

**How Safe Are You? Themes, concerns and metaphor of Jewish  
second-generation literature in the novel *To Life*.**

**Kirsten Warner**

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### Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

Date

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**How Safe Are You? Themes, concerns and metaphor of Jewish second-generation literature in the novel *To Life*.**

**INTRODUCTION**

The novel *To Life* concerns the inheritance of psychic trauma by the child of a survivor of the Jewish Holocaust, and is part of the genre of second-generation literature. In this exegesis I will examine the genre's frames of reference and some of its themes and concerns as relating to the novel *To Life*. Firstly, I will discuss some of the creative process of writing the novel, and why I felt compelled to do so. Within that I discuss feelings of lack of entitlement as a second-generation writer, and the transformation of personal history into fiction. I then examine 'second generation' as a psychological description of growing up with the Holocaust, and how I have tried to recreate this in the novel. I will outline the frames of reference of second-generation literature and how they shaped this novel. In particular I will examine voice, tense and point of view; memory and postmemory; and the subconscious made conscious. The exegesis identifies metaphor as a tool for second-generation writers. In related works and in *To Life*, I discuss how megametaphor operates through the text as a whole, by representation, comparison and association, to indicate that something is going on under the surface. In *To Life*, the underlying question for someone of the second generation is, "How safe are you?"

## SYNOPSIS

The novel inhabits the interior world of Christel, the child of a Holocaust survivor. Christel is working hard, maintaining home life with partner, Ted, and two small children, Maisie and Jim, and a career as a television writer/researcher on the programme *The Safety Factor*, although ethical reservations about reality television are adding stress. She becomes involved in an environmental campaign, Women Against Surplus Plastic (WASP) and constructs a giant sculptural figure out of empty bottles, Milk Bottle Man, for the campaign. The past keeps rising into Christel's everyday world, like from a pressure cooker Christel can't quite keep the lid on. There is her survivor father and his stories; memories of her parents, Conrad and Stella, and their secrets; of three abusers from her past, Karate Man, Artist and Teacher. Christel has what seem to be memories of experiences of the Jewish Holocaust. As well, an unpleasant character keeps turning up whom she recognises as Big C, the voice of her inner critic. Keep remembering, Big C tells her, otherwise you will never understand and never be free. But Milk Bottle Man runs off from its creator, and sets about exacting revenge on Karate Man, Artist and Teacher, as well as Christel's Fat Controller Boss. At the heart of the story is Christel's discovery about what her father was doing when he went away once a year to meet Klara, the Upstairs Woman.

## CREATIVE PROCESS

*To Life* started as a dialogue with Big C in a role-play. Big C started talking, and there was no stopping him. Big C was angry, critical and complaining in a nasty, undermining way, but also sometimes an ally. I kept writing down what Big C said. Big C was enraged by the way no one (me) was listening, which was why he had to shout. In particular he was angry with 'them' – and they became Artist, Karate Man and Teacher. Big C was a real shocker, but generally entertaining when I read to my writer's group what he was saying, and the writing seemed to speak about the domestic-professional-personal pressures on a modern woman. But a dialogue and a lot of hectoring wasn't a story. I needed to find out whose voice it was, what was behind it, where it came from.

My father was a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany who arrived in New Zealand in 1939, on his own, aged 18. I am not Jewish, as inheritance is matrilineal and my mother is not. But I had been a member of the Auckland Second Generation Group for some

years, and I linked some of Big C's warnings and anger with this inheritance. Until I joined the group, I had not realised that this legacy had possibly been relevant to me (although not the cause of every personal unhappiness or hurt).

In finding the story of Big C, I drew on stories I heard in my second-generation group, from my wider reading and knowledge, and from a radio interview I heard with an Australian ex-serviceman about his time as *Sonderkommando* (crematorium worker) in Auschwitz. Upon returning home, he said nothing, as his story was so unbelievable, but once a year he went to a motel by himself to express his repressed feelings. I never forgot that interview, and it formed the basis for this book. I believe he was Donald Watt (1995) whose book and story is seemingly now discredited as untrue. But his story bears strong similarities to information from other sources, and there were Allied soldiers interned in concentration camps who received compensation from their governments. It did not matter to me particularly if the work were true or not. Of more concern to me is the implication or notion that the work of fiction is necessarily less compelling, powerful or urgent than witness testimony.

I did not want to define myself by this second generation inheritance only. Nevertheless, I was compelled to write this book. Otherwise who would remember? As Castles (2011) writes in *Burning in: A sensory inheritance of family history*: "In the 21st century, as the Second World War passes from living memory, various art forms carry the injunction to remember. Novelists, often retrieving their materials from the vault of family history, fuse memory and imagination in their attempts to perceive antecedent experiences" (p. 1).

I have drawn from my own family stories, from those of others I know, and made up the rest. I thank my survivor father Günter Warner (now nearly 92 years old) for what he will surely recognise of us, although I have struggled to feel entitled to use my background. My father has not previously objected to my writing, but I fear he might this time. As Uncle Haskell says in one of Thane Rosenbaum's stories in *Elijah Visible* (1996): "Your father had an excuse for his suffering. What reason do you have to carry these sins around like bricks?" (p. 62).

I have not written my own story. My father was a refugee although his family died, as Conrad's did in the book. I have deliberately changed the character (and fate) of the father in the novel, who may tell some of my own father's stories in a similar way, but is different in terms of values, occupation and orientation in the world. I still worry about how the story will be read, how my father will see 'himself' thus portrayed: that I have somehow exploited him, appropriated his sorrows; joined the second-generation

circus, the vast network of activities, lectures, conventions, experts and now large field of writers both personal and theoretical; that I am transgressing. I can hear my father's rather cynical comment: "There's no business like Shoah business."

But write I must, like the boy in Lev Raphael's *The Tanteh* (1986, as cited by Berger, 1990) who wins an award for his essay about his aunt's experiences, deeply offending her. Even after numerous apologies and while regretting taking and using her story, he knows he would write it many more times.

I am by some definitions not a child of a survivor, as my father had managed to escape from Berlin in the weeks preceding the outbreak of World War II. But by most considerations I am second generation, and I have produced other works of fiction, poetry, memoir and film that concern this inheritance. I had already undertaken two edits of *To Life* for a New Zealand publisher, and had a detailed developmental edit from an American editor. I followed the American edit in the first part of the Master of Creative Writing, but was not convinced the work had been improved or even survived well. After discussion with my supervisor, I decided to write the book again, this time for me. The second part of the year was recovering and returning the work to something closer to its original form, which I think has been strengthened by such close rewriting.

Within the genre, there is a lot of writing that is family memoir-based, and fiction that tells of the survivor parent, but I did not set out to do that. I wanted to tell an imaginative story that put the second-generation first.

## **TERMINOLOGY - HOLOCAUST or SHOAH**

The words Holocaust 'sacrifice by fire' or 'burnt offering' and the Hebrew Shoah 'calamity' have become inter-changeable in referring to the Nazi genocide. I use Holocaust in acknowledgment of the vast number of people other than Jews who were exterminated or lost their lives. Unless otherwise specified, I use second generation to refer to children of survivors rather than children of perpetrators.

## **SECOND GENERATION**

It should be possible to read a novel without any other context, and the novel should make you believe in its world. But I describe *To Life* as belonging to a genre (second generation) and concerning transmission of trauma so I will examine these terms as relating to *To Life*.



By the end of the 1960s psychoanalysts were identifying emotional disturbances in the children of survivors. Epstein's (1979) *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations With Sons and Daughters of Survivors* was the first major second-generation publication. Children of Jewish survivors had started finding a common identity. All over the world, particularly in the United States with its large Jewish population, they were coming together to compare experiences of growing up with the Holocaust in the house: with their parents' grief, unfinished mourning, anxiety, over-protection and high expectations.

But the first and for me most influential work I read was Israeli psychotherapist Wardi's *Memorial Candles* (1992). Wardi had worked for 20 years with children of survivors when she published her study of their inner world and of how Holocaust trauma carried across generations. Not herself the child of a survivor, Wardi remembers reading in Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (1987) of how he stood naked in the snow for an Auschwitz roll call. Wardi (1992) imagined her own grandfather and grandmother in his place: "The feeling of terrible humiliation and anxiety caused by this picture was so strong I couldn't bear it... it seemed to me that I had experienced a tiny taste of the intense feelings and anxieties in the depths of the soul of every child of survivors" (p. 4).

The intention of the Nazi war on Jews was not just extermination; it was the destruction of human status. Psychic dismantlement and rearrangement was inevitable in the process of surviving, destroying personal identity and sense of belonging. Wardi (1992) refers to the excessive defense, denial and compartmentalisation of survivors. It was inevitable that survivors would try to rebuild themselves through new families. Wardi's patients, their children, suffered from depression, anxiety, sensitivity to separation, and the wish to protect their parents and suffering people in general. She observed that one child in particular in a family, unconsciously designated the 'memorial candle', carried the memory of lost relatives and hopes for the future, and was drawn into the parents' emotional world to a greater extent than siblings.

I have tried to show these dynamics within *To Life*. Conrad's behaviour, his essential absence in spite of his looming presence, is the puzzle that Christel cannot separate herself from. Christel is caught up in the emotional world of both her parents, but her adult rage is directed at others, not at the parents she loves and the father who the family system protects. Hoffman (2004) describes her own experience: "...no matter how I might want to hurt my parents, or how much I felt they hurt me, I couldn't touch them in the wounded places; I couldn't violate by the slightest indelicacy their mourning and

their deep, embodied anguish” (p. 14). Hoffman (2004) observes that to make a chronological narrative of what happened would have been to make “indecently rational what had been obscenely irrational” (p. 15). One was not to make “... a nice story out of loathsome cruelty and piercing, causeless hurt” (p. 15). Here, indeed, is the challenge for the writer (myself) who feels impelled towards but essentially conflicted by the need to write, to record, to find meaning and art through story.

There is debate about what takes place and if it can be called ‘transmission’ of trauma. Trauma is a description of the *after-effects* of violence or shock, points out Hirsch (2001), whose term postmemory refers to the belated nature of traumatic memory itself.

If indeed one of the signs of trauma is its delayed recognition, if trauma is recognisable only through its after-effects, then it is not surprising that it is transmitted across generations. Perhaps it is *only* in subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation (p. 12).

It is clear that survivors could barely manage to resume normal life, let alone emotionally work through what had happened, and in this way Hirsch suggests that the psychological work of the child was to try to complete what the parent could not. Wardi (1992) observes that whenever the transmission occurs it generally takes on very similar forms. It is clear that themes and concerns are identifiable throughout second-generation literature and there is a large body of critical work and research to support this.

If survivors and first generation write *from* memory, the children of survivors write *about* memory. According to Hoffman (2004) “...those who are born after calamity sense its most inward meanings first and have to work their way outwards toward the facts and the worldly shape of events” (p. 16). She refers to images of skeletal figures, trenches and pits, smoke and barbed wire as “available right behind the eyelids” of children of survivors (p. 12). Over time, through literature, film, memoir and oral testimony, these images have become part of the whole, wider generation’s store of imagery and narration.

But at least survivor parents had a past before the Holocaust, she says, and were in some ways more fortunate than their children, who did not (Hoffman, 2004). For Hoffman, knowledge of her parents’ past and fear of another war were transmitted as “first knowledge, a sort of super-condensed pellet of primal information” (p. 6). The facts seemed such a certain part of her inner world as to be her own experience. But

they were not, and “in that elision, that caesura, much of the postgeneration’s problematic can be found” (p. 6). Hoffman’s (2004) early information, like Christel’s, I hope, in *To Life*, was taken in as a kind of folk tale which was not so much other-worldly (as in fantasy) but coming from the centre of the universe: more fable than fairy tale.

Hoffman and others (including myself) have a certain discomfort with ‘second generation’, as the term implies a special status, diagnosis, category. Epstein and early theorists referred to ‘children of survivors’ not to ‘second generation’. To van Alphen (2006) it implies a continuum or continuity between generations (as in an updated or new edition or facsimile), and some kind of shared “victimship” (p. 474). He questions if and how trauma were ‘transmitted’ as if handed on or passed down. His view is that disturbances in parent-child relationships are more accurately attributed to *failure of continuity*; that their children’s traumas were caused by being raised by a traumatised Holocaust survivor. He sees this *dis-continuity* not in an emotional, personal sense but in terms of intelligibility. But he does not dispute that the unease exists or is registered.

However it is described, the result appears to be that the after-effects of traumatic experiences are communicated between generations as through some kind of osmosis, and are then enacted by the next generation’s ‘postmemory’ through *representation, projection* and *creation* (Hirsch, 2008).

## LITERATURE OF THE SECOND GENERATION

The second generation is not a culture in terms of an identifiable social, ethnic or age group, but there are common ways of identifying, one of them the feeling of secondary-ness to something vast. Its writers are concerned with re-definition, with excavation, with emerging from under the weight of the past. Bukiet’s (2002) *Nothing Makes You Free, Writings by Descendants of Jewish Holocaust Survivors* is a collection from a genre he describes as “literarily exuberant and sometimes ‘experimental,’ viciously un-redemptive, scoured of weakness as they look atrocity straight in the face with barely contained rage” (p. 21). “Healing is another word for forgetting. Healing is what movies like *Life Is Beautiful* and *Schindler’s List* seek, the former with gratuitous vulgarity, the latter with insidious skill” (p. 22).

Second generation art and literature started emerging in the 1970s and more regularly in the 1980s. In 1972, Art Spiegelman published his first *Maus* comic strip. Spiegelman’s full-length graphic novel *Maus I* (1986), awarded a special Pulitzer Prize

in 1992, and *Maus II* (1991) are the most acclaimed and best-known texts of the genre. More recently the second-generation definition has expanded to include the children of Nazi perpetrators whose writing share structurally similar, if qualitatively different, feelings of being marked by an extreme experience of trauma and violence (McGlothlin, 2006). This can be read in Raczymow's *Writing the Book of Esther* (1995, as cited by McGlothlin, 2006):

It was his special fate to play a bit part in a play he hadn't written, a play performed years before his birth, with its own actors and audience. And once the curtain was down, he had to remain on the stage with the others, like him, born after the performance, or during, or before, remembering the play they had seen and acted in, as torturer or as victim. Was he waiting for the curtain to go up again?

This passage sets out the frame of reference for literature of the genre. This will now be discussed in terms of a number of areas; i) point of view, tense and voice, ii) memory and postmemory, iii) subconscious made conscious. As I discuss the generic characteristics of second-generation literature, I will also attempt to explore how they have shaped those of *To Life*.

### **i) Point of view, tense and voice**

Raczymow's passage above is written in the third person point of view ("he") that allows both author and characters a distance to comment, philosophise, explain or summarise and would enable an author to contextualise the second-generation world. But instead *To Life* tries to re-create that world from within, using a first person point of view. It traps the reader close to and inside Christel's increasingly alienated experience. I tried writing Christel entirely in the third person. I also tried using both points of view, with third person subjective ("she" and "Christel") for the past. However, the shift to third person brought distance, which did not support the book's intention. But this first person point of view came with challenges. For example, when Christel says in the opening sentence, "For a few moments I think it's still the weekend and I can stay in bed" (p. 2). I asked myself whom the narrative voice was talking to? I wondered if Christel were telling her story to us, the readers? Or to her self, as the voice inside her which responded to events as they unfolded? But information within the self mostly does not arrive in clearly formulated sentences; rather it arrives randomly, in images,

unfinished thoughts, memories, flashes and snatches of interior monologue (and in Christel's case, in dialogue). The challenge was to stay true to her multi-layered, fragmented and fragmenting inner self, but in a way that could be read as a story (therefore organised narratively with narrative drive) without interrupting the reader's sense of being within an actual person. In this way, *To Life's* first person, interior point of view is a deception, as its narrative world is in fact highly authorially organised and constructed for coherence and congruence.

The voice may appear to be an interior voice, but it must also be a voice communicating to another or others and is still *a story* that is being narrated (as opposed to the noise of consciousness and random thought). I have tried to get the narrative voice working both as interior commentary and as conversational, as if this were an account Christel tells someone else and simultaneously tells herself. To make sure that the voice works on both levels, I have started reading the manuscript aloud for a final edit (which is my intention for the whole book), as that identifies awkwardness or difficulty with voice and helps with timing and humour.

Initially I wrote everything in the present tense, and felt comfortable with that, in the way that the past and present were continuous, or felt that way for Christel. But I had feedback that this was somewhat relentless, and I needed to indicate story strand shifts. So to distinguish the current day from other times, I have put memory and history in the past tense.

The border between Christel's subjective view of the world and objective reality is blurred, as she moves from daily life to memory, to imagined or seemingly inherited 'postmemory' (discussed below), to projections of her subconscious world which appear real to her but are not necessarily true (for example, as the characters Milk Bottle Man and Big C). The writing of these transitions needed to be seamless, so that the reader was not aware of having made an imaginative leap that interrupts the flow of narrative. For example, in the opening scene, Christel is getting herself and the children ready for the day and 'flashes back':

If they say showers to one side, you go to the shower, the shower, all you can think of is getting clean, it's a long walk and your feet are numb. You take off your clothes, and there's shit, it's been three days standing squashed flat. You look up for the rosette and there are pipes across the ceiling and double-glassed lights and grates in the floor and the doors slam and lock and there is no water, there's no odour, no warning. You're frantic to get to the door, wedged between bodies, petrified into the basalt column, no one ever gets out.

Stop it, that's enough, it didn't happen to me. Snap out of it. (pp. 2-3)

## ii) Memory and postmemory

In the passage above, Christel thinks as if she has insider knowledge, as if she occupies a privileged position, closer than normal. This over-identification is not even with her father's experiences, but with stories he tells her of the fate of other Jews. Her 'memories' seem doubly imagined. Christel is well aware that she has no idea about what it must have been like in the war, and (as is common to second generation) doubts she would have been able to endure such hardships. She suspects her preoccupation is gratuitous and may be offensive. Fresco (1984) describes this absent memory as like the phantom pain felt in an amputated limb.

Normal memory goes backwards and forwards in some kind of sequence, is indexical: even disrupted memory, which may be partial, fragmented, distorted or interpreted, contains traces of the event. The event is the beginning the memory is the result. For survivors, says van Alphen (2006), continuity may be hampered and memory is more like an unmediated return of the event than an indexical, or contexted, account of it. But in children of survivors, the problem is not that their Holocaust memories are also mediated, but that the indexical relationship that defines memory never existed. They weren't there.

Hirsch's (2008) 'postmemory' is not a movement, method or idea (like postmodernism) but a *structure* of transmission of knowledge and experience. "It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove" (p. 106). Postmemory, says McGlothlin (2006), is concerned with the second-hand nature of its knowledge, and repeatedly attempts to bridge the divide through representation. Unlike the survivor generation's repetitions, which function as a kind of block, the second generation repeats to try and conjure up the original event. Its basis is, says Hirsch, in *displacement, vicariousness and belatedness* (Hirsch, 2001).

But 'post-ness', says Hoffman (2004), may be as simple as *coming after* the huge events that shaped the twentieth century and sometimes threaten to overwhelm the lives of those who follow. Second-generation writing, says McGlothlin (2006), performs a double move: it both records the calamity, and attempts a recovery through imagination. *To Life* can be read as attempting to do both for its second-generation author (myself) and its protagonist.

## iii) Subconscious made conscious:

Hoffman (2004) links knowledge of the shadows of experience to Freud's notion of the uncanny, the sensation of something both alien and deeply familiar that only the unconscious knows. *To Life* is a novel about the dynamics of the psyche (the totality of the human mind conscious and unconscious). Christel is a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown. One of the devices used to show this state of mind is the externalising of archetypes from Christel's subconscious as it comes knocking. Big C represents at times her inner Judge or Critical Parent and at times Jung's (1959) animus (the unconscious of the female expressed as a masculine inner personality). Milk Bottle Man may be seen as her shadow (the figure of her repressed rage).

At first, I wrote some characters with only capitalised nicknames rather than personal names but I have settled on using both, indicating varying levels of Christel's personal safety. Different parts of Christel's personality also play out in her projections onto others, shown also through the capitalised nicknames. For example, Teacher represents another face of the Judge: authoritarian rule-maker and enforcer of systems of thought; Teacher (there are at least four different ones) also represents having to perform, conform and learn the lesson. Jung (1959) observed that the archetypes occur on an ethnological level within myths and also occur within individuals who anthropomorphise reality when consciousness is weak, or in individuals where fantasy overruns the outside world (p. 67). This would normally happen with young children, but it also occurs in Christel whose disordered reality is threatening to overrun her.

## **METAPHOR**

According to Sicher (1998), the second generation's search for literary and personal identity is reflected in central themes or images and metaphors in their writing. To write about the second generation is to write the inheritance not of nothing, but of nothingness (Raczymow, 1994). How can writing and language take the reader on a descent into that nothingness, into the subconscious where emotional disturbance, grief and the irrational reside? How does fiction convey Hirsch's (2001) *displacement, vicariousness and belatedness*? The use of figurative language is one way these objectives may be achieved. Metaphor is clearly an important literary device. The following discussion examines the use of language, central ideas and metaphor in *To Life*.

Figures of speech are words or phrases used beyond their literal sense as imaginative tools in both literature and ordinary communications, to add clarity and beauty, intensify and extend meaning. Figurative language (as opposed to literal language) is language

that doesn't mean exactly what it says: cars do not wear bonnets, men are not ships, time is not a river. Figurative language deliberately interferes with literal usage by assuming that terms and meaning connected with one object can be transferred to another object. This interference or carrying over creates a new, wider or special meaning (Hawkes, 1972). This was my creative task.

Figurative language is usually descriptive, says Hawkes (1972), and is often referred to in terms of images, which implies that the figure of speech appeals primarily to the eye. But this is not the case. Figurative language may be visual, but its essential mode is linguistic, he says, and as a result its appeal goes much further.

Metaphor is a trope, a figure of speech where something is used to represent or stand for something else. "He is a lion of a man" gives the power of the lion (although not literally) over to the man. Metonymy is a closely related figure of speech, which involves applying the literal term for one thing to another which it is part of (Knowles, 2006). In second generation literature, the lost individual such as Modiano's (2000) Dora Bruder might stand in for a lost population; or the moustache as a metonym for Hitler.

Metaphor is, says Knowles (2006), a form of symbol and symbols can be private or personal. For example, Yeats used the tower and the phases of the moon in conveying his personal philosophy. Children's literature often uses the kitchen for safety and comradeship; gardens may convey sanctuary or escape. It is possible to see whole texts at metaphorical: a story that concerns one set of events and people is really a metaphor or allegory for another, for example, Aesop's fables, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where farm animals can be read to represent figures of the Soviet state. The whale in *Moby Dick* and the island in *Lord of the Flies* symbolise aspects of the human condition. Understanding of metaphorical language depends on both our linguistic competency and our cultural sensitivity, not just the surface structure of words on the page (Knowles, 2006).

There is another way of building metaphoric meaning, where metaphor is used not as a sentence artifact but to build meaning over a whole work. Kövecses (2010) calls this megametaphor. Metaphor achieves effect via association, comparison or resemblance. Some metaphors may run through entire literary texts without necessarily surfacing, but tend to appear in the form of micrometaphors, according to Kövecses (2010). Underlying these texts, however, is an extended metaphor that makes these surface micrometaphors coherent. The megametaphor provides, he says, a certain undercurrent. We sense the undercurrent but cannot necessarily see it, like a shadow that disappears



when you shine a light onto it. Kövecses (2010) describes Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood* as a complex interaction of specific metaphors, metonymy, and an extended metaphor: sleep is death. A similar interaction of metaphor and extended metaphor can be seen in Spiegelman's *Maus I* (1986) and *Maus II* (1991), which tell of his father Vladek's concentration camp experiences and both their contemporary lives. In these complex works, the predominant trope is the animal – Jews are drawn as mice, Germans as cats and Poles as pigs. McGlothlin (2006) examines a section in *Maus II* (1991, p. 41), in which Art portrays himself as a human body with a mouse mask. He is deeply troubled by the unexpected success of *Maus*, miserably recounting his fortunes – a baby on the way, critical and commercial success, movie and TV offers – juxtaposed in the same thought bubbles with his father's death, the date his father started work at Auschwitz, numbers exterminated, his mother's suicide. Art is saying "Lately I've been feeling depressed" and out of frame someone is shouting "Alright Mr. Spiegelman... We're ready to shoot." Flies buzz around Art, and the frame pulls back to reveal an Auschwitz watchtower outside the window. Art at his drawing board is marooned in a sea of corpses he seems to have *re-killed* through his creative work and by asking his father to recount his testimony.

The flies – while another animal metaphor – stand in for 'time flies' (when you're having fun). Says McGlothlin (2006): "The reader is reminded of the short distance from the depiction of Jews as vermin to the specious justification for their destruction, for this metaphorical journey is made through the trope of the fly" (p. 81).

There are numerous levels of metaphor in operation in just these five frames (as in the books) (McGlothlin, 2006). A bright beam lights Art, evoking television lighting that in the last frame is revealed to be a camp searchlight. Television represents Art's commercial success and his resistance: how could he (when there is so much suffering in the world)? "We're about to shoot," could be a call to the firing squad. The animal drawings echo a Disney cartoon culture that has in some ways appropriated the Holocaust into a commodity of mass culture, ("There's no business like Shoah business"). Time is under the spotlight, the way it refuses to stand still and the past continues to leak into Art's present; the way it resists normal chronology. History like an annoying fly keeps buzzing. "Thus with the trope of the fly, time itself becomes, in a sense, a character in Spiegelman's book," (p. 79).

It remains unclear if the face under Art's mask is indeed human (McGlothlin, 2006), a visual metaphor for the way that the camps robbed prisoners of identity, echoed throughout the texts by the way Art questions his own humanity. His name is variously

Art or Artie, both names drawing on association with the word “art”. Everything piles together into the same space, time and place: the Holocaust, Art’s personal past, the present day, Art’s drawing table mounted on or over a pile of bodies. The underlying megametaphor, is that Spiegelman’s art is based on the suffering of others (McGlothlin, 2006).

Anne Michaels’ poetic novel *Fugitive Pieces* (1997) creates metaphor for specific description at a sentence level, some underlined:

The shadow past is shaped by everything that never happened. Invisible, it melts the present like rain through karst. A biography of longing. It steers us like magnetism, a spirit torque. This is how one becomes undone by a smell, a word, a place, the photo of a mountain of shoes. By love that closes its mouth before calling a name.

I did not witness the most important events of my life. My deepest story must be told by a blind man, a prisoner of sound. From behind a wall, from underground. (p. 17)

Cumulatively too, Michaels’ (1995) imagery of stone (karst being stone geographically particular to the story), knowledge, sight and place returning throughout the text, create a metaphorical whole which is greater than the sum of its descriptive parts. The fugitive child of the story buries himself under the earth to stay alive. He is rescued by a geologist who is dedicated to peat, limestone, and archaeological wood but remains fugitive for most of his life: “Time is a blind guide,” (p. 5) is chapter one’s first line. The novel is constantly circling and delving underground, the protagonist haunted by a shadowy past and lost sister, “It’s the moment of death we measure from” (p. 32), returning to the cataclysmic forces of geology (standing in for the Holocaust): “I was transfixed by the way time buckled, met itself in pleats and folds...” (p. 30).

Gunter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* (1965) employs a continuous series of thematic metaphors for responsibility in Nazi and post-war Germany, using, for example, Oskar’s delayed growth as an extended metaphor for the stunted moral development of Germans at large, their post-war amnesia and repression of memories. Grass, interviewed on *BBC World Book Club* (Gilbert, 2009), says that much of what others read as symbolism served him realistically – screaming can in fact break glass, a dwarf or midget gave Grass the child’s outsider status combined with an adult’s comprehension. Clearly a writer’s metaphoric language may be chosen without deliberate planning, drawn from the writer’s personal inner well and life experiences, and only afterwards does the larger meaning or function become apparent. Grass refers to Oskar observing from his position

‘under the table’, or under a stage where the rhythm of his drumming disturbs a Nazi rally (as Grass with *The Tin Drum* disturbed Germany’s narration of itself).

Similarly, metaphor in *To Life* works cumulatively as a series of clues alerting the reader to what needs to be acknowledged, read and understood; that something is going on.

### **THE USE OF METAPHOR IN *TO LIFE***

In *To Life*, I had to find ways to show how an inheritance was internalised; and how the protagonist “came to” after collapse. I found metaphor on a thematic level to build information and layering of unease, using recurring images, motifs and icons that resonated as they built association, comparison or resemblance. One example is photography. According to Didi-Huberman (2008) photography “shows a particular ability...to curb the fiercest will to obliterate” (p. 23). For Hirsch (2008), Holocaust photographs are the “fragmentary remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory” (p. 116). Intuitively, I used photography for remembering, for witnessing, being the witness, being snapped, caught out, spied on, and ultimately, for lack of permission. Photography also implies meanings of generation, focus and losing clarity over generations (Hirsch, 2001). But only at the end of writing did I discover information that was of particular significance to Christel: that there were only ever four photographs taken inside the actual gas chambers of Auschwitz, where the *Sonderkommando* worked.

In writing, I was drawing constantly from, or trying to capture or recreate, mental snapshots from my early childhood. I remember vividly being told about the crematoriums. Those transactions of information and the images they conjured up were indelibly burned into my mind, like photographs. My father would always say it was “unspeakable” what happened there, but he did not say “unimaginable”. He would not shrink from speaking of what happened, would not cover up the fate of his parents, his grandparents and most of his extended family. I sensed that for him, “unimaginable” allowed people to avoid responsibility. There were images. It was entirely imaginable: because people made it happen, people thought up the sadistic and formal intricacies of the death machine. How did the Nazis maintain their image of themselves? How did a prisoner hold onto to their image of themselves? (Didi-Huberman, 2008).

Some of the recurring metaphors in *To Life* include *stone* (for the freezing of time, ending of life, the geology of erosion), *fire and burning* (crematoriums and loss), *carpet*

*and lawn* (something under the surface, discussed below in more detail), *child* or *baby* (Christel's lost family; Christel's inner child, creativity, voice, individuation from parent), *images and photography* (proof and memorial), *the law* (enactment of power), *reality television* (un-safety and alienation; the ultimate un-reality of the Final Solution; the circus), *returning* (the unsolvable puzzle), *naming* (what was lost), *landscape* (instability, new landscapes), *volcano* (the aftershocks of the Holocaust, the earthquake-like cataclysm), *golem* (Milk Bottle Man – for Jewish culture; the shadow; redemption and revenge), and *shower* (disruption and destruction). Christel's own name is the overarching metaphor of the novel, named as she discovers, after Kristallnacht and with its shards lodged deep inside her.

Some of these thematic metaphors may be particular to this work, others recognised within the wider genre. Some of these will be discussed below in more detail.

### **Carpet:**

In *To Life*, “carpet” appears in different guises, seemingly innocuous:

- Conrad is enraged when he sees a van with the sign “Baltic Carpet Layers”
- Christel's baby Maisie pees on the carpet; cleaning up Christel remembers her father Conrad on his hands and knees giving her horsey-rides and his stories about his own father (who never has a name)
- Conrad, who prides himself on having survived the Holocaust, says he refuses to pass on “all that rubbish” on to his family. “I've swept it under the carpet,” he says, “It's just that every now and again it comes up again” (p. 164).

Conrad has not literally placed his past, his feelings and a pile of rubbish under a carpet. ‘Under the carpet’ carries a non-literal meaning, that of repression and denial, and helps shape and construct both Conrad's interior and how he represents himself to the world. ‘Carpet’ serves for all that Conrad is trying to keep down. His grief comes from another temporal plane. So ‘under the carpet’ is standing in, by association, for the past. Additionally, ‘carpet’ operates within a lattice of metaphors which together further compound the idea of impending un-safety. ‘Lawn’ and ‘mowing the lawn’ appear initially as images of normality and order, then with menace rearing out of that fragile veneer.

### **Sewing and repair:**

If healing were not possible for the first generation, the discussion is still open as to whether it is possible for the next. Bukiet (2002) observes anger and incompleteness among its writers: “Instead of closure, the writers prefer the open wound. And should that wound threaten to close, they rip out the stitches” (p. 22). However others see this differently. Berger (1990) though, sees repair as a theological drive which is an ideal of Jewish faith through the act of *tikkun*, the concept of doing good – both as the mending of the self and the repair of the world. Sewing becomes Raczynow’s (1994) metaphor for the process of recording and repairing through creativity, “In fact, sewing scraps together is every writer’s task, a hypothetically endless task, an impossible task. That is why my work consists in presenting the scraps in all their diversity, in their disorder, in their dispersion, in a kind of diaspora” (p. 103). His memory shot through with holes is the “shtetl shot through with holes” (p. 102) from his ‘pre-past’. “Writing was, and still is, the only way I could deal with the past,” he says (p.103).

Christel’s mother Stella is her intermediary with her survivor father. Stella’s handwork surfaces (with feelings of loss) in Christel’s dreams:

I notice a flash of white and hear an empty rattling sound but it’s probably just my dream teetering there, something to do with knitting or crochet and wooden toggles on a lace jacket. I take the baby back to bed, enjoying her small body as she settles, drift back to an image of tiny hooked needles and the familiar slip loop of double crochet.

The same dream comes the next night and this time it’s double treble, miss three chain, pass wool twice round hook, insert hook into next chain... I surface but Maisie isn’t crying. (p. 54)

Writing, then, opens up the scarred-over wounds of history and stitches them back together again (McGlothlin, 2006). In *To Life*, those scarred-over wounds are projected onto Christel’s body under hospital bandages, “for my thin new skin to grow across so I am a lacework of repair, knitted and crocheted together and still there is pain” (p. 251). The opening up of wounds is almost compulsive for Bernice Eisenstein in her autobiographical graphic novel *I was a child of Holocaust survivors* (2006). She compares her ‘addiction’ to the Holocaust, the big H, with heroin: she couldn’t leave it alone. As a child, she exploited the potency and shocking nature of her background for advantage over other children and to elicit sympathy. As an adult she makes art out of it. In *To Life* Christel too is aware of her own returning as semi-compulsive.

### **Marking and the body:**

Sewing also works as a metaphor because there are gaps left between stitches, like the gaps of memory, and because sewing is an act of marking which leaves visible traces (McGlothlin, 2006). For survivors and their children, the tattoo is one of their most potent icons, additionally taboo for Jews because marking the body was a prohibition under Mosaic Law. For children of perpetrators, the swastika of the Third Reich is their equivalent symbol (Waffen-SS bore their own armpit tattoo).

The psychosomatic nature of memory is enacted in and on the body: memories surface in the most private and potent of family languages, that of the body, in sighs, nightmares, tears, aches and illnesses (Hoffman, 2004). Karpf (1996) recounts the inner conflict of both wishing to respect her Jewish survivor parents' suffering and make up for it by becoming a successful and happy person, and of repressing her own negative emotions. Declaring war on herself, she develops severe eczema, first on her hands like stigmata, and then all over her body, a shameful and distressing symptom that lasts for years. In *To Life* Christel sees tattoos on the arms of her father's friends and uses a pen to mark her own numbers. Her body too becomes the site of adult re-enactment.

This marking of oneself as inheritor is a theme of second-generation fiction, in which the body becomes a metaphor for the battleground of inheritance (McGlothlin, 2006). Irene Anhalt (Anhalt, 1997) daughter of an SS officer, describes her ritualised cutting of herself as a child with the mark of the swastika while chanting the forbidden (in post-war Germany) names of Nazi leaders. Karpf's eczema is the way she declares war on herself. She scratches particularly at the place where the concentration camp tattoo was on her mother's arm. In this way Karpf, says McGlothlin (2006), "violently and masochistically transforms her body into a site marked by a Holocaust trauma that she cannot directly access, a locus of remembrance that has no recourse to lived memory" (p. 3). In the texts of the second generation, suicide – the most permanent marking of the body – is a recurring event.

## **BEARING WITNESS**

Bearing witness is central to the Jewish experience. The Passover scripture commands every Jew to consider him or herself as having gone forth in exodus from Egypt, in effect, as if he or she too had experienced exile (Berger, 1990). In Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* (1997) one of the characters comments that the Jews are always leaving Egypt, and Christel thinks of herself as fleeing Egypt, into the present. The Shoah (European exodus) may in time become part of the formal scripture, as has the Exodus

from slavery in Egypt, and the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem in the *Torah* and *Old Testament* (Berger, 1990). Berger suggests that we are witnessing the birth of scripture, with first generation Holocaust literature as the *Torah*, the first book, and the writing of the second generation as its interpretations, or *Talmud*. This infers a certain sanctity to narratives that children of survivors, notwithstanding the anger, defiance and possible impropriety of some of their writing, already know they must not violate. They intuit that to listen to a witness is to become one (Berger, 1990).

### SECRETS AND SEXUALITY

Hoffman (2004) discusses the psychotherapy of a woman, who as a teenage Jewish prisoner, was momentarily attracted to the handsome Dr. Joseph Mengele, and jealous of her mother's and sister's selection. Her sexuality became the locus of her guilt and trauma. So too may trauma reside or enact in the sexuality of the second generation, as for Christel. The war is secreted in the body's most internal and personal spaces and functions as almost primal knowledge, according to Hoffman (2004): "In the beginning was the war. That was my childhood theory of origins, akin perhaps to certain childhood theories of sexuality. For me, the world as I knew it and the people in it emerged not from the womb, but from war" (p. 3).

One of the hardest aspects of writing *To Life* was the intersection of sexual abuse and second-generation. The trauma narratives of Holocaust survivors have been compared with those of adults with a history of childhood sexual abuse (Kirmayer 1996, as cited by McGlothlin 2006). Dissociation is the response in which the trauma victim survives by psychically separating from the experience, self and body. With dissociation the movement between remembrance and forgetting is constantly active. According to McGlothlin (2006), "The process of dissociation is one in which the gaps in the parents' integration of identity and traumatic memory are transferred to the children," whose dissociation is largely a metaphorical process, (p. 56).

In classical psychoanalytic theory, the Electra complex is a girl's psychosexual competition with her mother for her father. Christel's handsome father is absent in profound ways, to her mother as well as to her, and as an adolescent, Christel searches for the absent father in relationships with two older men. In psychological theory the child's identification with the same-sex parent is the successful resolution of the Electra complex. But Christel's mother dies with those issues of sexual competition and betrayal unresolved.

In the literature of second generation perpetration, Schlink's *The Reader* (1997) concerns the sexual relationship between Michael (15) and Hanna (36) whose trial as a concentration camp guard he later attends. Their relationship is one of ambivalent erotic attachment (McGlothlin, 2006). *To Life* in some ways parallels this ambivalence, with Christel acting out (trying to find a solution for, rather than cutting off from) both her father and mother's secrets.

## MARKING AND THE TEXT

Second-generation literature becomes an arena in which the creative imagining, the rupture and repair of the Holocaust, takes place (McGlothlin, 2006). The text becomes the garment that the writer, in that attempt to repair, simultaneously cuts and mends (the ripping of cloth of Jewish mourning). The marking of absence is transferred onto the body of the text not only at the thematic level, but also in its narrative. Narrative crisis in second-generation literature plays out, according to McGlothlin (2006),

“...where the struggle to construct, absorb, displace, defer, repress, reproduce, reject, conceal, and uncover the legacy of the Holocaust leaves its own mark... narrative voice fractures, protagonists multiply in a compulsion to repeat, temporality is suspended, and generic conventions are transgressed or radically reshaped. These narrative transgressions are not merely gestures of experimentation; rather they are textual wounds that struggle to solve the crisis of signification and to heal” (pp. 12-13).

Writer and text are marked by ‘the continuing aftershocks of the Shoah’, which leaves its traces in the *process* of writing (McGlothlin, 2006, p.13). In *Elijah Visible* (Rosenbaum, 1996), multiple short stories tell of Adam (man from before the fall) Posner, who is a markedly different person in each story. But each story contains or paraphrases the line: “Adam’s parents had been in the camps” (p. 5).

Modiano’s (2000) search for what happened to 15-year-old Dora Bruder in Paris 1941–42 creates a narrative which rests on a central absence: the mapping of the streets themselves become the extended metaphor of Dora’s erasing from official records and of systemic amnesia. *Born-Where* (Schindel, 1995) is complex linguistically and narratively unstable. *Maus* (Speigelman, 1986, 1991) operates on three time levels and from different narrative positions. In *To Life* the narrative is fractured, looping back;



time overlaps, the past leaks into the present; Christel's psychological state changes with her level of personal safety.

### **KNOWLEDGE OF TRAUMA**

With trauma comes repression, based in fear and the unwillingness to re-experience and accompanied by a prohibition on direct representation: don't talk, don't feel, don't show, don't go back. In narratives that attempt to know or come to terms with traumatic events, the process of repression *and its legacy* prohibit the representation of the event directly (McGlothlin, 2006). According to Hartman (1995) knowledge of trauma is composed of two contradictory elements. One is the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced, which seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness and falls directly into the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche. On the level of poetics, the literal and figurative may correspond to these two types of understanding (p. 537). Carl Freidman's (1991) *Nightfather* portrays both kinds of response. In the first mode, the survivor father talks compulsively to children who, at an age of magical thinking, are too young to distinguish where his world ends and theirs begin. He seems almost unconscious of his behavior and patterns. In the second mode, his troping of "camp" becomes the children's metaphor for threat, possibly infectious:

"Well?" he said in a bored voice when we were standing in front of the wolf's cage. "What's the matter with him?"  
 "He has camp!" I sobbed. Max glanced through the bars.  
 "Impossible," he said. "Wolves don't get camp." (p. 2)

Hartman (1995) writes about psychoanalytic trauma theory for what cannot be made conscious. He describes a relationship between words and trauma, and of the analyst "reading the wound" with the aid of literature (p. 537). Much second-generation literature itself concerns the act of writing as traumatic retrieval. Christel delves and descends into inherited and historical territory that becomes 'the book' she is writing, which is, in fact, the totality of the novel *To Life*.

### **CONCLUSION**

The night before I finished writing this exegesis, I dreamed I had transplanted a small, round rather stocky camellia bush that was not thriving and its leaves were

curling. Perhaps too late, I wanted to save it. The soil had come away exposing thick, grey roots, which joined the trunk in a sculptural lattice like stone carving. Either the soil had been mounded up and washed away, or the tree was planted slightly too high or proud of the surface. I sliced up spadefuls of dark, rich soil and put it around the roots, but the earth just sat on top. So I started sliding it into the cavities, to pack and anchor the plant. As I walked away I realised the tree was very close to the seashore, like a mangrove, and waves would wash over it again. The ground was probably too wet and salty. It needed transplanting. It was in the wrong place.

I woke up quite sure that the dream was about the exegesis, about the process of creation, the artifice of construction; I was amused that my subconscious had provided me with a conclusion. I wrote the dream down and underlined the metaphors. I was struck by the stone-like roots; the wilting leaves; the dark soil; exposure to the tide; transplanting; the great sea.

I read somewhere that being unable to let go of detail, complicating things, cluttering, being unable to finish, are characteristics of the second generation, and I had certainly gone overboard with the exegesis, almost submerging in scholarship and literature. I had got lost in the detail, amidst that great tide of Jewish (and non-Jewish) thought and the insistent and wonderful chatter, debate, argument, ideas. My subconscious sent me another amusing idea: that the wandering tribe of talkers and intellectuals had moved out of the yeshivas or prayer schools of Eastern Europe and into the universities of America and France. The difference was that now women were allowed in. Was there this much scholarship about another new field of literature? Did any other culture talk and think as much as the Jews? If the literature of the second generation was the Talmud of the survivor testimony Torah, then this great tide of literary commentary was the Talmud of the Talmud.

I had tried to keep up, to encompass some of the ideas, but even to define the genre's terms was to enter a realm of metaphor that was emotional, philosophical, literary, spiritual and physical. The literary structure, the work itself, rooted as it is in the soil of the second generation, would have to do the job on its own.

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