply disappointed with the results—and those who take it seriously, too seriously, who seem themselves genuinely awaiting a ‘next Holocaust’.

This divide, in a way, between identifying through a horrific history to prepare for a similar future—and refusing to centralise it with the notion that the future will not come down to being victimised—reflects the struggle for balance and mutuality in contemporary Jewish identity politics, one that encompasses history as well as a present in which Jewish-Israeli power dynamics are far more difficult to grasp. Or, in other words, a meditation on an identity’s move from remembering suffering to learning how to place others’ suffering within a collective narrative—how to fit the possibility of power and the misuse of that power in a narrative of a community that has mostly known oppression and persecution.

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