(Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oświęcim, Poland)

Muscle Memory: Rethinking the Scatological in French Visions of Deportation

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Muscle Memory: Rethinking the scatological in French visions of deportation

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“We must not let evil be a throwaway term for the things we are afraid to understand.”

James Waller, historian

Introduction: Fecal matter— laughing matter?

Only art has the power of redeeming suffering from the abyss.
Aharon Appelfeld[1]

In terminating the *Quart Livre*, his final known work, the great François Rabelais went out with a scatological bang.[2] After enduring a long period marked by excremental fear, wily protagonist Panurge exalts triumphantly, "Que diable est cecy? Applez vous cecy foyre, bren, crottes, merde, fiant, dejection, matiere fecale, excrement, repaire, laisse, esmeut, fumée, estron, scybale ou spyrathe ? C'est, croy je, sapphran d'Hibernie. Ho, ho, hie ! C'est saphran d'Hibernie ! Cela! Beuvons."[3] So ends the corpus of Rabelais, a father of both French literature and the scatological as we know it.[4] In *Rabelais and his World*, his pioneering vision of the excremental lower bodily stratum of Rabelais, Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin probes deeper into the scene's components:

> At the end of the Fourth Book Panurge, who defecated from fear and was mocked by his companions, finally rids himself of his terror and regains his cheerfulness…. These are the last words of the Fourth Book, and actually the last sentence of the entire book that was written by Rabelais' own hand. Here we find twelve synonyms for excrement, from the most vulgar to the most scientific. At the end it is described as a tree, something rare and pleasant. And the tirade concludes with an invitation to drink, which in Rabelaisian imagery means to be in communion with truth.[5]

Not only does Panurge's gleeful proclamation imbue humor into the work's end, but it highlights several paradoxes which still ring true today. The most immediately apparent, perhaps, is this:

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[1] Aharon Appelfeld, *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and a Conversation with Philip Roth,* trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York: Fromm International, 1994), xv.
[2] Although a fifth book is attributed to Rabelais (*Le Cinquième livre)*, scholars frequently debate its authorship.
[3] François Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes, t. II*, ed. Pierre Jourda (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1962), 248.
[4] Rabelais may be one of the most well-known French authors to employ scatology in his works, but he certainly was not the first. The Middle Ages saw a humorous scatology present in a variety of genres, from the chanson de geste parody "Audigier" to fabliaux such as Rutebeuf's "Le pet du vilain." Inspired himself by medieval farces, Rabelais built extensively on the scatology of these earlier French works throughout his own corpus. See Omer Jodogne, "*Audigier* et la chanson de geste avec une édition nouvelle du poème," *Moyen Âge* 66 (1960): 495-526, and Rutebeuf, *Œuvres Complètes,* ed. Michel Zink (Paris: Livres de Poche, 2001).
[5] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 175.

how is it that so many words exist to describe a substance which is discussed so rarely? Western society has long conditioned us to believe that fecal matters are secrets best left between ourselves, our toilet bowls, and occasionally, our doctors. But for victims of Nazi extermination camps, the luxury of keeping this most sensitive region of their bodies private was not an option. The disorder of the concentrationary universe and its erosion of societal norms catapulted quotidian acts such as excreting to the forefront of deportees' physical and mental space. This sharp contrast between the world of the camps and the homes deportees had been forced to leave behind compelled them to confront and evaluate their relationships to their bodies in a manner not possible in a prewar existence governed by rigid social norms and a sense of taboo.

To examine the camps through a scatological prism proves provocative and meaningful for numerous reasons. In addition to excrement's centrality to the deportation experience, the systematic study of this binary also proves highly logical. In the scientific method, we are taught to evaluate a hypothesis's validity through a careful process of experimentation. When testing a theory, it is crucial to measure each variable against an unchanged aspect known as a constant in order to assess the true impact of a given variable in bringing about a specific outcome. During periods of hardship such as the war, where the status quo of both countries and individuals were completely upheaved, what could be more unchanging and quantifiable than the body's need to excrete waste? Defecation knows no boundaries of age, gender, or nationality, and is an aspect of life that every person must attend to on a daily basis. Examining the scatological as a constant against the war's innumerable variables thus facilitates our understanding of deportation's catastrophic influence on the daily lives of the interned, for it is a facet of existence uniting all of humanity.

Given the excremental's centrality to the human experience, scatology in literature is by no means a uniquely French phenomenon: most western European countries possess some sort of scatological tradition or excrementally-tinged literature.[6] Yet this corpus of works emerges additionally as one which is distinctly French, descended from a scatology which will prove to be thoroughly Rabelaisian. Like Panurge, who defecated from fear only to have his triumphant return marked through a mirthful praising of this same bodily waste, many French visions of the extermination camps theorize this most human of matters as one built on paradoxes, capable of the simultaneous humanization and dehumanization of the camp's deportees. Characterized by a sea of contrasts which strangely complement one another, this Rabelaisian attitude towards excrement first theorized by Bakhtin will pervasively color the way French language authors describe the extermination camps and their aftermath, creating unique and significant depictions of a traumatic past.

Despite the excremental's omnipresence in deportees' daily lives and its consistent placement in depictions of the camps, the scatological aspects of the concentrationary universe have received sparse academic attention. This paucity proves especially disappointing in scholarship surrounding the French deportation canon given the complex and meaningful visions of excrement which emerge in these narratives. Although several excellent precursors which I'll later discuss have explored key aspects of the scatological in French war works, this study is the first of its kind to propose a joint, in-depth examination of non-fiction and fiction alike. This dual study of the real and the imagined does not seek to valorize one over the other, but instead aims

[6] The scatological spans across hundreds of years of writing, prevalent in the works of authors from Swift to Shakespeare to Cervantes to Dante. As of 2016, there is lamentably no comprehensive monograph dedicated to the scatological in world literature. Instead, interested readers may wish to consult Jae Num Lee's summary of continental scatological satire in the first two chapters of *Swift and Scatological Satire,* entitled "Scatology in Continental Satirical Writings from Aristophanes to Rabelais" and "English Satirical Writings from Skelton to Pope." See Jae Num Lee, *Swift and Scatological Satire* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971).

to analyze them together as equally symptomatic components of our modern understanding of deportation. Whereas past studies have tended to focus on the excremental in one specific text, this dissertation explores how attentions to bodily matter figure purposely throughout French representations of the Nazi camps, and how when read together, these narratives transcend labels of genre to create meaningful points of contact.

The scatological proves heavily rooted in both nonfictional and fictional French visions of deportation, first originating in survivor accounts written soon after Liberation. Robert Antelme's Buchenwald memoir *L'Espèce humaine* and Marguerite Duras's *La Douleur*, a companion piece recounting her perspective of Antelme's convalescence, together advance dichotomous visions of bodily waste as a substance capable of simultaneously affirming and debasing deportees. The rich corpus of Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo likewise highlights the paradoxical nature of excrement, which, along with its odor, forms a concerted attack on her convoy's resistance identity while remaining closely fused to issues of memory after her return to France. In the realm of fiction, Michel Vinaver's play *Par-dessus bord* and Jonathan Littell's novel *Les Bienveillantes* similarly crystallize reflection around bodily functions, not only by employing the scatological meaningfully in their narratives, but through pointedly fusing the excremental to larger concerns about the memory of the period.

When analyzed together, these works' forceful harnessing of the scatological provoke new, unique, and significant visions of deportation, no easy feat for a subject which has already benefitted from decades of rigorous scholarship. However, before discussing these narratives in the great detail they demand, it is key to address several issues at the heart of the scatology-deportation binary. First and foremost, how has a subject meriting such urgent attention been neglected so frequently? This reason for this notable lacuna proves to be rooted in

overwhelmingly negative considerations of bodily waste. While these cultural attitudes towards excreta are certainly not universal, they prove to be widespread enough that they have significantly filtered the study of this critical pairing. Through exploring these biases, we gain a clearer understanding of the role they have played in discouraging lengthy studies of excrement and deportation together. Furthermore, a larger awareness of these taboos and their impact equally sheds light on why as the first of its kind, this present scholarship is both pressing and long overdue. In elucidating the relationship of bodily waste to deportation and its memory, this corpus provides us with crucial insight to one of the camp's most significant paradoxes: how the tenacity of the human spirit propelled deportees to carve out dignity and strength while faced against an experience engineered to annihilate them totally. Equally meaningful, these works catalyze collective reflection on the memory politics of deportation in our contemporary era, driving conscious assessment of our attitudes towards remembrance and even towards our bodies themselves.

A private "matter": Mapping scatology onto a modern world

If the need to excrete is a facet uniting all of humanity, almost equally unifying is the deep disgust that the scatological engenders. Despite urine and excrement's centrality to daily life, the omnipresent, transcultural unease which envelops them is not entirely surprising. Even when not linked directly to the Holocaust, an event so traumatic that debates over its memory continue to make headlines some 70 years later, we are in many ways conditioned to tread lightly when bodily functions are concerned.[7] These biases stem first and foremost from the very

[7] In the past 3 years alone, I think of several notable cases which demonstrate how the specter of the Holocaust continues to strike raw nerves all over the world. Many of these cases occur when individuals or a group respond to the memory of the Holocaust in a way that a larger collective deems inappropriate, resulting in extreme backlash. In 2013, when visiting the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, Canadian pop star Justin Bieber ignited controversy for writing in the site's guest book that, "Anne was a great girl. Hopefully she would have been a belieber [portmanteau

mechanism of language. According to dictionaries, arbiters of language, what does it mean to be scatological? When searching for a definition of this term, a bodily bias manifests itself clearly in French and English dictionaries alike. Larousse offers a definition of "propos ou écrits *grossiers* où il est question d'excréments," apparently unwilling to account for any sort of scatological literature that is not inherently crude.[8] Several of the most well-known English dictionaries go even further, creating within their pages stark dichotomies polarizing fecal matter's accepted uses in medicine and science with a literary approach often intimated to be low-brow. The Oxford Dictionary provides definitions of scatology as "That branch of science which deals with diagnosis by means of the fæces," "That branch of palæontology which treats of fossil excrement or coprolites" and finally, "*Filthy* literature." Their American counterparts at Merriam Webster are no more forgiving, sharply contrasting the scatological as either "interest in or treatment of *obscene* matters especially in literature" or "the biologically oriented study of excrement (as for

for fans of Bieber]." Despite the support of the museum, who hoped his visit would inspire a new group of young people to learn about Anne's story, Bieber swiftly drew the ire of many journalists and Twitter users who viewed his comment as callous and incredibly self-involved. In 2014, an American teenager's smiling selfie at Auschwitz prompted the young woman to receive death threats while sparking a contentious debate on digital decorum in sites of past violence and trauma. The Auschwitz Museum itself came under flack in summer of 2015 for installing an outdoor misting system at its entrance to keep visitors in line cool during a sweltering heat wave. Critics lambasted the apparatus, which they claimed evoked the showers used to gas incoming transports to death. The controversy highlighted challenges faced by the museum as it continues to navigate a balance between preserving memory and accommodating rapidly increasing numbers of visitors on site. Finally, in February 2016, Polish justice minister Zbigniew Ziobro introduced legislation that would make using the phrase "Polish death camp" a punishable crime in Poland. Ziobro hopes to see this misnomer, which has been used by people as prevalent as President Obama, replaced by phrases such as "Nazi death camp" or "death camp in occupied Poland." However, the Israeli press has expressed its concerns that this legislation belies a deeper, more disturbing trend in Poland's new ultraconservative government to cast wartime Poland purely in a light of victimhood despite the ruthlessness of many individual Poles to their Jewish neighbors in the war period. Josh Levs and Alan Duke, "Bieber camp mum over Anne Frank controversy as rabbi defends him," *CNN*, April 16, 2013, accessed March 13, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2013/ 04/15/showbiz/bieber-anne-frank/; Lee Moran, "Alabama girl gets death threats after taking selfie at Auschwitz," *NY Daily News,* July 25, 2014, accessed March 13, 2016, http://www.nydailynews. com/news/national/alabama-girl-death-threats-selfie-auschwitz-article-1.1879908; Vice News, "Auschwitz Museum Responds to Mist Shower Outrage," *Vice News,* August 31, 2015, accessed March 13, 2016, https://news.vice.com/article/ auschwitz-museum-responds-to-mist-shower-outrage; Ofer Aderet, "Poland's New Government Looks to Rewrite Polish Role in the Holocaust," *Haaretz,* February 16, 2016, accessed March 13, 2016, http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.703594.

[8]*Larousse, s.v.* "scatologie," accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/scatologie/ 71338?q=scatologie#70563. My emphasis.

taxonomic purposes or for the determination of diet)."[9] Although excrement is a completely normal part of the human experience, we are predisposed linguistically—at least in French and English—to see it as being filthy and obscene. Through dichotomous definitions such as these, interest, inquiry, and "preoccupation" in this domain are painted as abnormal when considered outside the accepted realm of the scientific.[10]

Since this dissertation will go forward examining a great deal of works and situations I consider to be scatological, it is necessary to clarify what exactly I understand by this term. Though there are elements of truth in each of these definitions, they prove to be too hewn with bias to function successfully in a work such as this one. In keeping with the definitions of scatology proposed by Larousse, Oxford, and Merriam Webster, the works which comprise this study may certainly be qualified as crude or rough (*grossier),* filthy or obscene at times. While it is immediately evident that these words are intended pejoratively, their use nevertheless merits a moment of reflection: what do these qualifying adjectives even mean? Perhaps it is *crude* or *grossier* when a young man tells his fiancée that his father died at the bottom of 'the shitter (les chiottes)' in Auschwitz, tumbling to a debasing excremental death after a life as a respected professor of history (Chapter III, Michel Vinaver's *Par-dessus bord*). Perhaps it is *filthy* when a female deportee steals away from work to wash her grime-caked body, attempting to rinse months of dirt and deportation from her pubic region in a Birkenau stream (Chapter II, "Le ruisseau" by Charlotte Delbo). And certainly, the Nazi's entire apparatus of systematic terror and

[9] *Merriam Webster, s.v.* "scatology," accessed February 16, 2016, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary /scatology. My emphasis. *Oxford English Dictionary, s.v* "scatology," accessed February 15, 2016, http://www. oed.com/view/Entry/172141?redirectedFrom=scatology&. My emphasis.

[10] Collins even goes as far as to deem scatology to be the "scientific study of excrement, esp in medicine for diagnostic purposes" or "*obscenity or preoccupation with obscenity*, esp in the form of references to excrement." *Collins Dictionary, s.v.* "scatology," accessed February 16, 2016, http:// www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary /english/scatology. My emphasis.

murder can be seen as *obscene*, something "disgusting to the senses," "abhorrent to morality," or "repulsive by reason of crass disregard of moral or ethical principles" as Merriam Webster would suggest.[11] Yet to default upon these adjectives is to miss something about the scatology present in these strange and complex visions of deportation. For these reasons, when I use the term "scatological," I interpret it broadly to mean anything related to the end products of the body's digestive system—ie, both urine and feces. I believe these matters are simply that – matter—and should be considered purely as such. After all, an object cannot be inherently good, bad, crude, filthy, or obscene. Rather it is the perspective of the beholder which attributes these qualities which are in no way innate to the object itself. Examining excrement itself is not nearly as compelling as exploring individuals' reactions to it, and it is this diverse sea of qualities humanly attributed to bodily waste which forms the heart of this study.

It is in acknowledgement of this omnipresent bias that Jeff Persels and Russel Ganim refer to scatology as "the last taboo" in their volume *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art,* arguing that "Sexuality in all its myriad forms has long been the darling of academic readers, a once marginalized, now legitimate field of critical investigation, commentary and theory building. Scatology, however, arguably an even more universal function than sexuality, still retains the power to make us blush, to provoke shame and embarrassment."[12] Yet despite—

[11] *Merriam Webster, s.v.* "obscene," accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/obscene.

[12] Russel Ganim and Jeff Persels, "Introduction: Scatology, the Last Taboo," in *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art,* eds. Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), xiii. I would argue that excreting is indeed a more universal function than sex and sexuality, not just "arguably" as Persels and Ganim suggest. While it was once a given that every human was a product of intercourse, advances in medicine such as in vitro fertilization preclude this from being a universal truth. Furthermore, although individual consciousness of sexuality is a facet of identity which develops gradually, the regular need to excrete waste becomes apparent from the moment we are born. Once alive, humans do not need to have sex to continue their own existence, but to go more than a few days without defecating can result in life-threatening medical issues, such as perforation of the intestine. One of the most extreme cases of constipation occurred in 2013, when an Indian woman needed emergency surgery after almost 45 days without a bowel movement. This poor individual dubiously beat the previous record of 10 days without a bowel movement by over a month. Heather Tooley, "Woman constipated for

or perhaps thanks to – the scatological's taboo aspects, both academic and popular culture have betrayed a cautious fascination with the body's processes. Much like Holocaust memory, the scatological exists on a plain between extreme curiosity and revulsion. The 21st century has been marked by a heightened interest in the substance, with boundaries continually being pushed past the frontiers of South Park-esque excremental humor into depictions of bodily functions more rooted in shock and horror. Perhaps one of the most noticeable instances of the scatological's rising in pop consciousness, the *Human Centipede* horror film franchise emerged in 2009, catapulting excrement into the limelight and stoking a contentious debate on what lines cinema may or may not cross in the name of common decorum. In Tom Six's controversial films (2009, 2011, and 2015), a sadistic German scientist kidnaps three tourists and fuses them together at the mouth and anus to create a three-person digestive system. Six wrote the role of the German doctor with Nazism and the perverse medical experiments of the concentration camps in mind: "My grandfather was put in a war camp. He wasn't a Jew but all healthy men were taken by the Germans to work in factories. When I was little he would tell me all these stories about the evil Germans. When I was a kid, I remembered those stories. Then when you grow up, you read about the atrocities."[13] Six's film series thus functions as an odd indicator of how interest in the scatological and the Holocaust elicit similar reactions of curiosity and disgust, and are in some ways subconsciously linked in the modern pop psyche.

While the success of *Human Centipede* proves compelling evidence for the joint fascination and revulsion elicited by defecation, it also lends further credence to Ganim and

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45 days: What doctors found during surgery," *Examiner*, April 22, 2013, accessed February 15, 2016, http:// www.examiner.com/article/woman-constipated-for-45-days-what-doctors-found-during-surgery.

[13] Andy Lea, "The sickest man alive? Human Centipede director Tom Six speaks his mind," *The Daily Star*, July 12, 2015, accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.dailystar.co.uk/movies/453226/Interview-with-Human-Centipede-director-Tom-Six.

Persels' argument that scatology has overtaken sexuality as pop culture's bête noire. In a 2011 op-ed for the *Guardian*, David Cox pointedly critiques the British Board of Film Classification [BBFC]'s clear bias towards the shock scatology seen in *Human Centipede 2*. Despite their relative acceptance of the first film, the BBFC condemned the second film in the franchise for replacing the German doctor character with an uneducated lowlife inspired to create his own centipede. Cox astutely observes,

> [T]he board pointed out, the first film's arthropod was merely the product of a clinical experiment, but the new one grew out of "depraved sexual fantasy." This implied a "clear association between pain, perversity and sexual pleasure." So dismaying was this concept that *Centipede 2* posed "a real, as opposed to a fanciful, risk that harm is likely to be caused to potential viewers"… Yet at around the same time, the board that now deemed sexual sadism unacceptable in principle were prepared to countenance *Antichrist*, with its bloody semen extracted by forced masturbation, *A Serbian Film*, with its rape of a newborn baby, *and I Spit on Your Grave*, with its protracted scenes of rape and buggery [anal intercourse]… The BBFC's reaction to *The Human Centipede 2* suggests that sexual sadism no longer bothers us, but defecation does.[14]

What can be said of a culture which considers the image of an infant being raped as less offensive, less sexually sadistic, less likely to pose a "real… risk [of] harm" to potential viewers than the coprophagy and scatology inherent in *Human Centipede 2*? Persels and Ganim's observations on scatology's place in academia thus ring equally true in popular culture, where the substance persists in shocking and offending audiences in a way that sex no longer does.

It is not just in popular entertainment that the excremental continues to ruffle feathers. In the world of art, scatological works similarly teeter a fine line between reverence and contention. While pieces suggestive of bodily functions such as Salvador Dalí's *Objet scatologique à fonctionnement symbolique (Le Soulier de Gala)* (1931) and Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) may adorn the galleries of the Centre Pompidou, not everyone finds excremental art to be in

[14] David Cox, "Human Centipede 2: why do we find the digestive tract so hard to stomach?," *The Guardian*, November 7, 2011, accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2011/nov/07/human-centipede-2-censorship-bbfc.

good taste. In 1987, artist Andres Serrano photographed a plastic crucifix in a jar of his own urine; he envisioned the resultant work, *Piss Christ*, as a condemnation of the "billion-dollar Christ-for-profit industry" and a "condemnation of those who abuse the teachings of Christ for their own ignoble ends."[15] Despite the potent message contained within this image, Serrano's photograph resulted in death threats and rescinded funding offers for the artist. In the United States, the fact that Serrano had received support from the National Endowment for the Arts spearheaded a contentious debate on public art funding led by Republican senator Jesse Helms (N.C.). Serrano's image incited an equally contentious polemic in France. On Palm Sunday in 2011, four young French Catholic fundamentalists bypassed two security guards and a layer of plexiglass to attack a print of the photograph with a hammer beyond repair in an Avignon art gallery. Situated in a period of escalating religious tensions in France as Sarkozy and the UMP revived the debate on secularism and religion through attacks on Islam and extolling the country's "Christian heritage", the attackers insulted museum staff of North African origin, allegedly threatening to "pour donkey piss on the Quran" while an e-mail to the institution suggested "plunging the diary of Anne Frank in urine."[16] Like its scatological counterparts in broader-reaching forms of entertainment such as Hollywood films, excremental art continues to challenge our perceptions of common decency in the 21st century.[17]

Controversy over projects such as Six's films and these scatological artworks leads our attention away from an alarming truth: as individuals living in relative security—unaffected by

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[15] Angelique Chrisafis, "Attack on 'blasphemous' art work fires debate on role of religion in France," *The Guardian*, April 18, 2011, accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/18/andres-serrano-piss-christ-destroyed-christian-protesters.

[16] Chrisafis, "Attack," op. cit.

[17] Other noticeable works of scatological art include Andres Serrano's *Merde* series, comprising 66 close-up shots of human and animal excrements (2008), Piero Manzoni's canned and labelled tins of excrement known as *Merde d'artist*e (1961), and numerous Dalí works including *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)* (1936).

crippling poverty, living lives which are not in constant danger— we often forget that excrement is more than a source of laughter, disgust, and complaint. For while we may possess the luxury of being able to gripe about the proper or improper treatment of our body's most reviled function in art or entertainment, for detainees of the concentrationary universe, and for most of the world today, shit is no laughing matter. In 2013, the World Health Organization calculated that diarrhea and pneumonia are responsible for 29% of yearly childhood deaths, and are the leading cause of death for children under the age of five worldwide.[18] The lack of appropriate sanitation facilities in parts of the developing world similarly provokes dire consequences for women's rights, and deeply influences the chances of young women in these countries to receive equal opportunities in life. In India, approximately 665 million people of the country's 1.2 billion population do not have access to a private toilet or latrine, which in addition to catalyzing public health issues, has catapulted acts as banal as relieving oneself into a moment of extreme danger and crisis for women. After the 2014 brutal gang rape and murder of two teenage girls who had left home to use the communal toilet, a public official admitted that, "More than 60 percent of the rapes in the state occur when the victims step out to relieve themselves because they do not have toilets at their homes… It is difficult to give protection to every woman who goes out in the open to relieve herself."[19] Toilets are not just a problem for women's current safety, but also figure critically into their futures. In countries like Uganda, inadequate single-sex toilet facilities and hygienic products lead many young menstruating women to miss a week of school every month.

[18] "GAPPD: ending preventable child deaths from pneumonia and diarrhoea by 2025," *World Health Organization*, accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.who.int/woman_child_accountability/news/gappd_2013/ en/.
[19] Biswajeet Banerjee, "India gang rape case exposes how a lack of toilets endangers women," *Huffington Post*, June 3, 2014, accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/03/india-rape-toilets_n _ 5437467 .html.

These period-related absences lead female students to sit out 11% of their school year and to incur higher rates of attrition in school than their male peers—all because of toilets.[20]

Given the scatological's dexterity in provoking public outrage and unease throughout the arts, it's clear why this alarm becomes magnified when attempting to discuss it in the traumatic context of the war. However, these contemporary situations in countries like India and Uganda remind us that the excremental is far larger than a source of laughter or disgust; similar to camp deportees, for many people in the world today excrement is a substance which is dire, a substance of urgency which weighs seriously on the health and wellbeing of their entire community. It is clear that neglecting the excremental provokes serious ramifications, yet the cultural biases which so frequently surround it often silence discussion on a topic irrevocably fused into the very fabric of life of the entire world, past and present.

A controversial "matter": Understanding deportation through scatology

Not all academics have been deterred from examining this pressing binary of war and waste. The incredible saliency and urgency of the excremental's relationship to deportation was first articulated in detail through the work of American historian Terrence Des Pres, an individual to whom this project is largely indebted. In his 1976 book *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps,* Des Pres pioneered a new approach to the deported body in a piece entitled "Excremental Assault." Although Des Pres' insights constitute only a chapter of his monograph, his work is the first and perhaps only scholarly endeavor to examine the excremental's effect on the individual in the camps. In his chapter, Des Pres elaborates the titular

[20] Dorah Egunyu, "A bleeding shame: why is menstruation still holding girls back?," *The Guardian*, May 28, 2014, accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network /2014/may/28/ menstruation-girls-education-uganda-sanitation.

process of "excremental assault," a phenomenon where the SS systematically and deliberately subjected deportees to an oppressive, excremental environment in the waging of a sick psychological warfare. He states,

> Conditions like these were not accidental; they were determined by a deliberate policy which aimed at complete humiliation and debasement of prisoners… the mere act of killing is not enough; for if a man dies without surrender, if something within him remains unbroken to the end, then the power which destroyed him has not, after all, crushed everything. Something has escaped its reach, and it is precisely this something—let us call it 'dignity'—that must die if those in power are to reach the orgasmic peak of their potential domination.[21]

Des Pres asserts that the aims of this excremental assault were trifold:

1) **To annihilate any sense of self-worth or bodily pride in prisoners through total shame and debasement:** *"Spiritual destruction became an end in itself, quite apart from the requirements of mass murder. The death of the soul was aimed at. It was to be accomplished by terror and privation, but first of all by a relentless assault on the survivor's sense of purity and worth (60)."*
2) **By extension, to instill disgust in between prisoners to prevent compassion or collusion between deportees:** "*How readily can one respond with respect to the needs of another, if both stink, if both are caked with mud and feces?... Here was an effective mechanism for intensifying the already heightened irritability of prisoners towards each other, and thus for stifling in common loathing the impulse toward solidarity (60-61)."*
3) **To facilitate the work of the SS by making deportees appear subhuman and unworthy of compassion:** *"This made it easier for the SS to do their job. It made mass murder less terrible to the murderers, because the victims appeared to be less than human. (61)."*

Excremental assault thus aimed at a complete spiritual annihilation of the prisoner by harnessing deportees' own bodies as weapons to be used against them, crushing their will to live and their ability to see in themselves beings of worth.

Des Pres' research relies heavily on survivor testimony, drawing from published written testimonials of mainly Jewish survivors, a majority of whom were Polish. While his chapter brings together diverse accounts of different camps to elaborate this theory, its length prohibits a detailed study of this phenomenon's progression in one isolated testimonial work. Des Pres' work as a historian also led him to examine strictly testimony, and to exclude works of fiction

[21] Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 59.

from the scope of his project. Nevertheless, his theory presents itself in testimony and fiction alike in varying levels of visibility, always rooted in a strong disgust in bodily functions and a resultant feeling of extreme shame. It is crucial to note that the French works I will go on to discuss are not the only scatological or excremental works in the deportation canon; the corpus Des Pres draws from is clear evidence that this is far from the truth. However, when contrasted against other accounts of deportation, works conscious of excremental assault but which do little to explore it, it will become evident that these French works' harnessing of the excremental is unique for reasons I'll soon elaborate.

The shame prisoners felt at their own befouled bodies is seen clearly in some of the most widely-read works of war testimony. Primo Levi describes the effect of an excremental environment on prisoners in his memoir *Survival in Auschwitz:*

> All the latrines were overflowing, as naturally nobody cared any more about their upkeep, and those suffering from dysentery (more than a hundred) had fouled every corner of Ka-Be [camp slang for Krankenbau, or infirmary], filling all the buckets, all the bowels formerly used for rations, all the pots. One could not move an inch without watching one's step; in the dark it was impossible to move around. Although suffering from the cold, which remained acute, we thought with horror of what would happen if it thawed: the diseases would spread irreparably, the stench would be suffocating, and even more, with the snow melted we would remain definitively without water.[22]

While Levi remains acutely aware of excrement's danger, it is one force which threatens his life among many others, including cold, thirst, and disease. Although conscious of the substance's demoralizing effect, Levi's work does not personalize filth, yet displays it cautiously and impersonally.

Nobel Laureate Imre Kertesz, the first and only Holocaust survivor to receive a Prize in Literature,[23] similarly alerts the reader to the dehumanization of excrement without exploring it

[22] Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. Giulio Einaudi (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 163-164.
[23] Kertesz won the Prize in Literature in 2002 "for writing that upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history." Other Holocaust survivors have won Nobel Prizes in other domains.

in detail. Deported to Buchenwald and Auschwitz as a teen, Kertesz penned the semiautobiographical novel *Fateless* which recounts the journey of George, a teenaged Hungarian Jew, as he is led through the system of Nazi death camps. George describes a clear example of excremental assault as a guard reacts to his personal odor: "[A] guard watched us on the journey with obvious resentment. His face was drawn, and at the inevitable sudden gust of an odor, he grimaced with clear disgust—and with some justification, I had to admit. What pained me most was that it seemed that he was forming an opinion, deducing some general truth, from this, and I felt like making excuses for myself: it wasn't entirely my fault; originally this was not my nature at all. But proving this to him would be nearly hopeless, I could see."[24] Compounded with a later discussion where he deems his own excretions as "sinful," Kertesz's narrator inhabits a universe where excrement constitutes a pervading and disgusting force, one which leads him to feel inferior to those around him. Despite suffering from dysentery, George displays a tendency to describe his condition in euphemisms, speaking of his "needs" or his excretions as "sinful signs."[25] Although the protagonist feels at ease discussing other areas of his body, such as the pus-filled abscesses which dot his entire form, his evocations of diarrhea are often masked through softened language. In this same vein, despite having the word 'anus' in its title, Wiesław

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Elie Wiesel's 1986 Nobel Prize was awarded as a Peace Prize, not in literature for endeavors such as *Night.* Russian Alexander Solzhenitsyn won a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970 for his works detailing deportation in the Soviet Gulag system. Most recently, Belgian particle physicist and Holocaust survivor François Englon won a Nobel Prize in Physics for his work in the discovery of the Higgs boson in 2013. For more information on all laureates consult http://www.nobelprize.org.

[24] Imre Kertesz, *Fateless,* trans. Christopher C. Wilson and Katharina M. Wilson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 127-28. The book has been translated more recently as *Fatelessness* by Tim Wilkinson. Although I do not speak Hungarian and cannot testify to the accuracy of either translation, I prefer the sound and rhythm of the older translation, and have therefore decided to use it throughout this work.

[25] Kertesz writes, "There was another fault, a continuing *sin* that, after all, I couldn't hide forever with any amount of willpower. I soon learned that on occasion, as my need arose, I had to call for a boy who was just a little older than I… He would appear with a flat pan equipped with a handle, and he would place this under the blankets… As it was, no one, himself included, denied the rightful necessity of such a demand once or twice a day, but I was forced to bother him three times or even four times a day, and I could see that this annoyed him… Once, he even carried the pot to the doctor, and explained something, argued, and kept showing him the contents. The doctor studied the *sinful* signs a little, but… he undoubtedly dismissed the charge." My emphasis. Kertesz, *Fateless,* 144.

Kielar's *Anus Mundi: 1,500 Days in Auschwitz/Birkenau* ironically almost never addresses the subject of excrement. Thus while broaching the subject of excrement is not uncommon in depictions of deportation, treatment of this subject is often sparse, shrouded in euphemistic language, or discussed in an emotionless, matter-of-fact tone.

40 years have passed since *The Survivor'*s publication and little has been done to continue the excellent work begun by Des Pres.[26] However, these French texts I discuss both inform and complicate our understanding of Des Pres' theory, proposing alternate perspectives of the excremental in the context of deportation and its memory. Although these works prove acutely aware of excrement's ability to induce shame, their treatment of the scatological explores this same substance's ability to bring to the surface notions of resistance, corruption, and guilt. In works of testimony, a rigorous probing of the excremental sheds light on the experience of deportation for survivors, elucidating how individuals relied on their own bodies to cope with life in the camps and to process their homecomings after Liberation. Additionally compelling, where scatological testimony sharpens our insights on the ways individuals processed the Nazi death camps, scatological fiction functions similarly to shed light on the dissemination of this traumatic collective memory in the psyches of all who experience it secondhand.

I begin with a study of testimonial works. In my first chapter, I examine the case of Buchenwald survivor Robert Antelme, whose memoir *L'Espèce humaine* (1947) reappropriates the same functions deemed degrading by the Nazis as proof of the author's spiritual autonomy

[26] Several academics have applied Des Pres' theory in their analysis of fictive texts, seen for example in Michael David Fox's reading of *Par-dessus bord* and Gary Mole's study of *L'Anus du monde,* Daniel Zimmermann's novel which should not to be mistaken for the similarly named testimony of Wiesław Kielar. See Michael David Fox, "Anus Mundi: Jews, the Holocaust, and Excremental Assault in Michel Vinaver's Overboard (Par-dessus bord)," *Modern Drama* 45.1 (2002): 35-60, and Gary D. Mole, "Scatology, Chopped Liver, and the Last Supper: Daniel Zimmermann's Holocaust Novel *L'Anus du monde*," *French Studies* 67.1 (2013): 30-46.

and resistance. Although the motivation for the work's brash incipit, "Je suis allé pisser," may initially be unclear, as Antelme progresses it becomes evident that he aligns urination with resistance: in addition to the candor of conversation in the bathroom spaces which the disgusted SS avoided, the author frequently feigns urination to halt working momentarily in a clandestine act of resistance against his captors and the work they force him to complete. Antelme's kaleidoscopic reflections on the scatological culminate in a moment of extreme consciousness: alone in the camp outhouse, the author deems the warm haze of urine around him to be the ultimate act of defiance, tangible, irrefutable proof that he and his friends continue to exist despite the SS's best efforts to annihilate them. Despite its negative connotations, urine thus functions as a source of comfort and hope for Antelme in this environment of suffering.

In the second half of this chapter, I continue to explore Antelme's relationship to the scatological through an analysis of *La Douleur* (1985), a work written by his then-wife, Marguerite Duras. In many ways a companion piece to *L'Espèce humaine, La Douleur* recounts Antelme's immediate return from Buchenwald. During a two-week period, Antelme's life hangs in the balance as his dysentery-ravaged body fights to survive, continually evacuating a "merde inhumaine" whose sight and odor strike Duras as being totally alien, a foreignness she fuses to her own inability to comprehend her husband's experience in Buchenwald. Throughout this period of evacuation it is unclear whether Antelme will survive this illness wreaked by the camp's squalid conditions. However, Duras potently aligns her husband's physical and psychic catharsis as his dysentery mimetically purges body and spirit of the filth of the camps. After a fortnight of this exhausting evacuation, an "odeur humaine" replaces the "inhuman" scent of Antelme's excretions, and it is through this olfactory shift that Duras recognizes that her husband

will survive. *La Douleur* thus presents a joint model of physical and psychic catharsis, examining one man's efforts to rid himself body and spirit of the trauma of the camps.

My second and final chapter in the dissertation's first section on testimony examines the works of Charlotte Delbo, whose visceral reactions to Auschwitz's foul odors create rich parallels with a long European tradition equating bodily scents with morality. I outline a long practice of biographical and hagiographical representations of death in which positive and negative olfactory qualities are ascribed to an individual based on their actions in life—while the death of martyrs brings accompanying sweet, floral smells, wicked or immoral individuals such as Judas Iscariot or William the Conqueror experience death as a phenomenon marked by foul smells and feces. As part of the famous 31 000 convoy of female French resisters, Delbo carefully positions herself and her fellow deportees as secular martyrs for France. For this reason, their bodies' stench incites an even acuter anguish in the camps by calling into question the convoy's narrative of secular martyrdom. Yet despite scent's ability to inflict psychic trauma in the camps, odor and the memory of odor prove crucial in Delbo's readjustment to life after Liberation due to a complex web of resonances uniting memory and the olfactory at their very cores. The works of these three witnesses to history thus poignantly fuse bodily functions to the experience and memory of the camps, unearthing issues touching both survivors and the transmission of their testimony to the non-interned population.

I proceed with a study of scatological fiction, which similarly opens up new lines of inquiry for deportation and its memory. In the second half of this project I begin by examining Michel Vinaver's darkly humorous play *Par-dessus bord* (1969). Centered on Alex, a childhood Auschwitz survivor poised to take over a failing toilet paper company, Vinaver's work interrogates the commodification of the individual and money's role in our remembrance of

deportation through a three-way concurrence of scatology, sex, and consumerism. As Alex recounts his experience in deportation to his new fiancée, the only person capable of receiving his testimony in the company's environment of stifling greed, it becomes clear that each member of his family has become mired in excrement through their time at Auschwitz: his brilliant concert pianist mother sees herself morphed into an abject waste object as a prostitute in the camp brothel and his father dies at the bottom of a latrine. Alex himself becomes bogged down anew through the ruthless consumerism of his new employer who deems his excremental past in Auschwitz to be a sign of his scatological expertise, leading the young man to flounder faced with a society which would exploit his Holocaust suffering in a shameless attempt to make money and sell toilet paper. Through his presentation of Alex and other characters' interactions with him, Vinaver not only explores the memory of war for one fictitious individual, but more importantly provides a biting commentary on modern French society's inability to digest the traumatic experience of the war in the years surrounding Henry Rousso's "miroir brisé."

With my final chapter, I conclude by interrogating the scatological from the perspective of a perpetrator. In Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* (2006), the excremental highlights a fictitious SS officer's latent unease towards his complicity in the Holocaust, as scatological imagery weaves its way through his waking and dreaming hours in a series of interrelated anecdotes. As the protagonist writes his memoirs decades after the war, he speaks candidly of his own postwar constipation, a condition he intimates may be alleviated through the purgative act of writing. Prefacing his memoir with a disclaimer of the "scabrous" scatology within its pages, the protagonist issues a warning for all readers with a weak stomach to put down his book and stop reading. However, there proves to be another level of meaning to this admonition: the reader comes to draw a parallel between the scabrous descriptions of bodily functions and the revolting,

heinous acts the protagonist commits as part of his job in the SS. Readers thus must overcome their joint disgust of excrement and the perspective of a perpetrator, both omnipresent in the novel, in order to receive this bizarre fictional testimony. The scatological in *Les Bienveillantes* not only serves as a modus to understand the novel in and of itself, but ultimately encourages reflection on the state of Holocaust memorialization today through the suggestion by critics and historians such as Denis Peschanski that Littell's tome is a portent of our passing from an *ère du témoin*, to use the term coined by Annette Wieviorka, to an *ère du bourreau*, due to the novel's first person Nazi narrator.

A pressing "matter": Concluding remarks

Together, these four carefully chosen cases work within Des Pres' theory of excremental assault, yet theorize rigorous conceptions of the excremental which transcend the realm of mere disgust and shame. In addressing elements of the scatological in Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine*, Bruno Chaouat wonders aloud, "Mais que nous dit cette merde? Qu'est-ce que chier veut dire, peut-on lire dans la merde ? La merde peut-elle témoigner, et si oui, de quoi témoigne-t-elle ?"[27] Throughout this project, I aim to prove that it is possible to "read in shit," and more importantly, as Chaouat suggests, that it is possible to find within this fertile substance a fecund and distinctive vision of deportation. It is perhaps telling that of all humanity's shared functions—blinking, breathing, hearts beating— that urination and excretion come to represent the body's potential for testimony. While these other processes might also unite us, urinating and excreting are the sole ones which leave behind physical traces on a daily basis. In addition to being universally human and quotidian, bodily functions speak to testimony because quite

[27] Bruno Chaouat, "Ce que chier veut dire (Les *ultima excreta* de Robert Antelme)," *Revue des sciences humaines* 261 (2001): 148.

simply, they are able to testify themselves, creating tangible products which endure and bear sustained visual witness to the inner-workings of our physical forms. Through their complex visualizations of bodily waste, the texts in this corpus not only enrich our understanding of deportation over 70 years later, but encourage conscious reflection on our own preconceptions of the body's most taboo region.

Despite the catastrophic suffering wreaked by excrement in the Nazi extermination camps, these works evidence that it is a mistake to view bodily waste solely as a source of sorrow and degradation. While remaining sharply conscious of excrement's ability to debase, the works I discuss harness the scatological to explore and embrace a humanity not altogether eradicated through the experience of deportation, whether they be feelings of autonomy and resistance or even latent unease and guilt. Similarly, in spite of moments of biting, well-merited humor and sarcasm, these works similarly prohibit excrement from being considered through a purely comedic prism as a source of laughter; it is hard not to feel compassion for the women of the 31 000 convoy, whose very *raison d'être* and pride as martyrs for France threatens to seep away through their bodies' most sensitive region. So what, then, *does* this shit tell us? Perhaps the most thought-provoking approach to this inquiry can be found by looking back to the response suggested by Rabelais and Bakhtin. In his analysis of Panurge's triumphant exaltation at the end of the *Quart Livre*, Bakhtin affirms that excrement is a matter built on seamlessly integrated paradoxes, at once debasing and tender, sobering and laughing matter:

> Here we find the ambivalent image of excrement, its relation to regeneration and renewal and its special role in overcoming fear. *Excrement is gay matter;* in the ancient scatological images, as we have said, *it is linked to the generating force* and to fertility. On the other hand, excrement is conceived as something *intermediate between earth and body,* as something relating the one to the other. It is also an *intermediate between the living body and dead disintegrating matter* that is being transformed into earth, into manure. The living body returns to the earth its excrement,

> which fertilizes the earth as does the body of the dead… *[Rabelais] conceived excrement as both joyous and sobering matter, at the same time debasing and tender*.[28]

Bakhtin's analysis elucidates why multifaceted approaches to excrement in deportation have been nurtured in works written in the language of Rabelais, for his observations on the scatological prove equally evocative of the authors discussed in this project. For Bakhtin and Rabelais, excrement becomes inextricable from the dualisms which comprise it, simultaneously a matter of life and death, of joy and sorrow, a matter of generation and decay. To eliminate one half of this pairing in visions of deportation therefore is to misunderstand the substance altogether: learning to understand and appreciate this strange matter develops through embracing its peculiar dual nature. Like Panurge, who overcomes a scatological fear and terror through a praise the same substance, in these French representations of deportation, excrement proves to be evidence of acute thought and feeling in an environment meant to dumb the senses and sensitivity of those who came into contact with it. It is not only gay matter, or laughing matter, but crying matter, anguished matter, fighting matter, resisting matter, a thinking matter. Above all, as Rabelais himself suggests through his call *beuvons*, it is a matter which sets us in communion with truth. While it may not ever be possible to grasp the entirety of the Nazi camps secondhand, studying the scatological's harnessing in real and fictitious depictions of deportation provokes us to reconsider our visions of survivors, our collective grappling with the past, and even our own bodies in all their grotesque, yet captivating wonder.

[28] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World,* 175-176.

PART I: Scatological Testimony
Antelme, Duras, Delbo: Images of the Revolting Body

Some of the most frequently discussed works of the French deportation canon, the rich testimonies of Robert Antelme and Charlotte Delbo continue to fascinate academics and drive new, meaningful scholarship well into the 21st century. Published in 1947, Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine* has occupied a place of visibility and prominence in the French understanding of deportation since its release. While Antelme's memoir ends with his liberation from the camps, his then-wife Marguerite Duras continues his story, describing his perilous return to France in great detail. Purportedly written at Liberation, the unconventional testimony recorded in 1985's *La Douleur* posits Duras as a "witness to the witness," as Camilla Loew argues, providing a complex and often controversial image of the couple in the period surrounding Antelme's homecoming.[1]

Charlotte Delbo's reflections on the concentrationary universe similarly span through multiple works. With a constellation of accounts weaving through prose, poetry and theater, Delbo's experience crystallizes around her three-volume *Auschwitz et Après*, written in the war period but first published from 1965 to 1971. Unlike Antelme, Delbo's work first gained renown abroad in countries like the United States; it is only in recent years that the author has begun to gain recognition for her remarkable works in her native France. Despite the shared longevity of their works, it is perhaps for these differences in primary readership bases that the experiences of Antelme and Delbo are infrequently considered alongside one another in detail. However, in

[1] Consult "Marguerite Duras: Witness to the Witness", the fourth chapter of Camila Loew, *The Memory of Pain: Women's Testimonies of the Holocaust* (Rodopi: New York, 2011).

examining the authors' unique, vivid accounts of their respective deportations– Antelme to Gandersheim and Buchenwald, Delbo to Auschwitz and Ravensbrück— their recollections prove to intersect meaningfully both on and off the page, most notably through complex, sustained dialogues mapping the scatological onto the bodies and memories of deportees.

As French gentiles deported for resistance activities, the experiences of Antelme and Delbo resonate as accounts of extreme suffering and sacrifice during Nazi Germany's wartime occupation of France. In March of 1942, Charlotte Delbo was arrested alongside her husband, Georges Dudach, in their Parisian apartment after agents followed Pierre Villon there to a clandestine meeting. Founder of the Front National resistance network[2] Villon witnessed the couple's capture, and was the sole member of the meeting to escape: "Je me suis trouvé le 2 mars 1942, à midi, chez Georges et Charlotte DUDACH, 93, rue de la Faisanderie. Un quart d'heure après mon arrivée un coup de sonette [sic] retentit. Sur la question de Charlotte DUDACH, qui est là?, une voix répondit: "c'est le gaz". Pour ne pas être vu, je suis passé dans la salle de bain et dès que j'eus tiré la porte sur moi j'entendis plusieurs hommes rentrer dans l'appartement et crier: "Haut les mains! Police!" Je pus m'échapper par la fenêtre…"[3] The Dudach couple was incarcerated in La Santé prison when on the morning of May 23, 1942, guards brought Charlotte to her husband to bid him farewell. After a brief final meeting with his wife, 28 year-old Georges Dudach was shot to death in the courtyard of Mont Valérien prison along with the husbands of

[2] Le Front national de lutte pour la libération et l'indépendance de la France was a network of communist resisters formed in 1941 by Villon and Jacques Duclos. It should not be confused with the far-right political party of the same name.

[3] On June 14, 1956, Roger Ginsburger, pseudonym Pierre Villon, gave a statement attesting to the couple's resistance service. The original document is housed in the Fonds Charlotte Delbo at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. In addition to this copy and a facsimile on display at the French pavilion at the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, a photograph of the statement may be consulted in Elisabetta Ruffini, ed., *Charlotte Delbo: Une mémoire à mille voix* (Bergamo: Il filo di Arianna, 2014), 40.

several of Charlotte's future convoy members.[4] Heartbroken over the murder of her husband, Charlotte grieved in an internment camp, surrounded by a resilient group of friends. What she did not know, however, was that her suffering was just beginning. In less than nine months, on January 23, 1943 she and 229 other female resisters would be deported from Compiègne to Auschwitz, where they would face death on a daily basis.

Once free from Auschwitz, where each day had to be eked forcibly from the clutches of death, Charlotte's thawing psyche returned to the memory of her beloved Georges. She described her grief upon returning to close friend and mentor Louis Jouvet:

> J'étais revenue, oui. Je l'ai regretté tout aussitôt. Revenue à quoi? A la vie? Sans doute. Mais quelle vie puisque G. n'y était pas. J'avais eu peur de l'oublier, j'avais craint que respirer, manger, espérer, ce soit oublier, l'oublier. Non. Son souvenir était si douloureux que j'ai envié Ondine. Elle, dès l'instant qu'elle aurait plongé au fond des eaux, elle oublierait. Moi j'étais remontée à la surface de moi-même, et tout ce qui m'entourait n'était qu'arêtes coupantes et brûlantes d'objets, de couleurs, de réminiscences, d'associations, d'évocations qui témoignaient que G. avait existé, m'avait aimée, que je l'avais aimé et que je n'étais pas morte de l'avoir quitté le matin qu'il partait mourir.[5]

Charlotte never remarried, choosing instead to consecrate herself to her writing, penning politically charged works and literary histories detailing the horrors of the Nazi camps and critiquing France's involvement in the Algerian War until her death in 1985.

Similarly engaged in Parisian Resistance circles, Robert Antelme was arrested on June 1, 1944 along with his younger sister Marie-Louise in a Gestapo sting at her apartment at 5 rue Dupin. Through her courageous actions, Marie-Louise Antelme would prevent future president

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[4] This group notably included Marxist philosopher Georges Politzer, husband of 31 000 deportee and friend to Charlotte Mai Politzer. "Georges Dudach," Les Amis de Charlotte Delbo, accessed February 19, 2016. http://www.charlottedelbo.org/bio-dudach.

[5] Charlotte Delbo, *Spectres, mes compagnons* (Paris: Berg International, 1995), 50. Jouvet would never read Delbo's letter, which ended with her tender evocation of George. Delbo stopped writing her letter to Jouvet upon his death in 1951.

François Mitterrand, then a member of the sibling's Resistance network, from entering the same trap. Mitterrand recollects Marie-Louise's quick thinking:

> Avant de monter, j'ai téléphoné depuis la poste de la rue Dupin, laquelle se trouve justement en bas de l'appartement. Je téléphone pour demander 'Ça va ? Rien de particulier?' C'était une précaution habituelle…. Je téléphone, c'est Marie-Louise qui prend l'appareil…. Elle me dit : 'Monsieur, vous vous êtes trompé de numéro.'… Pensant que je m'étais en effet trompé, j'ai recomposé le numéro. Une seconde fois, d'une voix irritée, elle me dit : 'je vous ai déjà dit que vous vous êtes trompé.' J'ai su plus tard qu'elle était là, au téléphone, avec l'agent de la Gestapo, revolver sorti, lui disant : 'dites-lui de venir.' Non seulement elle ne m'a pas dit de venir, mais en me répétant que je m'étais trompé de numéro alors que j'avais cette fois la certitude de ne m'être pas trompé, elle m'a indiqué qu'il ne fallait pas que je vienne, et je ne suis pas venu.[6]

After their arrests, Marie-Louise was sent to Ravensbrück and her brother to Buchenwald. Transported to Dachau shortly before Liberation, Robert Antelme greeted the war's end languishing away from typhus and dysentery.

However, fate or circumstance led the same man Marie-Louise had saved from the Gestapo trap to discover Robert in exorable conditions among the sea of the dead and dying. Mitterrand would fortuitously stumble upon Robert in the quarantined ruins of Dachau, where American soldiers forbade deportees from exiting the camp in order to stave endemic disease. In a 1985 conversation with Marguerite Duras, Mitterrand recounts the incredible amount of chance which led him to Antelme, and which permitted Antelme to escape quarantined Dachau:

> Pour qu'ensuite, ayant été désigné pour accompagner le général américain Lewis pour l'ouverture de certains camps de déportés, et notamment de Dachau, je me trouve là, que j'assiste à la libération du camp de Dachau, aux exécutions des SS, un spectacle fou, et que j'aille dans ce champ à l'intérieur du camp où les morts et les agonisants étaient abandonnés… Que nous ayons traversé ce champ pour aller d'un endroit à l'autre à l'intérieur du camp, pas spécialement là, d'ailleurs… Et d'un tas de ces corps, apparemment inertes, une voix faible s'est élevée, qui m'a appelé par mon prénom… Je me suis penché, et je ne savais pas qui avait prononcé mon nom. On a cherché, et quand on a trouvé que c'était lui, on ne l'a pas reconnu.[7]

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[6] Marguerite Duras and François Mitterrand, *Le bureau de poste de la rue Dupin et autres entretiens*, ed. Mazarine Pingeot (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 150-151.
[7] Duras and Mitterrand, *Le bureau de poste*, 19-20.

With the restrictions on deportees leaving the quarantined camp, Mitterrand found his own way to remove the dying Antelme from Dachau. Returning immediately to Paris, along with other network members he quickly fabricated fake laissez-passer papers similar to the ones which had allowed him to enter and leave the camp. Furnished with the fake papers, Dionys Mascolo smuggled Antelme from Dachau with the help of Antelme's childhood friend Georges Beauchamp. Mascolo reflects, "J'ai dit aux Américains que nous étions des agents de renseignement, que ce détenu avait des informations à nous donner sur des services de la Gestapo encore actifs en France, et que nous avions besoin de le questionner sans témoin. Ils nous ont permis de sortir du camp et de marcher devant les barrières de grillage. Ce que nous avons fait. Après une vingtaine de minutes, nous nous sommes esquivés, jusqu'à la voiture cachée dans une rue adjacente. Nous sommes rentrés en deux jours à Paris."[8] By the time the trio reached Strasbourg, Antelme's friends were certain he was dead; however, when they took him to a hospital, a nurse confirmed that he was still alive, albeit barely. Returning to Paris, his life hung in the balance for ten days as chronicled by Duras in *La Douleur.* However, through the actions of his friends and family Robert survived his deportation, dying in 1990. His courageous sister was not as fortunate. Marie-Louise Antelme died soon after the liberation of Ravensbrück at the age of 26, not surviving the Red Cross airlift to Sweden. *L'Espèce humaine,* Robert's account of deportation, is dedicated to the memory of his younger sister.

Although the experiences of Delbo and Antelme are equally heartbreaking and marked by the loss of the loved ones who resisted beside them, their stories prove unified past their shared nationality, political engagement, and trauma. Both individuals' testimonies demonstrate a common concern for the excremental throughout their camp experiences and in their

[8] Duras and Mitterrand, *Le bureau de poste,* 154.

readjustment to life after Liberation, as evidenced in Duras's *La Douleur*. During their deportations, both Antelme and Delbo find bodily substances tied to their identity as resisters to the Nazi regime; Antelme harnesses urine to enact symbolically subversive acts against his captors, while Delbo agonizes over the excremental and its resultant odors' questioning of her convoy's secular martyr identity. Upon their returns home, bodily waste proves equally fused to memory: Delbo explores the ebbs and flow of memory through scented temporalities whereas Antelme is aided by Duras, whose recollections of his return in *La Douleur* morph the excretory system into a mimetic device purging Antelme's body of the camps in a jointly physical and psychic catharsis.

Furthermore, these authors' embracing of an explored and theorized scatology highlights the literariness of each work, rare qualities in Holocaust testimony. For as Terrence Des Pres asserts, war testimonies were recounted "often clumsily, with little thought for style or rhetorical device."[9] The intricate works depicting the lives of Antelme and Delbo thus raise a strange question: can one take a certain pleasure in reading accounts of something so horrific?[10] Georges Perec believes adamently in this possibility, deeming Antelme's memoir as "l'exemple le plus parfait, dans la production française contemporaine, de ce que peut être la littérature,"[11] Delbo's works similarly foster a beauty to be embraced. Critic François Bott writes of her testimony as, "Dépeignant l'extrême misère avec une extrême douceur, une extrême tendresse, elle a su traduire ce que La Rochefoucauld appelait 'le mystère du corps,' et nous faire sentir

[9] Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 29.
[10] For a more comprehensive response to this question of grave importance, consult Brett Ashley Kaplan's monograph *Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
[11] Georges Perec, "Robert Antelme ou la vérité de la littérature," in *Robert Antelme: Textes inédites sur L'espèce humaine,* by Robert Antelme et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 188.

profondément le monstrueux attentat que commettent les bourreaux lorsqu'ils offensent ce mystère. C'est la raison pour laquelle les textes de Charlotte se lisent comme un étrange poème d'amour."[12] A carefully foregrounded attention to bodily waste in the works of Antelme, Duras, and Delbo thus creates works which simultaneously emphasize intense suffering and beauty, two extremes which converge around a revolting body: a body that disgusts, but at the same time, a body in constant revolution against the oppression which surrounds it.

[12] François Bott, "Un étrange poème d'amour," introduction to Charlotte Delbo, *La mémoire et les jours* (Paris: Berg International, 1995), 8-9.

Chapter I: Pisser rend libre: Excremental Catharsis in Antelme and Duras

"Là où ça sent la merde, ça sent l'être." – Antonin Artaud[1]

"Je suis allé pisser."[2] With this stark, yet deceptively simple declarative sentence, readers of *L'Espèce humaine* enter the grisly reality of Robert Antelme's Buchenwald via the camp outhouse, coming to bear witness to the physical and mental traumas which would continue to haunt the Resistant long after his return from deportation. Although Antelme's incipit may initially disorient the reader in its audaciousness, this debut effectively sets the tone for a memoir which will be peppered with copious references to excrement and excretion, an understandable (if not still-unanticipated) lexical presence given the well-documented squalor of the Nazi concentration camp system. The complex web of scatological references employed by Antelme, however, has occasionally provoked misguided interpretations of his rich *témoignage*, due in part to the juxtaposition of emotionally heavy scatological scenes with fleeting, seemingly banal references to excreta. A general human unease with bodily functions coupled with an academic wariness towards certain aspects of scatology have similarly damaged the way some scholars have chosen to interpret Antelme's mobilization of the excremental.

In their monograph on scatology in German literature, Dieter and Jacqueline Rollfinke critique scholarly unease with the excremental, stating "[A] shortcoming of the available scholarly work on scatology is the almost unanimous opinion that the only real literary value of scatology lies in its use as a shocking and powerful satirical weapon. If scatology in nonsatirical

[1] Antonin Artaud, "La recherche de la fécalité," YouTube video, 4:36, from a 1947 recording, posted by "Ondes Nerveuses," May 21, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3lMGhWFo-A.
[2] Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 15. All subsequent quotations of Antelme will be cited parenthetically from this edition.

forms is discussed at all, it is usually described as useless dirty humor of a subliterary nature."[3] Little room seems to exist then for any excremental discourse between boorishly-crass toilet humor or the scathing scatological satires of Swift and Rabelais. It is perhaps for reasons like this that some scholars choose to write off the powerful beginning of Antelme's memoir, qualifying it as a stylistic trope meant predominately to shock readers and to bear testament to the complete otherworldliness of the *univers concentrationnaire*, a term coined by fellow Buchenwald deportee David Rousset.[4]

In *Langages du désastre*, Joë Friedemann denies the weight of the excremental undertones in Antelme's opening paragraph, stating that readers should not even consider the work as scatological: "*L'Espèce humaine,* en totale opposition avec les règles d'une quelconque bienséance, débute sur une description qui, dans d'autres circonstances, aurait été qualifiée de scatologique. A l'évidence, cette optique n'est pas celle de l'écrivain. Robert Antelme entame son discours sur un ton délibérément non-conformiste, et dans des temps d'un réalisme sans artifice, c'est d'entrée, pour ne laisser aucune incertitude quant à l'entité d'un monde dont les normes ont été intégralement bouleversées, perverties par la volonté des hommes."[5]The two stereotyped perceptions of the excremental outlined by the Rollfinkes elucidate this syllogistic misreading of Antelme: if scatology in the written arts may be either toilet humor or satire, and Antelme's work is neither toilet humor nor satire, Antelme's work cannot be scatological. These attempts to distance *L'Espèce humaine* from the excremental thus betray the overwhelmingly negative connotations which Friedemann considers irrevocably fused to the term "scatological," and an honorable, if extremely misguided attempt to defend the intellectual integrity of

[3] Dieter and Jacqueline Rollfinke, *The Call of Human Nature: The Role of Scatology in Modern German Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 6.
[4] See David Rousset, *L'univers concentrationnaire* (Paris: Fayard, 2011).
[5] Joë Friedemann, *Langages du désastre* (Paris: Librairie A-G Nizet, 2007), 34.

Antelme's work by distancing it from a trope which represents nothing but crassness to the critic. Friedemann's defense of *L'Espèce humaine* as non-scatological thus does more to stress his own prejudices against excremental literature than it does to convince his reader that Antelme's work is not deliberately scatological. However, this misguided endeavor to champion *L'Espèce humaine'*s intellectual worth comes at a steep price: in attempting to divorce Antelme's memoir from its pervading excremental overtones, Friedemann strips this passage and this work of its strength, divorcing it from a force which will propel the rest of Antelme's narrative and serve as a potent reaffirmation of being throughout the entirety of *L'Espèce humaine.*

Given the prevalence of excremental references in *L'Espèce humaine,* noticeable from the work's very beginning, to consider Antelme's mobilization of the scatological as a mere shock tactic is unsettling, and does a great injustice to the intricate moments where urine and excrement rise to the surface of his memoir. When readers and scholars remember the heightened excremental environments of the concentration camps, the recalcitrance of many author-survivors to confront the scatological meaningfully in their works, and finally, the ubiquity of scatological discourse in Antelme's memoir, it becomes clear that there is much more than meets the eye—or perhaps the nose—in Antelme's very deliberate harnessing of bodily functions. Deceptively straightforward and written in stark, yet elegant prose, the scatological in Antelme seeks not to offend, vilify, or surprise, but to explain, illuminate, and most importantly, to bear objective witness to the events surrounding Antelme's internment. If scatological literature's most frequently perceived utility by critics is in its ability either to shock or to satirize, as the Rollefinkes comment, then the work of Robert Antelme presents itself as a compelling third option, one which explores jointly the agony and strength of the human race while submitted to unthinkable suffering. Considered through its scatological prism, *L'Espèce humaine* thus

becomes a work whose references to the body and its functions refract in countless directions, imbuing and adorning Antelme's memoir with rich, complex levels of meaning.

However, *L'Espèce humaine*'s omnipresent web of scatological references is extraordinary for reasons which far surpass the confrontation of social taboo. When examined against the pervasive Nazi practice of using excrement as a mass psychological weapon, Antelme's decision to infuse the human body and its processes with positive connotations paradoxically morphs a symbol of debasement into a potent reaffirmation of self for the deportee. In a process which historian Terrence Des Pres refers to as "excremental assault," the Nazis deliberately and concertedly assailed the inmate's sense of worth and inner cleanliness through prolonged, traumatic exposure to human excrement. Although *L'Espèce humaine* testifies to the degradation experienced by deportees submerged in their own bodily filth, a pain and anguish that no words can neutralize completely, by grafting a positive definition onto this pre-established Nazi signification of excrement, Antelme performs a powerful act of ideological resistance, assigning bodily functions a significance antithetical to their previously classified role in Nazi intellectual propaganda. Through this symbolically potent rebranding of the excremental, Antelme channels one of the Nazi's most sadistic psychological weapons into a source of strength and defiance for prisoners, an act which powerfully affirms his autonomy and his very existence in an environment of supreme suffering.

This harnessing of the excremental as a powerful referent of being would in turn follow Antelme home from the camps as seen in *La Douleur,* a *cahier* written by Antelme's then-wife Marguerite Duras detailing his painful convalescence. In this occasionally problematic and stylized recounting of her husband's homecoming, Duras similarly endows the scatological with nuanced, emotionally rich significance, conceptualizing the waste which flows from Antelme as

a powerful externalization of memory, and of the body's grotesquely beautiful ability to purge itself both physically and spiritually of forces which harm it. Duras's description of her husband's digestive cycle establishes a bowel/brain metonymy where purgation of the body mirrors a purgation of the soul. However, there is an even more disturbing metonymy at play: that of individual and collective, as represented through the relationship between dysentery-stricken Robert and the friends who surround him. While Duras looks awestruck at the unrecognizable waste that spews from Robert's body, she poses disquieting questions regarding the ability of even the most sympathetic non-survivor to comprehend the camps. As George Perec reflects, "On croit connaître les camps parce que l'on a vu, ou cru voir, les miradors, les barbelés, les chambres à gaz… Des panneaux touristiques, à Munich, invitent à visiter Dachau. Mais les baraques sont vides et propres, le gazon pousse."[6] Every non-deportee's understanding of the concentrationary universe is thus fatally flawed; although the individual may approach a more nuanced understanding of the past through contact with the survivor, this knowledge will always be inherently secondhand and re-presentational. The survivor will forever be alone in his or her macabre awareness of the past.

While this conclusion of ultimate solitude may seem hopelessly pessimistic for these *revenants,* to borrow the haunting yet apt ghostly appellation for the deported, [7] it soon becomes clear that all is not lost. Although family members and loved ones of the deportee will never be able to cross the insurmountable impasse from sympathy to empathy, it is in this environment of benevolent misunderstanding that writing emerges as the final cathartic act. As Robert's body

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[6] Georges Perec, "Robert Antelme ou la vérité de la littérature," in *Robert Antelme: Textes inédites sur L'espèce humaine*, by Robert Antelme et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 176.

[7] See Peter Kuon's 2014 *L'écriture des revenants : Lectures de témoignages de la déportation politique* (Paris: Kimé, 2014) and David Caron and Sharon Marquart's *Les Revenantes. Charlotte Delbo: la voix d'une communauté à jamais déportée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2011). Claude Burgelin additionally refers to Antelme as a *revenant* in *Lire Duras: écriture, théâtre, cinéma* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2000), 55-56.

starts to mend itself through a physical purgation of waste, a movement which mirrors a simultaneous emotional purgation, his true and ultimate catharsis takes place as he expels thought, emotions, and memory from his body to the blank pages of his memoir, an act which allows him to begin healing from this gruesome chapter of his life, purging himself after a long period of spiritual and emotional constipation.

Although fundamentally separated in that one is written by a survivor, and the other by a non-survivor, the postwar autobiographical writings of Robert Antelme and Marguerite Duras converge in the bathroom in order to elucidate different aspects of one man's struggle to survive Buchenwald and to heal from unthinkable trauma. Despite the Nazi apparatus's ruthless tentative to destroy deportees through excremental assault, this same potent symbol of degradation ultimately proves to be a totem of hope, strength, and perseverance under the most adverse of situations. By bringing the excremental to the surface of their works at key moments, Antelme and Duras fight fire with fire, paradoxically rebranding one of the most debasing signs of humiliation and submission into the embodiment of empowerment and healing.

A Brief history of "excremental assault": Situating prewar visions of bodily functions

To understand the innovative nature of Antelme's scatological discourse is to fathom fully the pervasiveness of excrement in the *univers concentrationnaire.* In addition to withstanding unthinkable physical barbarousness at the hands of their captors, prisoners such as Robert Antelme suffered psychologically and spiritually due to the fetid conditions of their new environs. The period leading up to the Liberation saw inmates of Nazi concentration camps forced into frequent and excruciating direct contact with bodily filth. Terrence Des Pres argues that this immersion in mire was not solely a byproduct of the camps' unhygienic circumstances, but was part of a deliberate, concerted effort of the Nazis to annihilate all sense of pride and self-

worth in the deportees, a process which he describes as "excremental assault." According to Des Pres, "Spiritual destruction became an end in itself, quite apart from the requirements of mass murder. The death of the soul was aimed at. It was to be accomplished by terror and privation, but first of all by a relentless assault on the survivor's sense of purity and worth. Excremental assault, the physical inducement of disgust and self-loathing, was a principal weapon."[8] The SS strove to code the excremental as the acme of deportees' physical and spiritual debasement, forcing inmates to question their inner sense of worth through systematic, repeated debasement through excrement. Equally important, the prisoner's revulsion at his own body was fed by the disgust excremental assault sowed between the individual and his filthy peers. When describing the effect of dysentery on his fellow prisoners, Majdanek and Dachau survivor Alexander Donat recounts, "Those with dysentery melted down like candles, relieving themselves in their clothes, and swiftly turned into stinking repulsive skeletons who died in their own excrement."[9] Excrement therefore became one of the Nazis' most prevalent and effective weapons of a dual physical and psychological abuse, destroying not only the prisoner's feeling of self-worth, but rattling his empathy for those around him, grim reminders of what he himself may one day become.

Leading prisoners to see themselves and their peers as "stinking repulsive skeletons" was an objective which served several purposes. As Des Pres reminds us,

> Defilement had its lesser logic as well… How much self-esteem can one maintain, how readily can one respond with respect to the needs of another, if both stink, are both are caked with mud and feces? We tend to forget how camp prisoners looked and smelled, especially those who had given up the will to live, and in consequence the enormous revulsion and disgust which naturally arose among prisoners… The prisoner was made to feel subhuman, to see his self-image only in the stink of his neighbor… And here is a final, vastly significant reason why in the camps the prisoners were so

[8] Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 60.
[9] Alexander Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), 269.

> degraded. This made it easier for the SS to do their job. It made mass murder less terrible to the murderers, because the victims appeared less than human.[10]

Boundaries between prisoner and excrement thus became frequently blurred and bled into one another. How ironic then, that the Buchenwald morgue should be situated "au bout des grandes chiottes (35)" for as Bruno Chaouat astutely observes, "Le fantasme sanitaire nazi transpire dans cette topographie du camp. Aux chiottes les cadavres des sous-hommes, comme nos excréments…"[11] The debasement of prisoners through excremental assault therefore served a triad of purposes, aiming to facilitate the SS's job, to distil disgust and distrust among the prisoner's filthy peers, and finally, to break down the prisoners' sense of dignity as he became forced to see himself as human filth.

Although readers can observe Des Pres' excremental assault in a litany of examples in *L'Espèce humaine,* it is seen nowhere so clearly as in an episode where inmates flee the advancing Allied forces with their captors. The starving men stop in a church, where a SS commandant informs them, "Vous allez dormir dans cette église. C'est un monument classé: ne vous conduisez pas comme des bandits, sinon il y aura des sanctions (247)." The men attempt to satisfy their hunger with a bag of dog biscuits, which provokes disastrous repercussions on their weakened digestive systems. As Antelme recounts,

> Pour chier il faudra sortir un par un… pour pisser on a amené une tinette dans l'église… Les biscuits de chien ont provoqué la diarrhée… les types tapent des pieds, ils ne peuvent plus attendre. Alors, ils se cachent et chient dans les coins de l'église, près des confessionnaux, derrière l'autel… d'autres chient dans la tinette réservée à l'urine…. Des italiens se tordent le ventre près de la porte, ils ne peuvent plus tenir. Maintenant presque tout le monde chie dans l'église (247-248).

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[10] Des Pres, *The Survivor,* 60-61.

[11] Bruno Chaouat, "Ce que chier veut dire (Les *ultima excreta* de Robert Antelme)," *Revue des sciences humaines* 261 (2001): 151. The corpse-excrement binary notably evokes Julia Kristeva's abjection, where humans experience horror and disgust at these two powerful reminders of mortality. See Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980).

The SS officer's words of warning seem to foreshadow the inevitable: despite having confined men ravaged by dysentery in a small space with nonexistent toilet facilities, then forcing them to wait to relieve themselves one by one, the SS are outraged the next morning to discover that the prisoners have defecated in the church. Those in charge mercilessly punish the men for not being capable of controlling their own bodies, and shoot hostages in retribution. The debasement of prisoners through excrement in this passage reaches its acme through its religious imagery, which evokes a blasphemous, inverted communion. Instead of digesting a divine host in a house of God, a religious rite which brings communion-takers one step closer to the Almighty, the intense hunger felt by the prisoners forces them to consume a base aliment not fit for humans, a deceptive poison which leads their bodies to turn inside out in a wave of excrement. What should be a site of sanctity and refuge, the church is morphed into a filthy, confining prison that deportees cannot escape.

Prisoners such as Antelme acutely experienced the repercussions of an existence in filth. This agony propels the author to equate himself with living excrement as he agonizes, "Je suis de la merde. C'est vrai, je suis de la merde (126)." Ironically, this self-identification with excrement is not brought about overtly by an immersion in the excremental, but is instead fostered by a different sense of uncleanliness: the author feels himself being slowly eaten alive by fleas:

> Quand je suis sur le point de m'endormir la brûlure commence, sous les bras et entre les cuisses. J'essaie de ne pas bouger, de ne pas me gratter, mais si je me contracte, je sens les poux marcher sur la peu. Alors je gratte pour ne plus sentir cette solitude tranquille du pou, cette indépendance, pour ne plus éprouver que la brûlure … Des croûtes commencent à se former, je les arrache et elles saignent. Je n'en peux plus, je vais crier. Je suis de la merde. C'est vrai, je suis de la merde (126).

In addition to the link between insects and excrement as archetypal representations of filth, the fierce urge to itch resonates strongly on a physiological level with the need to relieve oneself.

Although one may initially resist the urge to breathe, scratch, or excrete, a point arrives where the body's need triumphs over the mind's willpower. As Des Pres argues, "The anguish of existence in the camps was thus intensified by the mineral movement of life itself. Death was planted in a need which could not, like other needs, be repressed or delayed or passively endured. The demands of the bowels are absolute, and under such circumstances men and women had to oppose, yet somehow accommodate, their own most intimate necessities."[12] If prisoners felt the anguished pangs of hunger or the burn of thirst, these needs could ultimately be "passively endured" or "repressed" in a way not possible with the need to scratch, or to defecate.[13] However, with excretion, the individual inevitably reached a point of crisis where not even the most marked self-control or willpower could stop the body from performing as it must.[14]

Like the need to excrete, the prisoner's fight to resist itching similarly proved to be a futile battle where a physiological need always triumphed over will. In *Fateless,* a novel loosely based on Imre Kertesz's teenage years in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, fictional protagonist George describes the fleas consuming him alive. His description mirrors Antelme's: "Never have I felt a struggle to be more futile, never a resistance more stubborn than this. In time I yielded and just watched this gluttony, this eagerness, this greediness, this appetite, this undisguised bliss… When I began thinking of their behavior, I saw that I could to a certain degree understand

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[12] Des Pres, *The Survivor,* 55.

[13] Charlotte Delbo details similar passive struggles and her agonizing battle with thirst in the fragments "La soif" in *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* and and "Boire" in *Une connaissance inutile.* "Boire" ends with a biting interrogation of the non-interned population's ability to comprehend such extreme thirst: "Il y a des gens qui disent 'J'ai soif.' Ils entrent dans un café et ils commandent une bière (48)."

[14] Donat describes how one Majdanek Kapo used this scatological breaking point to torture prisoners with a gleeful sadism: "One kapo… [would] lay in wait near the camp latrine… When he saw an inmate running for the latrine he would jump out of his hiding place and call the prisoner to him. The unfortunate victim, repressing the pain in his bowels would stand at attention while the Kapo showered him with questions… Then the Kapo would give him calisthenics, making him squat in deep-knee-bends until the poor man could no longer control his sphincter and "exploded." Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom,* 178.

them… [and] my aversion almost disappeared."[15] Like George, Antelme's helplessness to stop itching even brings about a bizarre sort of self-identification with the fleas consuming him. Whereas George ironically notes his understanding of the flea's insatiable gluttony, a sentiment he identifies with in his starved state, Antelme, too, itches to fight back against the "solitude tranquille" of these tiny organisms organism which still possess a freedom and tranquility not afforded to him, an independence he fights against in part to sate his own ironic, bitter envy of these parasitic beings which consume him.

Similar to the prisoners who fight in vain against the need to void their bowels, Antelme's fundamental inability to resist itching links his sense of powerlessness at his own body to feelings of an inner filth. However, there is a more sinister veracity to the author's exasperated cry, "Je suis de la merde." For in addition to becoming morphed into metaphoric shit, tainted by pests, Antelme's statement proves to be true even in a literal sense: if the author becomes food for fleas, so, too, is his living flesh destined to become their excrement[16] By consuming him alive and transforming his body into excrement, the fleas that attack Antelme engender sentiments of excremental assault on both physical and emotional levels. It is this feeling of complete helplessness as Antelme fights against his own body that leads him to cry out in frustration, "c'est vrai, je suis de la merde."

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[15] Imre Kertesz, *Fateless*, trans. Christopher C. Wilson and Katharina M. Wilson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 134.

[16] This is commonly referred to as "flea dirt"—a mixture of blood and feces excreted by fleas. Inmates were not only food for fleas, but also food and eventual excrement for rats, as an anecdote recounted by Wiesław Kielar in *Anus Mundi* reminds us. Upon seeing rats scurry away from female cadavers, the author's friend Staszek remarks, "Fresh food for the rats." Wiesław Kielar, *Anus Mundi: 1,500 Days in Auschwitz-Birkenau*, trans. Susanne Flatauer (New York: Times Book, 1980), 134. For an even more disturbing conceptualization of prisoners as food and eventual excrement, consult the graphic scenes of cannibalism in Daniel Zimmermann's *L'Anus du Monde,* a novel with occasional resonances to Kielar's autobiographic text.

Although the SS overtly exacted excremental assault through physical immersion in filth, Des Pres' theory proves equally prevalent on a linguistic level in Antelme's Buchenwald. In *L'Espèce humaine,* both the lexicon of profanity employed by guards as well as Antelme's own considerations with his spoken French bear witness to the spoken word's significant role in the excremental debasement of prisoners. How apt that the first German words uttered in Antelme's memoir should be a *chef du bloc,* hurling, "Alle Franzosen Scheisse!" and "Scheisse, Schweinkopf" at his charges (17).[17] As this citation demonstrates, the Buchenwald guards do not demean their prisoners by affronting their intelligence, strength, or virility: instead, their insults deliberately stress the prisoner's inner and outer dirtiness by aligning them with excrement. However, the guards' predilection towards scatological insults can be understood as more than a verbal iteration of excremental assault. Long before the outbreak of the Second World War, from jokes to folklore to obscenity, the scatological has occupied a place of ubiquity in German culture. In his *Life is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder: A Study of German National Character through Folklore,* Alan Dundes asserts, "In German folklore, one finds an inordinate number of texts concerned with anality. Scheisse (shit), Dreck (dirt), Mist (manure), Arsch (ass), and similar locutions are commonplace. Folksongs, folktales, proverbs, riddles, folk speech—all attest to the Germans' longstanding special interest in this area of human activity."[18]

Although present in spoken German across a wide linguistic spectrum, the unique position occupied by the scatological in the German profane lexicon becomes even more pronounced when examined alongside its European counterparts. War survivor and Austrian-

[17] These insults translate roughly to "Let's go, French shits!" and "[You] shit, Pighead."
[18]Alan Dundes, *Life is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder: A Study of German National Character through Folklore* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 9.

British writer and Jakov Lind contextualizes the Germanic affinity for scatological insults for Anglophone readers:

> Unlike the rest of the world, the Germans have no use for the expressive term 'fucking.' The word 'fucking' can only be used when it means just that. What is considered dirty and therefore insulting by the Anglo-Saxons means nothing to the Germans. For them, everything that has to do with the rear end, feces, and the anus is real filth. That's why the words *Arsch, Scheisse, Arschloch,* and 'Lick my arse' are 'real and serious insults'; they can only be used by people according to hierarchy. Insult is the privilege of the powerful. A director, a boss, an officer, a captain can call those underneath his rank any name he fancies; but saying to your superior 'Lick my arse' is equivalent to patricide.[19]

While historically Catholic countries such as France and Poland tend to employ profanity stressing female sexual promiscuity, Germany's most biting profanities prove to be lodged in a scatological matrix.[20] Combined with this overall presence of the excremental in German, many historians and anthropologists have chosen to interpret this predilection as symptomatic of a cultural response to cleanliness deep-rooted in the country's national self-conscious.

In the diverse array of books it has inspired, many authors interpret the German fascination with excrement as both a response to the country's deep Protestant roots as well as evidence of a characteristic German anality.[21] Dieter and Jacqueline Rollfinke contextualize the relevance of classifying the German national psyche through this Freudian prism: "Although the basic triad of anal personality traits—orderliness, parsimoniousness, and obstinacy—and their more complex elaborations may be found in persons the world over, observers have been

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[19]Jakov Lind, *Counting My Steps: An Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 127-128.

[20] In addition to insults, even German humor is geared towards the scatological in a way uncommon to other Western countries. As anthropologist and linguist Peter Farb hypothesizes, "French dirty jokes are usually concerned with seduction, adultery, and sexual technique; British with homosexuality and incest; American with oral-genital themes and the debasement of women." In Peter Farb, *Word Play: What Happens When People Talk* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 88.

[21] Michael Haneke's *Das Weisse Band* provides an excellent, nuanced portrayal of this perceived Protestant-rooted national anality and its disastrous repercussions. A series of grisly, sadistic events plague a small German town on the brink of World War I. Although no definite conclusion is offered to the viewer, Haneke insinuates the responsibility of the town's children, acting out against a strictly authoritarian cleanliness and order emphasized by the titular white ribbon. Despite Haneke's insistence that this film is not a commentary of the etiology of Nazism, many film critics have expressed their doubt at the director's claim. See Garrett Stewart, "Pre-War Trauma: Haneke's *The White Ribbon," Film Quarterly 63.4* (2010): 40-47.

noticeably consistent in finding characteristics of this type in the Germans. Indeed, cleanliness, a firm belief in order, frugality, and a strong sense of duty are all traits generally associated with Germans."[22] Although rigidly fixing stereotypes among a given people poses its own unique set of problems, the common German awareness of and self-identification with a national valorization of cleanliness merits careful consideration, especially when one examines the reverse positing it afforded to prisoners such as Antelme in his recodification of bodily functions.[23] Antelme's contrapuntal reinterpretation of the excremental in the camps thus reaches its full potency not only in its positioning against excremental assault, but in pushing back against this common German stereotype: a national respect and reverence for cleanliness and order.

The cultural valorization of cleanliness and symbolic wariness of dirt are by no means a phenomenon restricted to Germany and Germans, but are symptomatic of Western society on a whole. In her groundbreaking study *Purity and Danger,* British anthropologist Mary Douglas discusses the cultural significations of cleanliness and filth. She asserts, "If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place… [which] implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt, then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."[24] Although ideas of contagion and disease feed into fears of mortality, Douglass ultimately demonstrates that dirt is demonstrative more of

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[22] Rollfinke, *The Call of Human Nature,* 18-19.
[23] Anality equally has a strong foothold in many German novels of the war period as a trope frequently associated with Nazism: "Twentieth-century German writers have used the motif of cleanliness, particularly an excessive preoccupation with cleanliness, in describing the Nazi personality and the tendencies in the German psyche that made many Germans receptive to Nazi propaganda." Rollfinke, *The Call of Human Nature,* 19.
[24] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 44.

a fear of disorder than a fear of dirt itself. The idea of dirt, or what is dirty, she asserts, is largely relative: "Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing…. In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications."[25] We then do not dread dirt because it is dirty, but because dirt is disorder, as evidenced by the metaphor of the disorganized house: to clean is to exact control over one's environment by prescribing it classifications and subsequently following them, whereas to dirty is to rebel against this established order. Douglass therefore demonstrates that cleanliness and dirtiness possess rich symbolic lives which extend far past the realms of physical propriety: dirt and filth are chaotic matter, anarchy, or anything which challenges the order which makes a society run smoothly.

Although the metaphor of dirt and contagion serves a transgressive function for a wide spectrum of western cultures, it holds special significance when examined in regards to Germany. While one may find the scatological scattered across time and continents in Western culture, spanning from Swift to *South Park*, the German fondness for the excremental enjoys a far more pronounced cultural visibility. [26] In *Life is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder,* Dundes argues for the German fascination with the excremental as a national characteristic well-documented in centuries of scatological folklore and idiomatic expressions, inconclusively questioning its role in a psychoanalytic Germanic anality. [27] However, the omnipresence of excrement in German

[25] Douglas, *Purity and Danger,* 44-45.
[26] Even Germanic music evidences an appreciation of the scatological, present for example in some of Mozart's playful, bawdy compositions. See the 1782 six-part vocal canon "Leck mich im arsch (kiss my ass)" as well the canon, "Difficile lectu mihi mars et jonicu difficile," whose nonsensical Latin lyrics, when sung, result in a bilingual German command similar to "Leck mich im arsch."
[27] Dundes also rightly encourages the reader to meditate on the differences between national stereotype and a national character: "For one thing, the existence of national stereotypes is absolutely certain; the existence of national character continues to be debated… if I were pressed to distinguish national character from national

culture receives another possible explanation when considered as a byproduct of Lutheranism and the country's Protestant roots:

> [During the Reformation,] many Germans were receptive to the Lutheran stress upon the body as dirt or filth. The biblical metaphor of the human being as dust moved into a central position in Lutheran theology and often became intensified scatologically in the words of Luther, as in the following example from *Table Talk*: 'On the day that he [Luther] had taken a bath and after eating he washed his hands and said: Why is water so dirty after a bath? Yes, I have forgotten that skin and flesh are made of filth, as it is said in the Scriptures: You are dust and ashes. Why are you so proud, O human being?" (Gen 3:19)[28]

It seems fitting that the father of Protestantism, a religion predicated on cleansing Christianity of the Catholic Church's corruption, should make heavy use of a lexicon of cleanliness and filth. Luther's harnessing of the scatological is especially notable in his scathing critiques of the pope and his cardinals. [29] States Josef Schmidt, "Luther displayed a very direct and uninhibited attitude toward the use of urine and feces... His tirades against the pope especially indulge in this type of fecal imagery… When pitying a corrupt Rome, he laments the city that was re-created with the blood of martyrs, 'until the Devil shat the pope, his very own shit, on it.' And likewise, 'The pope is the cuckoo who devours the church's eggs and then craps plenty of cardinals' (Krumbholz 13f.)."[30] Luther's pointed critiques highlight a belief that one of the best ways to undermine the pope and the church in the eyes of the faithful was to align the institution and its clergy with excrement, creating a parallel between the physical and spiritual putridness of those

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stereotype, I would suggest that national character is the way people actually *are,* while national stereotypes are what people *perceive* they themselves or others are like. This raises this issue of whether we can ever progress past perception, that is, stereotypes, to get an underlying national character." Dundes, *Life is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder,* 7.

[28] Rollfinke, *The Call of Human Nature,* 19.

[29] Scholars have argued that Luther's penchant from the scatological stemmed in part from his own battles with constipation. See Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959).

[30] Josef Schmidt, "Holy and Unholy Shit: The Pragmatic Context of Scatological Curses in Early German Reformation Satire," in *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art,* eds. Jeff Persels et Russell Ganim (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 112.

who comprised this church.[31] Several hundred years later, the Nazis adopted a similar ideological attack, compounding an emotional assault through excrement on the physical toils exacted by their regime. However, instead of using excremental insults as a modus to undermine the church and its officials in the eyes of the public, Nazis used the scatological in order to discredit the individual in his own eyes, by implying that the detainee's inner self was as equally tainted and impure as his excrement-caked body. Excremental assault thus takes on a unique significance when considered as one iteration among folklore, humor, and Lutheranism in a longstanding Germanic cultural fascination with excrement.

If the German national character has long been understood by both ordinary Germans and outside ethnographers alike through this Lutheran prism, it also becomes evident that Antelme holds similar viewpoints on his captors and their stereotypical appreciation of cleanliness. Antelme fantasizes about making the SS understand that he, too, is a dignified human being through a passage that stresses spatial order and propriety: "Pauvre con, tu ne vois rien. En ce moment, si je pouvais te prendre par le collet, te secouer, la première chose que je voudrais te faire comprendre, c'est que, moi, chez moi, j'ai un lit, que j'ai une porte que je peux fermer à clef, que si l'on veut me voir on sonne à ma porte (88)." In this imagined dialogue, Antelme does not attempt to prove his humanity to the *bourreau* through an emphasis on his own body or mind, but by emphatically stressing spatial cleanliness and physical order. Antelme essentially reverses the internal/external binary of excremental assault in order to formulate an analogy he believes will resonate with this imagined German. If the immersion of the individual in excrement was made to make the prisoner feel repulsed by a transference of outer and inner

[31] Luther was not the only Renaissance luminary to critique the Catholic Church through extensive excremental metaphors. For a contemporary comedic scatological barb at the church, see François Rabelais' *Gargantua,* specifically chapter XVII and the discussion of this episode in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World.*

filthiness, then by stressing the physical propriety of the space he inhabits in France, and the human accoutrements that he, too, possesses there, Antelme reaffirms a unsoiled inner self through a projection of his clean and proper "chez moi."

In addition to an emphasis on spatial cleanliness in this fantasized conversation, Antelme elects to employ a heightened linguistic cleanliness when engaged in conversation around Germans, standing in stark contrast to the scatological insults perpetually hurled against him. If a excremental German lexicon employed by those in power encouraged prisoners to view themselves as human feces, then Antelme fights back against this schematic, stressing his inherent moral cleanliness by taking linguistic cares with his spoken language, communicating deliberately in a polished French in front of his captors: "Quand je suis près d'un Allemand, il m'arrive de parler le français avec plus d'attention, comme je ne le parle pas habituellement là-bas; je construis mieux la phrase, j'use de toutes les liaisons, avec autant de soin, de volupté que si je fabriquais un chant (53)." Like the imagined dialogue with the German, Antelme's carefully-constructed spoken French constitutes an appeal to a perceived German love of propriety and order. In his hopes that demonstrations of his outer cleanliness would convince Germans of his inner cleanliness, it thus becomes clear that Antelme consciously lived in an environment of excremental assault such as the one as described by Des Pres. Antelme pushes back against this codification of the deportee as filth in a two-prong ideological attack: in addition to stressing his inner dignity by putting emphasis on his own inherent cleanliness, during his imprisonment in this excremental environment Antelme also surprisingly finds solace changing the connotations of a force meant to debase him, in a conscious reappropriation of the scatological. Through a deliberate recodification of this same Nazi symbol of debasement into an externalization of empowerment and resistance, Antelme challenges the Nazi narrative of the

excremental by endowing it with a significance completely contradictory to the one held by his captors.

Although Antelme's dual descriptions of excremental assault and scatological resistance may seem to oppose one another, it is a binary to be embraced. As Martin Crowley explains, images of bodies built on binaries are a defining aspect of Antelme's work which often serve to problematize testimony in a larger sense. He states, "[In *L'Espèce humaine*,] a bodily image marks a point of ultimate fragility, and at the same time gives on to a sense of resistance and, indeed, witness. In Antelme's characteristic use, the physical feature in question is defined by its duality: on the one hand, it declares the dereliction of the person it identifies; on the other, the identity of this person thereby continues to be marked even in its erosion."[32] Crowley furthers his argument by analyzing a jarring early passage in *L'Espèce Humaine,* in which a ghostly, ambiguous figure's shift from a "quelque chose" to a "quelqu'un" is exacted through a bowel movement. In the passage,

> Quelque chose est apparue sur la couverture étalée. Une peau gris-noir collée sur des os. Deux mains se sont élevées de la couverture et chacun des types a saisi une de ces mains et a tiré… Il nous tournait le dos. Il s'est baissé et on a vu une large fente noire entre deux os. Un jet de merde liquide est parti vers nous…. Le copain était étendu dehors sur la couverture. Il ne bougeait pas… On ne pouvait pas savoir s'il était mort. Peut-être se relèverait-il et chierait-il encore? C'était par la merde qu'on avait su qu'il était vivant (36).

As Crowley explains "Indeed, this 'quelque chose' only becomes recognizably human in Antelme's narrative with a moment of squalid humiliation… this transition from 'quelque chose' to 'quelqu'un' is effected precisely by this moment of abjection."[33] Like much of Antelme's use of the excremental, this scene is both dehumanizing and humanizing: it is through experiencing a moment of "squalid humiliation" and debasement that the dying man simultaneously reaffirms

[32] Martin Crowley, "Remaining Human: Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce Humaine*," *French Studies* 56 (2002): 472.
[33] Crowley, "Remaining Human," 473. As we will see, this scene where a body becomes recognizably human through excretion will eerily parallel Antelme's own return from the camps.

his own existence. So it is with the excremental in *L'Espèce humaine:* although Antelme describes moments of extreme abasement through excrement, it soon becomes clear that his innovative conceptualizations of the scatological work side by side with excrement's degrading power, questioning it, and destabilizing it through baptizing it with an inverse definition.

"Lieux" de mémoire: "Liberté, égalité, fraternité " in the Buchenwald outhouse

Antelme's emphasis on the excremental is apparent from his memoir's unanticipated opening paragraph, which conveys nothing but people urinating, defecating, and the spaces zoned for these functions. He begins, "Je suis allé pisser. Il faisait encore nuit. D'autres à côté de moi pissaient aussi; on ne se parlait pas. Derrière la pissotière il y avait la fosse de chiottes avec un petit mur sur lequel d'autres types étaient assis, le pantalon baissé. Un petit toit recouvrait la fosse, pas la pissotière. Derrière nous, des bruits de galoches, des toux, c'en état d'autres qui arrivaient. Les chiottes n'étaient jamais désertes. A toute heure, une vapeur flottait au-dessous de pissotières (15)." In addition to the shock engendered by the incipit's harsh and unexpected subject, the beginning of *L'Espèce humaine* surprises even further for the specific scatological vision it advances, one which will color the rest of the memoir. Instead of opening on an environment of excremental assault and misery, Antelme initiates the reader into a world where bodily functions and the spaces in which they occur function as pockets of cautious respite and freedom in the predominately hostile camp. Sarah Kofman notes the recalibration of the reader's mind fostered by this debut: "Ces premiers mots du livre, emprunts, dans leur impudeur d'une retenue et d'une émotion extrêmes, sont grandioses : ils donnent le ton—très peu idyllique—de ce livre où l'homme réduit aux fonctions vitales les plus élémentaires peut encore prouver par

elles qu'il reste bel et bien un homme."[34] Bathroom spaces serve as a parenthesis to life in the camp where prisoners relax and relieve themselves in a space permeated by a hazy referent of their existence: the vapor which floats above the urinals. With its declarative descriptions of the *chiottes*, Antelme's debut evokes a sort of eerie literary realism: if Balzac's *Père Goriot* opens on a lengthy description of the Maison Vauquer in order to provide insight to the lives of its inhabitants, so, too, does Antelme's memoir start by describing a space in Buchenwald that will come to define its inmates on multiple levels, a bizarre sort of home where the prisoners' true self may emerge.

The outhouse spaces of Buchenwald represented a nuclei of social freedom for deportees on diverse levels, so powerfully coded that even the physical act of walking there became a meaningful gesture to prisoners in the camp. States Antelme, "Là-bas [outside of the camps], ils disent: 'Je sors': ils descendent l'escalier, ils sont dehors. Ils disent : 'Je vais m'asseoir,' ils disent 'on va diner ensemble,' …. Et ils vont, ils font… Ici, on peut seulement dire : 'Je vais aux chiottes.' Elles sont sans doute ce qui corresponde le mieux ici à ce qu'on appelle communément là-bas liberté (115-116)." In this light, the opening phrase of *L'Espèce humaine,* "Je suis allé pisser," begins by immediately foregrounding the agency of the first person "Je" who is speaking. In opening with his trip to the outhouse, Antelme begins his narrative with the most autonomous act he can conceive of, asserting his freedom and liberty in one of the few ways possible in Buchenwald right from the incipit. *L'Espèce humaine* thus opens not with the degradation of the prisoner, but with a forceful tableau deliberately stressing deportee agency,

[34] Sarah Kofman, *Paroles Suffoqués* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1987), 72-73.

introducing readers to a strange oasis where guards do not even exist and the men exist tranquilly together under the night sky.

If deportees considered walking to the outhouses as one of the few demonstrations of agency possible in Buchenwald, it soon becomes clear that the bodily functions associated with this space become equally imbued with power and liberty. As *L'Espèce humaine* progresses, readers observe that a permutation of freedom becomes closely bound to the very act of urinating, which functions as a covert jab at the SS. Antelme highlights the sharply contradictory binary of how the SS and the prisoner view urination: while prisoners are conscious of a discrepancy in codification, the SS officers remain blissfully unaware. States Antelme,

> Les SS tolèrent également que l'on pisse et que l'on chie …. Le SS s'incline devant l'indépendance apparente, la libre disposition de soi de l'homme qui pisse : il doit croire que pisser est exclusivement pour le détenu un service dont l'accomplissement doit le faire devenir meilleur, lui permettre de mieux travailler….. Le SS ne sait pas qu'en pissant on s'évade. Aussi, parfois, on se met contre un mur, on ouvre la braguette, et on fait semblant ; le SS passe, comme le cocher devant le cheval (42).

Antelme highlights these dichotomized viewpoints with two almost homonymic verbs, separated only by a vowel-- "le SS passe, le détenu pisse"—duality which ascribes passivity to the actions of the SS while the prisoners' action of pissing becomes deliberate and active. A lexicon of phrases such as "indépendance," "libre disposition," and "s'évade" all highlight an atmosphere of freedom, standing in stark contrast to the totalitarian environment of the camp. Antelme is quick to point out that urinating is more than an abstract, symbolic gesture where prisoners' minds can wander briefly. As Sarah Kofman observes, "Aller aux chiottes n'était pas pour le détenu une simple servitude qui devait lui permettre de mieux travailler. C'était aussi, comble de la dérision, et sans que le SS le sache, le seul endroit où il pouvait se sentir libre, rester un

moment sans surveillance, les mains dans les poches."[35] When prisoners feign urination, a tangible form of protest occurs, evidenced by a momentary duping of the SS. If the SS believe that urination's sole function is to permit prisoners to work harder, the act of pretending to urinate completely circumvents this belief, serving as a clandestine gesture of resistance where prisoners rest deliberately idle and steal time back from their captors.

It is perhaps for this reason that Antelme chooses to appropriate urination as the ultimate barometer of happiness in the camps, one that similarly results from differences in codification between prisoners and non-interned Germans. Antelme describes picking up garbage in a factory:

> J'ai pris un grand panier et j'ai commencé à ramasser les déchets de dural qui traînait par terre. Il fallait se baisser, se relever, faire quelques pas, se baisser de nouveau. Je ne travaillais pas à la carlingue, mais cette tâche devait rassurer les civils parce que je ne cessais pas d'être courbé et que je ramassais les déchets. Puisque je n'étais pas ce détenu extraordinaire, tourneur ou mécanicien, j'étais le détenu déchet qui avec ses pieds avance, avec ses mains ramasse les déchets… [mais] ils ne savait pas qu'en ramassant les déchets au hasard, courbé, parfaitement ignoré, il arrivait qu'on soit heureux, comme en pissant (77).

Similar to the SS, who view urination drastically differently than their prisoners, the German civilians working alongside Antelme consider the unskilled job of trash collecting to be an act where the inmate perpetually bows down in his properly-debased space: "j'étais le detenu déchet qui avec ses pieds avance, avec ses mains ramasse les déchets. Coïncidence parfaite de la tâche et de l'homme; cette harmonie les rassurait, c'était sûr (77)." However, Antelme embraces his mantle of "detenu déchet," for as a prisoner, not having to interact with civilians in these moments of peaceful solitude makes garbage picking a liberating, relaxing activity. Like the scatological, which serves jointly to debase and affirm humanity, as seen through the dying man who is de/humanized by a bowel movement, the image of garbage picking simultaneously

[35] Kofman, *Paroles suffoqués,* 73.

represents two divergent perceptions of the same situation. Although his body may be bent over in a position evoking subservience, Antelme paradoxically feels a certain freedom while picking up garbage: ignored by the Germans around him, this contact with the unclean permits his mind to roam freely, creating an action symbolically analogous to urination.

Urinating stood for more than physical and social liberty in Antelme's Buchenwald, proving to be the ultimate act of self-consciousness. Antelme's reflections in the camp urinal demonstrate how the substance of urine itself becomes morphed into proof of life, functioning as an externalization of resistance and autonomy.[36] Late one night, Antelme steals away from his friends and reflects:

> J'étais seul aux pissotières. Ça fumait… On peut brûler les enfants sans que la nuit remue. Elle est immobile autour de nous…. Les étoiles sont calmes aussi, au-dessous de nous. Mais ce calme, cette immobilité ne sont ni l'essence ni le symbole d'une vérité préférable. Ils sont le scandale de l'indifférence dernière. … J'étais seul entre le mur de l'église et la baraque des SS, l'urine fumait, j'étais vivant… J'ai pensé que j'étais peut-être seul alors à regarder la nuit ainsi. Dans la fumée de l'urine, sous le vide, dans l'effroi, c'était le bonheur. C'est sans doute ainsi qu'il faut dire: cette nuit était belle (122).

In this passage, Antelme repeatedly stresses his own solitude and the warm vapor of urine which hangs around him on this cold night. Similar to the waste picking episode, he once again closely aligns urination with happiness: "Dans la fumée de l'urine, sous le vide, dans l'effroi, c'était le bonheur." Despite his solitude, the cloud of urine floating over him serves as tangible proof that the men around him continue to live, breathe, and piss despite the SS's best efforts at annihilation. While natural occurrences like smoke, mist, and fog often function metaphorically as a sign of uncertainty for their ability to obscure and conceal, this hazy space paradoxically

[36] Antelme is by no means the first Frenchman to conceive of the urinals as a place of intellectual reflection. The foul odors of the latrine proved to be a place of "inspiration" for Jules Michelet in both senses of the word. As Dominique Laporte recounts, "[When Michelet] was short on inspiration, he lingered in latrines in order to *inspire* (breathe in) the suffocating stench that awoke in him the spirit of creation." See Dominque Laporte, *History of Shit,* trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 37.

permits Antelme to see more clearly, encouraging and crystallizing his own reflection as he ponders the world's blissful unawareness of the war's atrocities.

However, this ultimate realization of the world's apathy does not depress him; on the contrary, it leads him to rejoice at his continued ability to pause and reflect like a sentient human being among the daily horrors of the camp. Surrounded by this warm vapor, Antelme not only asserts his happiness, but his very existence: "L'urine fumait, j'étais vivant." The resonance between this passage and the hazy clouds of urine in the book's opening paragraph is striking. As Sarah Kofman observes, "S'il faut noter qu'à "tout heure, une vapeur flotte au-dessous des pissotières," c'est parce que cette fumée que les détenus continuent de fabriquer et la preuve qu'ils continuent à vivre. Si Antelme multiplie ce genre de connotations, ce n'est pas qu'il s'y complaise de façon malsaine : c'est parce que "pisser" et "chier" étaient une manière de triompher des bourreaux que ne pouvaient empêcher l'accomplissement de ces *actes* pas plus que de mourir."[37] Instead of provoking his disgust, the warm clouds of urine around Antelme function as an affirmation of his continued physical and mental existence. In sharp contrast to the smoke billowing from the crematoria – incinerated particles of the deportees' bodies, proof of their death suspended in air— the haze of urine which surrounds Antelme emerges to assert life itself, a physical, tangible manifestation of deportees' being and vitality which hangs in the atmosphere, warm from the heat of their still-pulsating bodies.[38] In a nod to his irrepressible

[37] Kofman, *Paroles suffoqués*, 73.

[38] Although here urine functions as a potent symbol of continued existence, the actual substance of urine occasionally played a concrete, physical role as a life-extending force for prisoners. Jorge Semprun's autobiographical novel *Le grand voyage* details an episode of transit in a cattle car where deportees start to pass out due to lack of oxygen and days of confinement. Prisoners pass around urine-soaked rags in order to reanimate the men who have fainted, an action which proves dually beneficial: not only are the sick men reanimated, but having a job comforts those who are still conscious. Even more striking, the men are able to see a lighter side in this episode as laughter emerges in the cattle car, raising morale against the uncertainty of their voyage. Urine thus helps in fostering a sense of community for the deportees en route. I think of Bakhtin: "We must not forget that urine (as well as dung) is gay matter, which degrades and relieves at the same time, transforming fear into laughter." See

inner liberty, this externalized part of himself wafts freely through the air as the rest of his body remains confined.[39] Due to these moments where Antelme carefully codifies bodily functions as proof of resistance and freedom, even seemingly banal, fleeting references to bodily waste become subsequently imbued with new meaning, creating constant reminders of the deportee's intellectual freedom and autonomy through inscription in this complex dialogue.[40] In all its permutations, throughout *L'Espèce humaine,* urine and urination thus foreground deportee's indomitable agency in an environment of ruthless totalitarianism.

If the bodily functions associated with the outhouse became emblematic of freedom and resistance, it is not surprising that the space itself should become imbued with a similar, powerful aura of liberty. Once in the outhouse, the relaxation felt by inmates extended far past the relief experienced in urinating or voiding one's bowels. Disgusted by the odors and the sights within, the SS generally avoided camp outhouses, but in doing so, they created a fertile, unsupervised space for prisoners to congregate, rest, and greet one another. Outhouses thus came

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Jorge Semprun, *Le Grand Voyage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 246-248 and Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, 335.

[39] Given the association between urine, the urinal, and liberty, it seems especially poignant that Antelme first hears the canons of the liberating army while on a nighttime trip to the urinal: "Un bruit, puis le silence. C'était la nuit. J'étais allé pisser. Je me suis arrêté dans l'antichambre du block. Bamm! Un copain traversait l'antichambre, je l'ai arrêté.—Ecoute! Bamm! Net. Pas fort, mais distinct…. Il n'y a plus à savoir maintenant. Ça y est. La tête se délivre. On entend avec la même oreille que depuis un an, et c'est bien ave elle qu'il y a quelque heures encore on entendant les voix des kapos. Il n'y a qu'à suivre, croire cette oreille. J'étais allé pisser. Je n'y pensais pas (220-221).

[40] Thanks to these emotionally heavy scatological scenes I've discussed, several vignettes which almost inexplicably mention urination can subsequently be understood as moments reiterating deportee autonomy through this association of urination with inner resistance. Examples of these other episodes include: "Une patate, encore une patate, encore une patate. On les enfouissait une à une dans la poche. On était délivré pour ce soir-là; la poche pleine, la main contre les patates, un avenir était possible. Parfois il n'y avait rien. On continuait à rôder dans l'entrée. On allait pisser. Quand on avait définitivement renoncé, on rentrait dans la chambre (144)." This linguistic tic of fleeting references to urine is also seen in situations such as these: "On est entré, il faisait noir. Un bruit d'eau qui coule: c'était un copain qui pissait dans un baquet de fer… on ne le voyait pas (137)"; "Ça va? demande le copain qui pisse. – Ça va. C'est la question qu'on pose en général en pissant (197)." Given Antelme's passionate views on urination's transgressive role, and the fact that these references to urination may momentarily divert the reader from the central events being described for seemingly no reason at all, it is impossible not to understand these brief, scatological vignettes as anecdotes which function jointly with the scenes that noticeably foreground urination as proof of power and agency.

to occupy an important social role in the camps, functioning almost as reverse watering holes of conversation among inmates. States Antelme, "Aux chiottes… des copains piétinaient dans la boue de neige et d'urine. Ils n'y allaient pas simplement pour chier ou pour pisser ; ils y allaient pour y rester un moment, les mains dans les poches. C'était aux chiottes que les copains se disaient bonjour pour la première fois le matin et se questionnaient (76)." In detailing the *chiottes'* status as a social hub, Antelme emphasizes how the site oversteps its prescribed utility in the concentrationary universe, transgressing its intended use by the SS in a small act of resistance for deportees. As Bruno Chaouat posits, "Les chiottes sont un lieu où le temps du travail forcé se trouve suspendu… De s'asseoir à l'abri dans les chiottes du camp, pantalon baissé, au bord de la fosse, ne résulte aucun salut, simplement un répit, un repos, temps mort ou, au contraire, temps à soi où le corps du détenu-esclave, la chose des SS, échappe pour une fois, fût-ce dérisoirement, à son aliénation."[41] Despite the omnipresent snow, urine, and mud in the *chiottes*, bane to many a deportee, with the statement, "on n'y allaient pas simplement pour chier ou pour pisser," Antelme insists on the agency which led prisoners to visit the space of their own volition for reasons wholly unrelated to the demands of their bodies. What is a solitary space for the individual in the outside world— the privy, or the *privé*, whose very name evokes its status as a fundamentally private space— paradoxically became a place of camaraderie and community where prisoners were able to be their most open and social, interacting with their peers in ways not afforded to them in the supervised camp at large.[42]

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[41] Chaouat, "Ce que chier veut dire," 153-154.

[42] Although the camaraderie described by Antelme is entirely masculine, the latrines occasionally functioned as social spaces between men and women in other camps. In his reminiscences on Auschwitz, Tadeusz Borowski recounts, "The latrines were built for the men and the women jointly, and were separated only by wooden boards… On the women's side, it was crowded and noisy, on ours, quiet and pleasantly cool inside the concrete enclosure. You sat there by the hour conducting love dialogues with Katia, the pretty little latrine girl. No one felt any embarrassment or thought the set-up uncomfortable. After all, one had already seen so much…" Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, trans. Barbara Vedder (New York: Penguin, 1976), 93-94.

In addition to its reversal of societal norms, morphing a private place into a social arena, the outhouse space exacted a similar contortion of the camp's social hierarchy, functioning as the one site in deportation where the prisoner reigned supreme. This upheaval becomes evident when examining the case of the kapo Ernst in the Buchenwald outhouse: although the SS steered clear of outhouse spaces as much as possible, other camp authorities such as kapos, lackey authority figures between the prisoner and SS, were still obligated to share these spaces with the prisoner. If the outhouse functions as an inviting site for prisoners, then the same power which Ernst enjoys in the camp paradoxically serves to undermine him in the detainee's home turf. States Antelme,

> Le gros kapo Ernst, qui cogne, essaye lui aussi de rigoler avec nous quand il chie. Ici, il ne peut pas garder sa dignité (c'est pour cela d'ailleurs qu'à l'usine, des cabinets sont réservés aux civils), et il essaye de faire comme s'il choisissait pour un moment l'humilité de sa situation, en parlant amicalement avec ceux qui sont là. Quelquefois il se trouve que c'est avec celui sur lequel il vient de cogner. Mais Ernst ne peut rien faire pour ne pas nous paraître indécent : ses caleçons sont blancs, ses cuisses énormes. Il est fort même en chiant (113).

Despite his position of authority in the camp's daily routine, in this realm of prisoners, Ernst is cognizant that this hierarchy no longer holds water: moments after asserting his physical dominance over prisoners, the kapo awkwardly ingratiates himself to these same individuals, betraying his awareness of his own social impotence in the outhouse space.

Just as Ernst's power outside of the outhouse strips him of power inside of the outhouse by fostering in him feelings of humility and debasement, so, too, does his plump, healthy form ironically morph him into an object of disgust: when compared to the distorted bodies of the prisoners and Antelme's wrinkly, mauve thighs, it is Ernst's proper white undergarments and healthful, strong legs which stand out, and which seem indecent and grotesque in the outhouse. Antelme's revulsion at Ernst's strong, healthy body, out of place in the latrines, is by no means unique, and is emblematic of a frequent disgust displayed by the author at clean, Germanic

bodies. When describing a prisoner referred to as the Rhénan, Antelme states, "Je sentais son odeur d'homme propre, celle de son costume et cette odeur gênait (84)." Similar to the aversion he feels faced with the Rhénan's proper odor and at the indecent cleanliness of Ernst, Antelme's description of the rosy, Germanically-named Bortlick betrays a self-avowed repugnance of the *meister*'s cleanliness and propriety: "Ses mains étaient roses, ses cheveux bruns, partagés par une raie nette, luisaient; il était rasé, il avait une veste, un pull-over, une chemise. Tout cela était propre… J'avais l'impression que je me trouvais à côté d'un homme vierge, d'une sorte de bambin géant. Cette peau rose était répugnante. Il n'était jamais sale, il pouvait se mettre nu et enfiler un pyjama. J'éprouvais à peu près le dégoût que peut éprouver une femme devant un homme vierge (125)." Both the physical cleanliness of this man and the similar equation of virginity with sexual purity or cleanliness reinforce Antelme's disgust at this washed German being.

Although initially surprising given Antelme's projection of a clean inner self near German guards, the author's revulsion at proper German bodies proves lodged in the same matrix. If outhouse spaces are welcoming to prisoners and unwelcoming to the kapo, and if the pure of heart are physically dirty yet morally clean, then by extension one may recognize evildoers by someone who is physically clean yet morally mired. The exclusion and disgust of characters such as Ernst is logical when considering filth from an anthropological standpoint. As Mary Douglas reminds us, "[Dirt is] matter out of place…. [which] implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order."[43] In its role as "matter out of place," dirt and filth are thus transgressive in their very nature: by disdaining the clean, sanitized Nazi figures which surround him, Antelme embraces his own filth as an emblem of his transgressive status against

[43] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 44.

the SS and its legions of cleanly-scrubbed, rosy-skinned sadists. William Cohen expands on the work of Douglas, asserting that "in a general sense, *filth* is a term of condemnation, which instantly repudiates a threatening thing, person, or idea by ascribing alterity to it. Ordinarily, that which is filthy is so fundamentally alien that it must be rejected; labelling something filthy is a viscerally powerful means of excluding it."[44] Like excrement, coded differently by deportees and guards, cleanliness similarly provokes sharp, contrasting connotations among the two groups. While being physically unclean proves to be an agonizing, uncomfortable experience, when juxtaposed against the frequent association of being physically clean and morally dirty, filth becomes an emblem of suffering and righteousness. Douglas's thesis thus forms a bizarre paradox when examined alongside Antelme: if dirt is fundamentally "matter out of place" as Douglas asserts, then it is the lone clean man among the ubiquitous filth of the prisoners who despite his outer cleanliness, ironically becomes the matter which is out of place, clean yet so inherently filthy and "fundamentally alien" that he is alienated from the flock. Notions of cleanliness and filth thus become inverted completely on a symbolic level in Buchenwald.

In the Buchenwald latrine, public and private become blurred in a vertiginous space where the powerful are powerless, silent prisoners find their voice, and clean, orderly authority figures are paradoxically excluded and disdained for their propriety. The latrine thus came to bear striking similarities to one of literary history's most significant inquiries into the scatological: literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualization of the carnivalesque in the works of François Rabelais. While discussing Rabelais' prolific mobilization of the excremental in his five books, Bakhtin characterized these references as belonging to the grotesque realism inherent

[44] William Cohen and Ryan Johnson, eds., *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), ix.

in carnival, which emerged in clear opposition to the hierarchical feasts of the Middle Ages. Bakhtin argues, "As opposed to the official feast one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions."[45] This suspension of norms and reality provided participants with a momentary respite from standards of common propriety advanced by the signifying order of society. Carnival thus incarnates an open discourse of the collective: by upending social norms and foregrounding the body, the carnivalesque is a period which stresses the corporeal bonds between every human being over the manmade societal categories which divide them in the prevailing social order. It is in this context Bakhtin views the carnivalesque as a driving force of Rabelais' copious scatology.

With its role as a space suspended from the harsh reality or "prevailing truth and established order" of the camps, and in its role as an equalizer of rank and privilege, as seen by the case of Ernst, it becomes clear that the camp outhouses function as this sort of carnivalesque equalizer. Deportees regain a sense of their pre-Buchenwald freedom, and band together in a site incarnating France's national motto, *liberté, égalité,* and *fraternité*: in addition to duping his captors, Antelme regains a sense of *liberté* through his feelings of autonomy and self-awareness which crystallize in the outhouse, sentiments which reach their zenith as he ponders the night stars under a haze of urine. *Egalité* emerges as prisoners witness the erasure of camp hierarchies. The need to share an outhouse space, reminder of humanity's universal needs to urinate and defecate, acts as an equalizing force between kapos such as Ernst and prisoners, thus proving to be a space where the camp's typical stratified power structure ultimately cannot sustain itself. "Il n'y a q'une espèce humaine," as Antelme reminds us, and no amount of torture, imprisonment,

[45] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World,* 10.

or abuse can alter the need to excrete waste, an unbreakable, universal bond which unites every single human being (241).[46] Finally, *fraternité* blossoms among prisoners as they forge strong social bonds and deepen their sense of community in the social hub of the *chiottes*, a largely unsupervised space where deportees could act freely amongst themselves and greet each other with a cordiality not altogether lost in the camps.

Although areas emblematic of excremental assault, and of the SS desire to make prisoners "feel subhuman, [seeing their] self-image only in the dirt and stink of [their] neighbor," as Des Pres states, the camp urinals and *chiottes* in *L'Espèce humaine* paradoxically serve as sites of power which bind Antelme even closer to his peers and to his own sense of humanity.[47] In a camp marked by complex binaries, it is fitting that this *liberté*, *égalité,* and *fraternité* should emerge amidst *fécalité,* for at its very heart, the outhouse epitomizes purgation, or the intense purification of body and soul through release. Bruno Chaouat observes that, "Les chiottes, purgatoire du *Lager,* où les corps se purgent avant d'être éliminés, sont la mimique outrancière de la *katharsis*."[48] A term used to describe physical and emotional purges,[49] *katharsis* will present itself in both forms of the word: not only does the term evoke the meaningful act of

[46] Jonathan Swift meditated on this unity in his tongue-in-cheek observation in *The Grand Mystery, or Art of Meditating over an House of Office:* "People of both Sexes, of all Ages, Degrees, Conditions, Countries, Complexions and Religions, by Night and Day, in Sickness and in Health, go to Sh—te, some in Fields, some in Houses, some in Garrets, some in Cellars, and some in their Breeches, without the least Reflection on the great and tremendous Mysteries veil'd under that Performance; or imagining that their Lives, Fortunes, and Reputations, depend on the regular and successful Execution of it." Jonathan Swift, *The Grand Mystery, or Art of Meditating over an* [sic] *House of Office* (London: J. Roberts, 1726), 1-2.
[47] Des Pres, *The Survivor,* 61.
[48] Chaouat, "Ce que chier veut dire," 152.
[49] The Oxford English Dictionary qualifies *katharsis* as both "Purgation of the excrements of the body; esp. evacuation of the bowels," and "The purification of the emotions by vicarious experience." *Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.* "katharsis," accessed February 18, 2016. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/28926 ?redirectedFrom = katharsis#eid.

physical purgation in the camps, but it will additionally prove significant in synthesizing Antelme's return after Liberation.

Despite the SS desire that prisoners would feel spiritually annihilated by extreme exposure to urine and excrement, in *L'Espèce humaine,* Robert Antelme reclaims his body as his own, conceiving of its functions as empowering affirmations of his continued existence and that of his peers amidst an environment of unthinkable adversity. Similarly, while scatological functions were meant to degrade prisoners, it is ironically the space zoned for these functions, the camp outhouse, which comes to shelter and protect them from the quotidian horrors of the camps. In spite of their perceived low and unclean origin, these places of refuge evoke the French national motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité,* acting as a *"lieu" de mémoire* where prisoners momentarily regain a glimpse of their pre-war autonomy while reasserting their role as spiritually-free men in Buchenwald.[50]

With its strong emphasis on bodily functions, Robert Antelme's memoir occupies a unique space in accounts of the war, uniting a multitude of stark, contrasting corporeal dualisms. From the de/humanized man, to the contrasting views of urination, and even the warring perceptions of the squalid, yet welcoming outhouse where the deportees are at their most powerful, Antelme proves that these binaries do not undermine one another, but work together to create a more nuanced description of the past. The reconciliation of these contrasting images is

[50] A more extreme version of the latrine as a space of ultimate rebellion can be found in Lina Wertmüller's film *Seven Beauties,* which recounts the story of the wily, amiable, if somewhat morally dubious Pasqualino who finds himself deported to a concentration camp. An anarchist prisoner, Pedro, states that the only remedy to Nazism, or these people obsessed with order, is the idea of anarchy, or a "man in disorder." Pedro chooses a gruesome, albeit rebellious death when he commits suicide by jumping in a latrine, an ultimate expression of disorder and defiance incarnating the polar opposite of perceived Nazi cleanliness.

perhaps most notable for the larger conflict which it evokes: the sharp tension between literature and témoignage.

Survivors and writers have long argued over the concentration camp's place in world literature, with ex-deportees such as Elie Wiesel going as far as to assert that, "Auschwitz has been and will remain in the realm of mystical experience or insanity; the play beyond everything—beyond logic, beyond description… Auschwitz and literature do not go together, they exclude one another."[51] While Wiesel may remain staunch in his belief that no room exists for true concentrationary literature, writers such as George Perec not only disagree, but argue that Antelme's work is the very embodiment of this divisive new genre. In his glowing *éloge* of *L'Espèce humaine,* which he deems as "l'exemple le plus parfait, dans la production française contemporaine, de ce que peut être la littérature,"[52] Perec explains the origins of this seemingly-irrevocable gap between literature and *témoignage*:

> Il est clair que l'on distingue soigneusement ces livres de la 'vraie' littérature. A tel point que l'on ne sait plus très bien si le fondement de cette attitude est que l'on a trop de respect (ou de mauvaise conscience) vis-à-vis du phénomène concentrationnaire, au point de penser que la littérature ne pourra jamais en donner qu'une expression inauthentique et impuissante, ou si l'on pense que l'expérience d'un déporté est incapable en elle-même de donner naissance à une œuvre d'art… Mais la littérature n'est pas une activité séparée de la vie. Nous vivons dans un monde de parole, de langage, de récit.[53]

L'Espèce humaine thus bears witness not only to acute suffering, but to the very fact that there is, and can be beauty in one man's recounting of such trauma. Just as Antelme's complex scatological discourse evidences a profound literary life of bodily functions outside of the crass and the satirical, so, too, does *L'Espèce humaine* unite art and life through a simple yet poignant

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[51] Elie Wiesel, "Auschwitz: An Incident," cited in Alvin Goldfarb, "Greek Tragedy in the Nazi Concentration Camps: Charlotte Delbo's *Qui Rapportera Ces Paroles?* And Alberto Moravia's *Il dio Kurt," Exchange* 6.2 (1980), 1.
[52] Georges Perec, "Robert Antelme ou la vérité de la littérature," 188.
[53] Perec, "Robert Antelme ou la vérité de la littérature," 174.

narrative of life in Buchenwald, displaying how one of the Nazi's cruelest weapons was also the inmates' most crucial pieces of armor.

"Excrire" la guerre: La douleur de Robert Antelme[54]

While his memoir may conclude in an intense moment of reflection with a young Russian deportee during Liberation, as the events of *L'Espèce humaine* came to a close, a new set of struggles was just beginning for Antelme.[55] Smuggled out of Dachau through the colossal efforts of two friends, Antelme languished between life and death for two and a half weeks upon his return to Paris, an agonizing homecoming detailed by his then-wife Marguerite Duras in her cahier *La Douleur*.[56] Like *L'Espèce humaine*, Duras's recounting of Antelme's return is marked by a similar foregrounding of the scatological. Despite both works' first-person accounts of the same individual and the shared scatological references, the joint reading of *L'Espèce humaine* and *La Douleur* as two historical pieces of the same puzzle is not entirely unproblematic. Although the two works are purported to have been written contemporarily, *La Douleur* was first published in 1985, nearly forty years after *L'Espèce humaine*'s release in 1947. Published just two years after Antelme's return from Buchenwald, *L'Espèce humaine* was one of the first written testimonials of deportation to be published, emerging in a world still reeling from Nuremberg. While *La Douleur* may similarly detail the events of 1945, critics such as Camila Loew have reminded readers of the significance of the four decades separating its writing and its publication, resulting in the work being received in an era completely different from the

[54] I borrow Bruno Chaouat's thought-provoking neologism from "Ce que chier veut dire," 158.
[55] "Rien n'existe plus que l'homme que je ne vois pas. Ma main s'est mise sur son épaule. A voix basse:--*Wir sind frei.* (Nous sommes libres.) Il se relève. Il essaye de me voir. Il me serre la main.—*Ja* (321)."
[56] Although the events of *L'Espèce humaine* recount Antelme's internment in Buchenwald, he was moved to Dachau in the spring of 1945, not long before Liberation.

immediate postwar period, one colored by decades of testimonies and interrogations into deportation.[57]

Genre equally complicates a close joint reading of these two texts: although Antelme's text is clearly a memoir, Duras's *cahier* belongs to a significantly more nebulous genre. Despite dated entries and a predominately first person narration evocative of a *journal intime,* Duras's work exists somewhere between truth and embellishment. Her insistence that she has no recollection of writing this work, as well as the oft-discussed passage where she floats in and out of a third person narration complicate the reader's ability to classify *La Douleur* wholly as memoir.[58] However, perhaps the most difficult point of contention to reconcile between the two works lies in the question of perspective: it is hard to ignore the fundamental fact that while one work is written *by* a concentration camp survivor, the other is written *about* a concentration camp survivor, creating a perspective which Camille Loew describes as a "witness to the witness."[59] Though partially focusing on Antelme, it is undeniable that *La Douleur* centers predominately on Duras and her own experience of waiting for her husband, and on her subsequent efforts to digest his return. As Duras biographer Laure Adler observes, "Ce n'est pas le journal du retour de Robert qu'elle retrouva mais la sténographie minutieuse de son désarroi moral et métaphysique."[60]

Duras's own centricity in *La Douleur* is undoubtedly one of the factors which led her to publish the *cahier* without consulting Antelme. States Adler,

> Depuis longtemps Duras viole les règles de la bienséance. Avec la publication de *La douleur* en avril 1985, elle prend le risqué de violer celles de l'amour et de l'amitié. Livre poignant qui coupe

[57] Camila Loew, *The Memory of Pain: Women's Testimonies of the Holocaust* (Rodopi: New York, 2011).
[58] Duras famously asserts, "J'ai retrouvé ce Journal dans deux cahiers des armoires bleues de Neauphle-le-Château. Je n'ai aucun souvenir de l'avoir écrit (12)."
[59] Loew entitles the fourth chapter of her book "Marguerite Duras: Witness to the Witness."
[60] Laure Adler, *Marguerite Duras* (Gallimard: Paris, 1998), 529.

> le soufflé, *La douleur* n'aurait en effet pas été publié si Robert Antelme avait été consulté. Mais au moment de la sortie du livre, il était à l'hôpital dans l'incapacité de pouvoir réagir, encore moins de répondre. Marguerite savait que Robert serait choqué de voir ainsi sa vie exposée.[61]

The publication of *La Douleur* deeply upset Antelme, who refused to speak to Duras after its publication. However surprised he may have been, he was not shocked: in February of 1976, Duras had already published an anonymous first version of *La Douleur* in the review *Sorcières.* Even though the *Sorcières* piece had no author attributed, a friend haphazardly stumbled across the piece and immediately recognized Antelme's story, subsequently alerting him to the publication's existence. In an interview with Laure Adler, Robert's second wife Monique Antelme described her husband's reaction to "Pas mort en deportation," the *Sorcières* piece which would later be published as *La Douleur:*

> Et un jour, chez Gallimard, dans le bureau de Robert, une amie à lui, la femme d'un type connu qui est mort, je crois d'ailleurs qu'elle aussi est morte, je ne sais pas tout le monde est mort - c'est vrai, on se dit à qui on va parler ? on n'a plus personne ! - elle arrive avec le numéro de *Sorcières* dans la main, elle connaissait bien Robert, elle parlait tous les jours avec lui longuement, et elle dit: Robert, regardez ! Et Robert voit *La douleur*, ça lui a fait un effet ! Encore maintenant je n'arrive pas à réaliser pourquoi ça lui a fait cet effet à ce point-là parce qu'il était comme un fou ! Il est rentré à la maison, blanc ! Il m'a tendu le livre et m'a dit : elle a osé ! C'était donc un extrait de *La douleur*, moi je trouvais ça assez beau. Je comprends que Robert ait été blessé. Il m'a dit qu'elle savait très bien, mieux que toi, il me disait, que lui n'aurait pas supporté ça, donc elle n'aurait pas dû le faire sachant sa réaction, à lui. Il m'a dit qu'il ne supportait pas qu'elle parle de sa déportation et qu'elle en parle de cette manière-là. Il y avait les deux choses, mais aussi qu'elle parle tout simplement, il trouve que c'est sujet qu'elle n'aurait pas dû aborder étant donné qu'il lui avait quand même beaucoup parlé en rentrant et tout ça, qu'elle savait l'importance… C'était capital évidemment, pour Robert, sa déportation. Alors il a dit : elle a osé, je ne lui adresserai plus jamais la parole.[62]

Despite Antelme's resistance to *La Douleur*, there proves to be a certain truthfulness in the slender *cahier* which ties it heavily to *L'Espèce humaine.*

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[61] Adler, *Duras,* 28. Robert was hospitalized for the rest of his life after a stroke in 1983 left him paralyzed.

[62] This 2009 interview was rebroadcast in 2012 on France-Culture to mark the passing of Monique Antelme, a gifted writer, intellectual, and *résistante* in her own right. Monique Antelme, "Entretien avec Monique Antelme," by Laure Adler, *Hors-Champs,* interview transcript, August 2009, http://www.fabriquedesens.net/ Hors-champs-Monique-Antelme.; Monique Antelme, "Entretien avec Monique Antelme," by Laure Adler, *Hors-Champs,* streaming audio, August 2009, http://www.franceculture.fr/emission-hors-champs-hommage-a-monique-antelme-2012-10-24.

The wartime accounts of Antelme and Duras collide in their nuanced and unflinching portrayal of bodily functions. States Colin Davis, "*La Douleur* and *L'Espèce humaine* contain, in fact, a number of significant echoes and cross-references, so that the two works may be regarded to some extent as complimentary texts… After Robert L.'s return, his wife's concentration on his bodily functions picks up one of the central concerns of *L'Espèce humaine* and echoes numerous passages in which Antelme describes eating and defecation."[63] Upon further examination, the works prove linked beyond a simple shared visibility of excreta: like Antelme, in *La Douleur,* Duras mobilizes the body's functions as a reaffirmation of existence. In an interview published in *Les Yeux Verts,* Duras emphasized the scatological's centrality to her dually literary and autobiographical narrative: "Il ressort des critiques que [*La Douleur*] c'est autre chose que de la littérature. Je trouve au contraire que c'est la plus haute littérature parce que l'écriture saisit quelque chose d'impossible à évoquer et le texte y réussit, *notamment à travers toute cette histoire de merde*."[64] Duras's conscientious development of the scatological visibly builds on Antelme's codification of the excremental as a forceful symbol of a life doggedly resisting the SS's best efforts to annihilate it. In *La Douleur,* bodily functions do not only potently affirm existence, but act as the very medicine whose purgative powers lead a body on the brink of extinction back to the realm of the living. These vivid descriptions of Robert's excretions and their resulting constitutional shift thus function as a barometer by which a life teetering on the edge of death becomes once more recognizable and human.

In *La Douleur,* where physical and emotional purgation are intricately fused, Robert's shift back to life is signaled through what he discards, his own waste. This unflinching examination of

[63] Colin Davis, "Duras, Antelme and the Ethics of Writing," *Comparative Literature Studies* 34.2 (1997): 171.
[64] Marguerite Duras, *Œuvres Completes t. III,* ed. Gilles Philippe (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), 78. My thanks to Liz Groff for sharing this quotation with me. My italics.

Robert's digestive tract will prove metonymic of his recovery on multiple levels. Forced to consume nebulously alimentary waste, eating scraps from the garbage and drinking the watery byproduct of machines, Robert's own bodily waste goes through a shocking upheaval after his return: ravaged by dysentery, his body excretes uncontrollably. Duras's emphasis on this physical purgation notably suggests the absence of another purge, the purgation of the heart and mind : "Ce que se retenait de faire le cœur, l'anus ne pouvait pas le retenir, il lâchait son contenu… le cœur, lui, continuait à retenir son contenu. Le cœur. Et la tête."[65] While the stubborn head and heart hold on to their toxic *contenu*, the anus easily and gladly rids itself of its noxious contents. Despite human revulsion at excretion, the anus is capable of expelling what the heart and head cannot, outperforming and outfunctioning these organs historically valorized intellectually.[66] By positing an organ that is not just spatially but symbolically beneath the head and heart, Duras symbolically inverts the human body, endowing the anus with a value not previously afforded to this long underappreciated and deprecated organ.

Duras is continually awestruck by the ability of Antelme's body to purge itself, as she wonders, "Comment savoir ce que ce ventre contenait encore d'inconnu, de douleur (74)?" The choice of the world "douleur" proves significant on myriad levels, creating surprising and unforeseen meaning. The *Larousse* provides two definitions of the word "douleur," classifying it both as a "sensation pénible, désagréable, ressentie dans une partie du corps," and as a

[65] Marguerite Duras, *La Douleur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 72-73. Subsequent quotations from this work will be cited parenthetically.

[66] I intend "historically-valorized organs" to reference notably the Enlightenment valorization of the mind and reason, as well as the supreme importance bestowed on the heart, symbol of sentiment, in the Romantic Movement. Furthermore, the 16th century blasons of poets such as Marot and Scève lauded practically every part of the human form except for the anus. This notable omission from the traditional Renaissance blazon canon would be remedied in satirical reworkings by Eustorg de Beaulieu with "Du Cul" (1537) and Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine's 19th century pastiche of the blazon genre, "Sonnet du Trou de Cul" (1872).

"sentiment pénible, affliction, souffrance morale; chagrin, peine."[67] On a surface level, Duras's choice of the word "douleur" with its jointly psycho-corporeal connotations thus makes instant reference to the complex link between body and soul, alluding to the binary of emotional and physical *douleur* contained in Antelme's broken body. However, in addition to "douleur" as sensation—physical pain— and "douleur" as sentiment – sadness—Duras endows "douleur" with an innovative sense: if one considers "douleur" as the contents of Robert's stomach—"ce que ce ventre contenait encore d'inconnu, de douleur"—then the author's musings morph "douleur" into a Durassian euphemism for excrement. Duras's "douleur" thus functions on a triad of levels, coming to incarnate pain of the body, anguish of the mind, and excrement itself, the byproduct of *douleur* both physical and mental. How apt, then, that an account of one man's healing through excrement should be entitled with this word simultaneously understood to be pain, sadness, and excrement.

While enduring a pain that is jointly physical and emotional, Antelme's bodily functions come to reaffirm his pre-Buchenwald humanity, which has yet to be extinguished completely. As Robert clings to his life by a thread, the waste which spews out of his body is unrecognizably alien:

> Merde que personne n'avait encore vue…. Pendant dix-sept jours, l'aspect de cette merde resta la même. Elle était inhumaine. Elle le séparait de nous plus que la fièvre, plus que la maigreur, les doigts désonglés, les traces de coups des S.S. On lui donnait de la bouille jaune d'or, bouille pour nourrisson et elle ressortait de lui vert sombre comme de la vase de marécage. Le seau hygiénique fermé on entendait les bulles lorsqu'elles crevaient à la surface. Elle aurait pu rappeler – glaireuse et gluante—un gros crachat. Dès qu'elle sortait, la chambre s'emplissait d'une odeur qui n'était pas celle de la putréfaction, du cadavre… mais plutôt celle d'un humus végétal, l'odeur des feuilles mortes, celle des sous-bois trop épais (73-74).

[67] *Dictionnaire Larousse, s.v.* "douleur," accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/douleur /26637?q=douleur#26506.

Duras conveys the total strangeness of Robert's excretions through a vivid description which employs almost all five senses, evoking its odor, color, and even the sounds made by its expulsion. The pervasiveness of Robert's excrement becomes equally evident in Robert's lexical treatment in this description of waste. As he is nursed back to health and inhuman shit spills out of him, Duras reflects this helplessness by syntactically placing Antelme into passive constructions where he is present primarily as a direct object receiving action, rather than as a subject generating actions or thoughts of his own: "On lui donnait de la bouille." Even more striking, the predominant subject in this description of convalescence is not an "il"—Robert—but an "elle"—sa merde. Not only is Robert's body masked on a physical level, unrecognizable through a pervasive, cloaking shit, but through Duras's lengthy description of his excrement, Robert becomes equally obscured syntactically under a sea of verbal shit until a shift in excrement signals his return from the brink of death.

In addition to the pervasiveness of this excrement, which momentarily usurps Robert's place in the narrative by subjugating him syntactically, Duras's specific description of these bodily functions raises additional cause for alarm by extensively aligning Antelme's body and its waste with the botanical world. Duras explicitly distances Antelme's scent from that of a cadaver, or a body that was once recognizably human and alive. Instead, the author insists on the foreign nature of this excrement, aligning it with objects in the natural world which have never possessed human life: dead leaves and swamp sludge. Bruno Chaouat observes of this odor's strangeness, "Whereas the stench of the rotting cadaver would indeed be human, all too human—a smell that one could identify a unambiguously belonging to the species—the smell of Robert L's excreta is reinscribed in the vegetable kingdom and compared to the most smell of "humus," a mixture of dead leaves and thick bushes. Interestingly enough, the word 'humus' shares a root

with the word 'human."[68] The disturbing, alien qualities of this excrement lead Robert's caretakers to hide own body from him:"Dix-sept jours nous cachons à ses propres yeux ce qui sort de lui de même que nous lui cachons ses propres jambes, ses pieds, son corps, l'incroyable (74)." Robert's inhuman expulsions do not just distance him from his caretakers in their complete alien strangeness, but his bodily functions even distance Robert from himself by estranging him from his own body, morphing it into a grotesque machine which mysteriously turns yellow bouillon into green sludge somewhere in between the mouth and anus. Robert's excrement thus becomes a physical manifestation of his otherness, separating him from his caretakers more than any other aspect of his wounded body.

While his observations on the etymology of 'humus' are elucidating, Chaouat's conclusion regarding Robert's alien excrement is less convincing. He argues, "It is through the inhuman aspect of his shit, as well as through the thick strangeness of its smell, that Robert L. no longer belongs to the human community and has been relegated by the experience of the concentration camp to an outsider of the human species."[69] While Duras may ascribe unhuman qualities to Antelme's physical purges which momentarily seem to establish his foreignness, I would argue that Robert's excrement is what ultimately establishes his humanness and signals his return from the brink of death, as seen through a subtle, yet crucial lexical shift in Duras's text. Scatological functions as a biological barometer of life are, of course, a familiar motif for readers acquainted with *L'Espèce humaine:* one cannot help recalling the poor mass who morphs from a *quelque chose* to a *quelqu'un* through the expulsion of a stream of liquid shit, a fate which eerily

[68] Bruno Chaouat, "'La mort ne recèle pas tant de mystère': Robert Antelme's Defaced Humanism," *L'Esprit Créateur* 40.1 (2000): 95-96.
[69] Chaouat, "La mort ne recèle pas tant de mystère," 95.

foreshadows Robert's own return from Buchenwald.[70] After several weeks hovering between life and death, Robert emerges from the period where "merde inhumaine" spills from his body: "Au bout de dix-sept jours la mort se fatigue. Dans le sceau elle ne bouillonne plus, elle devient liquide, elle reste verte, mais elle a une odeur plus humaine, une odeur humaine. Et un jour la fièvre tombe… et puis un matin il dit: "J'ai faim" (75)." Despite tribulations which have lead him to share more with a swamp than a cadaver, in this shift from "merde inhumaine" to "une odeur humaine," Antelme manages to regain a slight, yet unmistakable aspect of his pre-camp self, if only in what he excretes. His alien excrement does not divorce him from the human race, as Chaouat would suggest, but acts as a constant affirmation of his humanity: even after all of the evils he has endured, Robert never stops excreting. This constant of human life may be deformed past the point of recognition, but like the constant in a scientific experiment, it never disappears. However small a victory it may seem, the mineral movement from "inhuman" to "human" thus proves to be the catalyst in a long list of events in his recovery, leading up to the day where he proclaims, "J'ai faim."

Robert's statement "J'ai faim" acts as a powerful portent of change on several levels, none of which is as obvious as its testifying to his slowly-improving health. After seventeen days of purging, excreting, and emptying himself, Robert's renewed appetite evidences a capacity and desire to start filling his body once more. This phrase is even more poignant in that it reinscribes Robert into an active register, breaking up a long section of silence. Similar to Antelme's syntactical subjugation to his excrement in much of *La Douleur*, Robert is silent in this long passage recounting his healing. However, just as *L'Espèce humaine* starts with the first person

[70] "Le copain était étendu dehors sur la couverture. Il ne bougeait pas… On ne pouvait pas savoir s'il était mort. Peut-être se relèverait-il et chierait-il encore? C'était par la merde qu'on avait su qu'il était vivant (36)."

pronoun 'je' in the phrase "Je suis allé pisser," the use of the first person singular pronoun in this short, declarative sentence establishes- or reestablishes- Antelme as the active subject of his own story.

This reinscription of Antelme in an active register, however, is somewhat misleading, for despite his silence in this section of *La Douleur,* Robert Antelme's own memories of this period of convalescence are markedly less silent. Antelme's alternate perception of this period becomes clear in Dionys Mascolo's *Autour d'un effort de mémoire,* where Mascolo publishes and comments on a letter sent to him by his dear friend in June 1945. Antelme writes Mascolo, "Eh bien, dans ce qui chez d'autres représentait pour moi l'enfer, tout dire, c'est là où j'ai vécu mon paradis; car il faut que tu saches bien D., que pendant les premiers jours où j'étais dans mon lit et où je vous ai parlé, à toi et à Marguerite surtout, je n'étais pas un homme de la terre."[71] Once again, the unnavigable gap between the witness and the "witness to the witness" becomes starkly evident to readers of the two sharply differing accounts of the same recovery period.

One might ask why Duras alters by omission her recounting of Antelme's homecoming; after all, it is his wife's sympathetic ear which Antelme specifically singles out as an object of comfort in his convalescence: "les premiers jours … où je vous ai parlé, à toi et à Marguerite surtout," he recounts in his letter to Mascolo. Is this alternate version of the events of spring 1945 a deliberate effort of Duras to hurt or silence her ex-husband? Did she choose not to put words in Antelme's mouth in order to mitigate the pain she knew she would inflict by publishing his story without his consent? Or did Duras's own centricity in *La Douleur*, self-cast in her personal story of suffering, lead her to relegate her husband to a silent, supporting role? We may

[71] Dionys Mascolo, *Autour d'un effort de mémoire* (Paris: Maurice Nadeau, 1987), 92.

never know. However, the discrepancies between these two versions hearken back to a central concern of Duras's testimony as a "witness to a witness": the issue of perception. This gap which exists between the survivor and those who witness his return proves to be a central, unresolved matter in *La Douleur,* and one which Duras frames largely through an excremental metaphor. For in addition to the link Duras forges between emotional and physical purgation, which symbolically morphs excrement into a barometer of life, the excremental in *La Douleur* also poses serious, troubling questions about the nature of sympathy, empathy, and the ability of the non-interned population to attain a comprehension of the camp experience that is not fundamentally flawed. While Robert's body mimetically represents his emotional purgation through physical purgation, the reaction of Duras and other caretakers to Robert's excrement and his bodily purgation similarly functions as a metonymic expression of their necessarily foreign, outsider views of the camps: just as Robert's "merde inhumaine" is utterly incomprehensible and unexplainable to those he loves, smelling so alien that it is labeled botanical, so too is his experience destined to rest shrouded to anyone who did not also experience it firsthand

Duras cements this link between shit's odor and memory when she describes the scent of Robert's "merde inhumaine." She observes, "C'était là en effet une odeur sombre, épaisse comme le reflet de cette nuit épaisse de laquelle il émergeait et que nous ne connaîtrons jamais (74)" and with the image of the 'nuit épaisse' readers are instantly transported to Antelme's moment of consciousness under the stars, the night where he urinates and proclaims, "Dans la fumée de l'urine… cette nuit était belle," his heart heavy but ultimately joyous at the knowledge he possesses and his ability to think like a free man . In this reflection, Duras creates a metaphor between the alien nature of this excrement's odor and the utter incomprehensibility of Antelme's

deportation for those who did not experience it alongside him. She continues to discuss her shock and awe at this seemingly-unhuman excrement:

> Evidemment il avait fouillé dans les poubelles pour manger… mais ça *n'expliquait pa*s [cette merde]. Devant la chose *inconnue* on cherchait des explications. On se disait que peut-être là sous nos yeux, il mangeait son foie, sa rate. Comment *savoir* ? Comment *savoir* ce que ce ventre contenait encore d'*inconnu*, de douleur ? Dix-sept jours durant l'aspect de cette merde est resté le même. Dix-sept jours sans que cette merde ressemble à quelque chose de *connu*. Chacune des sept fois qu'il fait par jour, nous la humons, nous la regardons sans la *reconnaître* (74, my emphasis).

Duras's reaction to Robert's foreign excrement is permeated by a vocabulary implying a void—not just the empty space of Robert's continually-emptying anal cavity, but an intellectual void symbolizing a complete lack of knowledge. Negative and interrogative forms of *savoir*, *connaître,* and *reconnaître* as well as repetition of the adjective "inconnu" all emphasize the total lack of understanding experienced by Robert's caretakers as they witness an unrecognizable sludge spill from his body, waste so foreign that it must be labeled as 'botanical,' for lack of any other explicably-human point of reference. "Dix-sept jours nous cachons de lui son propre corps," Duras states. Not only is Robert's body a mystery hidden from him by his benevolent caretakers, but even the caretakers who gaze at this body still find his form unknowable, masked under a veil of unrecognizable, inhuman shit.

This looking without seeing, this ultimately unattainable desire to recognize proves indicative of the entire experience of deportation, for no matter how ardently Duras pores over this bodily waste, no matter how she may try to understand Robert's experiences or his excretions, she remains mystified, unable to find a single visibly human referent among this sickly mire. As Leslie Hill states,

> The texts in [*La Douleur*] as a whole function less as a testimony to the truth of what happened in 1944 or 1945 than as a means of questioning the terms on which testimony in general is possible. Instead of giving an objective account of historical events it suggests in effect that there is no stable place or position from which neutral testimony can be offered… Historical catastrophe on

> that scale threatens not only the survival of its own immediate victims, but also the very possibility of establishing a secure frame of reference within which catastrophe as such might be understood or rendered meaningful. *La Douleur,* in this respect, is not only a testimony to the ravages of war, but more radically, a work that bears witness to the sheer impossibility of bearing witness.[72]

Duras's myopia thus becomes painfully evident: her lack of sight is not a result of being born blind, but of being born without the eyes to see Antelme's experience as he has seen it.

What, then, of this "sheer impossibility of bearing witness?" Despite the initial pessimism of this conclusion drawn by Duras and critics like Hill, it is under this seemingly hopeless situation that writing emerges as the final cathartic act, an expulsion of experience, emotion, and memory onto paper. If excretion is purgative on an individual level, so, too, is the act of writing, which proves to be a meaningful act more for the person who writes rather than for the person who reads. "The demands of the bowels are absolute," Terrence Des Pres reminds us, and like the need to scratch or the need to defecate, so, too, does Antelme's need to bear testimony become a demand impossible to halt.[73] Mascolo describes the information which spilled out of Antelme on their drive from Dachau back to Paris: "Lui seul désormais parlera. Dans son épuisement physique, il n'est plus que parole. Je n'ai pas à le questionner. Il dit tout. Tout ce qu'il a vécu depuis un an, épisode par épisode, sans ordre, l'un évoquant l'autre. Garder le silence plus de quelques seconds lui serait impossible."[74] If this disordered speech evokes a testimonial dysentery, then Antelme would too soon be stricken by an intense verbal constipation: "A peine commencions-nous à raconteur, que nous suffoquions,"[75] Antelme writes of his return from the camps in *L'Espèce humaine*'s introduction (9). This *va-et-vient*, between silence and a chaotic verbal expulsion of testimony ultimately mimics the anus's similarly-

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[72] Leslie Hill, *Marguerite Duras: Apocalyptic Desires* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 128-129.
[73] Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 55.
[74] Mascolo, *Autour d'un effort,* 50.
[75] This heartbreaking revelation inspired the title of Sarah Kofman's thoughtful essay *Paroles Suffoqués.*

patterned muscle alternances.[76] As Bruno Chaouat observes, "La parole du témoignage se fait spasme, épreintes, commémorant l'ultime colique du premier homme qu'Antelme aura vu mourir à Buchenwald. L'alternance constriction-relâchement du sphincter de la gorge mime hystériquement… celle du sphincter anal."[77] Not only does excretion become intricately linked to personal, emotional purgation, but it proves emblematic of the very act of diffusing written testimony.

Where words may suffocate, the pen ultimately heals. Duras describes writing's purgative powers as such: "Il a écrit un livre sur ce qu'il croit avoir vécu en Allemagne: *L'Espèce humaine.* Une fois ce livre écrit, fait, édité, il n'a plus parlé des camps de concentration allemands. Il ne prononce jamais ces mots. Jamais plus. Jamais plus non plus le titre du livre."[78] While the spoken word may stop and start unexpectedly, suffocating survivors with the weight of their testimony, the act of writing proves an efficient laxative. On passing a kidney stone, Michel de Montaigne once reflected, "Mais est-il rien doux au prix de cette soudaine mutation, quand d'une douleur extrême je viens, par la vidange de ma pierre, à recouvrer comme d'un éclair la belle lumière de la santé, si libre et si pleine, comme il advient en nos soudaines et plus âpres coliques ?"[79] Like Montaigne's kidney stone, the act of writing testimony proves to be a

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[76] The silence-speech alternation may also evoke for readers *L'Ere du témoin,* Annette Wieviorka's model on the arc taken by Jewish wartime testimonies. Survivors remained relatively silent in Western public life before the 1961 Adolph Eichmann trial ushered in a new era of *témoignage* and a cultural dialogue of survivors as witnesses to history. She argues, "Ainsi, la mémoire individuelle inscrite dans celle d'un groupe close qui pourrait être identifié à la famille se construit dès l'évènement. Mais cette mémoire n'est pas dans l'air du temps, elle ne présente guère d'usage politique. Pour que l'expression du souvenir de *Hurbn* [Yiddish: destruction, ruin] pénètre le champ social, il faut que la configuration politique change, que le témoignage se charge d'un sens qui dépasse l'expérience individuelle, qu'il soit porté par des secteurs de la société." Annette Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin* (Paris: Hachette, 1998,) 79.

[77] Chaouat, "Ce que chier veut dire," 162.

[78] The phrase "ce qu'il croit avoir vécu" has long provoked readers in its implicit questioning of the events recounted by Antelme. Bruno Chaouat provides a compelling interpretation of this uncertain construction: "Cette phrase, loin de nier la réalité objective de Dachau, et encore moins que Robert L. fut bien résident de cette "autre planète", indique simplement les limites de l'expérience et de sa représentation." Chaouat, "Ce que chier veut dire," 159.

[79] Michel de Montaigne, "De L'Expérience," in *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), 440.

sublimely cathartic purge of a colossal pain. In both Antelme's memoir of his deportation as well as in Duras's stylized recounting of his convalescence, the two employ references to excrement which not only challenge prevalent preconceptions of scatological literature, but which push against the Nazi's overarching narrative of excremental assault, imbuing bodily waste with dual meanings which must exist side by side. Leslie Kaplan comments on Antelme's union of art and suffering: "À celui ou elle qui traverse le livre de Robert Antelme, *L'espèce humaine,* il est donné de vivre le paradoxe le plus grand: éprouver en même temps le désespoir devant l'existence de l'enfer réel, et la joie devant la force du travail actif de la pensée (106)."[80] Through a forceful embracing of the excremental, Antelme and Duras explore how a tool of debasement and evidence of the Nazis' sadism also proves to be a source of joy, a symbol of the body's continued existence and its ability to heal and renew itself under unimaginable trauma.

[80] Leslie Kaplan, "Penser la mort" in *Robert Antelme: Textes inédits sur L'espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 106.

Chapter II: "Ecrite la merde ne sent pas": The Scented Memory of Charlotte Delbo and the 31 000 convoy

"It is really the smell that makes a visit to a death camp stark reality. The smell and the stink of the dead and dying, the smell and the stink of the starving. Yes, it is the smell, the odor of the death camp that makes it burn in the nostrils and memory. I will always smell Mauthausen." —A member of the U.S. liberating forces[1]

"Vous vouliez le sang, vous avez la merde."[2] So asserts Jean-François Lyotard in his aptly-titled effort, "Phraser après Auschwitz." Upon their arrival to the notorious Nazi death camp, a convoy of French women envisioned torture, blood, and death. Never could they have anticipated that all this awaited them and more: in addition to brutal confrontations with the sadistic SS, these French women in Auschwitz found themselves in a crisic battle with their own bodies through deadly, unhygienic circumstances. Courageous women conscientious of the gravity of their Resistance activities, they came into the battle of deportation prepared for blood, but not for shit: never in their wildest imagination could they have foreseen literally drowning in excrement in a place which Nazi doctor Heinz Thilo referred to as *anus mundi,* the anus of the world.[3] This same incredulousness towards the camps would hold true for the stunned population who greeted the scant survivors upon their return, just as it does over seventy years later for a modern society glutinous for stories of violence and disaster. If the recent proliferation of both excellent and misguided film depictions of deportation is any indication, [4] the contemporary era still craves

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[1] Jon Bridgman, *The End of the Holocaust: The Liberation of the Camps* (Portland, Ore.: Areopagitica Press, 1990), 90.

[2] Jean-François Lyotard, "Discussions, ou: phraser 'après Auschwitz," in *Les Fins de l'homme,* eds. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 290.

[3] Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 147. Thilo's epithet for the camp provided the title for both Wiesław Kielar's memoir *Anus Mundi: 1,500 Days in Auschwitz-Birkenau* and Daniel Zimmermann's novel *L'anus du monde.*

[4] Although this list is certainly not comprehensive, I think notably of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful (La vita è bella,* 1997*),* Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), Stefan Ruzowitzky's *The Counterfeiters (Die Fälscher,* 2007*),* Anna Justice's *Remembrance (Die verlorene Zeit,* 2011),

these stories of blood. We find ourselves sickly fascinated by stories of Joseph Mengele, of SS brutality, of the *sonderkommando* and of the gas chambers, but instead of blood, we should concern ourselves instead with accounts of shit, for it is in the violent confrontation with this matter that another sort of courage begins to crystallize.

In the œuvre of Charlotte Delbo, Lyotard's grotesque transubstantiation periodically bubbles to the surface as Delbo and the women of her convoy are thrust into battle with their own bodies' functions, triggering a disgust rooted in their own resultant foul odors. On January 24, 1943, Charlotte Delbo was deported with 229 other women from Compiègne to Auschwitz; 85% of the 230 women were resistants.[5] The situation of the 31 000 convoy, so called for their Auschwitz matriculation numbers, was a unique one: as historian Caroline Morehead reminds us, Delbo's convoy was "the only train, during the entire four years of German occupation, to take women from the French Resistance to the Nazi death camps."[6] Instead of being imprisoned domestically or sent to the German concentration camp Ravensbrück, the typical punishments for French women in the Resistance, Delbo and her peers were sent to the war's most notorious extermination camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, an ordeal from which only 49 of them would return.[7] Even to this day, no one has ever figured out why the January 24th convoy received this dubious and horrific honor.

Phillip Kadelbach's *Naked Among Wolves (Nackt unter Wölfen,* 2015) and László Nemes's *Son of Saul (Saul fia,* 2015).

[5] "Présentation du convoi du 24 janvier 1943, dit convoi des 31000," Mémoire Vive, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.memoirevive.org/presentation-du-convoi-du-24-janvier-1943-dit-convoi-des-31000/.

[6] Caroline Moorehead, *A Train in Winter: An Extraordinary Story of Women, Friendship, and Resistance in Occupied France* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 4.

[7] For more on the differences between concentration camps and extermination camps (as well as transit camps and work camps), I suggest consulting these descriptions offered by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Holocaust Encyclopedia. "Nazi Camps: Introduction," US Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed March 13, 2016, http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005144.

If Lyotard's statement alludes to the enormous gap between perceptions and reality in a somewhat-perverse fascination with the Holocaust and deportation, then scholar Bruno Chaouat highlights yet another compelling component this phrase. He observes, "C'est ainsi que [Lyotard] résumait la platitude de la mort à Auschwitz, invoquant une sinistre eucharistie, dérision du martyre chrétien: le sang s'est changé en merde, le corps du martyr en déchet."[8] Chaouat's analysis of Lyotard situates his statement in a long French dialogue of martyrdom which proves especially astute in regards to Delbo and her convoy. Victims of previously unimaginable excremental degradation, the 31 000 convoy become cast as secular martyrs in the works of Charlotte Delbo, whose writing explores the effects of this "sinister Eucharist" on women laying down their lives not for a love of God, but for the deep love of their besieged homeland.

Numerous testimonial works have demonstrated the universal feelings of anguish endured by deportees upon their extreme immersion in bodily filth.[9] In the case of the 31 000 convoy's deportation, however, the women's carefully constructed group identification as martyrs significantly colored the way they experienced Auschwitz's excrementally-rooted suffering. The unsanitary conditions they encountered in the camp thrust the women into stark contrast with a well-established, rich dialogue equating moral judgment and bodily odor in the European subconscious, a phenomenon documented by a lengthy olfactory literary tradition. For the 31 000 convoy, the noxious scents of their own forms surpassed the realm of the physical anguish experienced globally by deportees, serving even more ominously as a forced interrogation of their resistance's utility. The foul stenches which surrounded them haunted them to their ends,

[8] Bruno Chaouat, "Ce que chier veut dire (Les ultima excreta de Robert Antelme)," *Revue des sciences humaines* 261 (2001): 151.
[9] Consult the testimonial works cited in Terrence Des Pres' chapter "Excremental Assault" in *The Survivor.*

masking and challenging the conscious sacrifice of women who saw their bodies and everything they stood for obscured under a pervasive cloak of foulness.

In Delbo's largely autobiographical play *Qui rapportera ces paroles?* the female population of an unnamed concentration camp discuss the agony felt by suffers of dysentery, whose lives seep away in slow, stinking waves through the anus. As Yvonne explains to her friend Claire, " Quand je suis entrée dans mon groupe de combat, j'ai pensé à la torture, j'y ai beaucoup pensé pour n'être pas prise au dépourvu, pour m'habituer à y résister et j'avais acquise une force: la certitude de résister à la torture…. Voilà pourquoi jusqu'à notre arrivée ici je croyais que rien ne pouvait ôter à un être sa fierté. Rien, sauf la dysenterie."[10] The degradation inherent in suffering from dysentery proves to extend past the realm of the women's physical forms, planting seeds of psychic agony which threaten to erase all remnants of the convoy's pre-camp identities as proud, dignified resisters.

Although the debasement of a being through excrement and its odors notably evokes Terrence Des Pres' excremental assault, another sea of resonances prove equally crucial in synthesizing the women's joint psychic pain. The use of death odors to denote morality hearkens back to an extensive equation of putrid odors with sin and wrongdoing in both secular and religious early modern European literature, a set of allusions especially significant in the context of the convoy's perceived secular martyrdom. Works in this scent-oriented tradition foreground an intricate olfactory matrix which sharply contrasts well-doers and evildoers through pleasant and foul odors. As I'll soon discuss, chronicles and hagiographies abound with accounts of sweet smells emitting from the corpses of saints and martyrs, a reaffirmation of the deceased's correct

[10] Charlotte Delbo, *Qui rapportera ces paroles? et autres écrits inédits* (Paris: Fayard, 2013), 18. Future quotations from *Qui* will be cited parenthetically.

conduct in life deemed to be an "odor of sanctity."[11] Conversely, individuals who led sinful or wicked lives such as William the Conqueror and Judas Iscariot often met putrid, scatological ends. In this tradition, even sin itself becomes characterized as foul-smelling, so significant is the link fusing odor to morality. The resultant metaphor between bodily odor and identity thus forms a dialogue with the nature of sacrifice, and creates compelling parallels with the women of the 1943 convoy.

Even though the pervasive scent of excrement threatens to negate these secular martyrs' strongly ingrained sense of self in the camp, it is ironically odor which serves to crystallize memory and to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in testimony upon their return. In "Le Ruisseau," Delbo's fragmented recollection of a day at a stream in *Une Connaissance inutile*, it becomes clear that the mind and the nose are intricately linked, as the olfactory problematizes a complicated and often conflicting web of remembrance. Throughout the atemporal trajectory of this episode, or fragment,[12] Delbo's memories cleave over four distinct temporal levels, each of which is characterized by an odor or the lack thereof. By examining these scented memories together and the role of these olfactory markers in Delbo's memory, it becomes clear that odor and Delbo's recollections of Auschwitz flow in and out of one another due to the striking compositional similarities between the olfactory and memory, two parts of a being which mirror each other in their functionality.

It is perhaps surprising that of all the five senses it should be scent which fuses itself most intricately with memory, for the olfactory has often been marginalized historically in regards to

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[11] Frank Graziano, *Wounds of Love: The Mystical Marriage of Saint Rose of Lima* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 80

[12] I borrow Nicole Thatcher's term "fragment" when talking about the small narratives that comprise many of Delbo's prose works. See Nicole Thatcher, *A Literary Analysis of Charlotte Delbo's Concentration Camp Re-Presentation,* (Lewiston, U.K: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 9.

the other senses. If philosophers dating from Plato and Aristotle have extolled vision as the most noble and important of the senses, then scent often finds itself at the bottom of the sensory hierarchical organization.[13] Immanuel Kant famously asked readers, "To which organic sense do we owe the least and which seems to be the most dispensable? The sense of smell. It does not pay us to cultivate it or to refine it in order to gain enjoyment; this sense can pick up more objects of aversion than of pleasure (especially in crowded places) and, besides, the pleasure coming from the sense of smell cannot be other than fleeting and transitory."[14] However, as Delbo demonstrates, it is ironically our most unreliable sense which provides some of the most compelling insight into deportation: not only does scent elucidate the impossibilities of recounting this trauma completely through testimony, but it similarly proves to function as a complex externalization of the deportee's memory. Scent may be unreliable, but it is perhaps this very unreliability which permits it to bind itself so closely to testimony, as the passing of time leads even deportees themselves to question what they have lived.[15] Totems of both degradation and memory, excrement and foul odors provide compelling insight to the unique deportation of the 31 000 convoy, a group forced to interrogate their secular martyr mantle through jarring confrontations with scent. Yet despite this erasure of self threatened by dysentery and its stench in Auschwitz, upon the survivors' return, odors, especially foul odors, serve to crystallize their memories of deportation, saliently highlighting the difficulties inherent in its transmission. Just like Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine,* where excrement possesses the

[13] See Danijela Kambaskovic and Charles Wolfe, "The Senses in Philosophy and Science: From the nobility of sight to the materialism of touch," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Renaissance*, ed. Herman Roodenburg (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).
[14] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 46.
[15] This ambiguity between the past and her memory of it led Delbo to preface her 3-volume *Auschwitz et après* with the following disclaimer: "Je ne suis pas sûre que ce que j'ai écrit soit vrai. Je suis sûre que c'est véridique." Charlotte Delbo, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1970), 7.

power to humanize and dehumanize deportees, Charlotte Delbo's olfactory testimony constitutes a dual vision where odors both bury and unearth the past, as scent becomes mapped onto memory.

"La vie qui s'en va par l'intestin:" Secular martyrdom in the 31 000 convoy[16]

In *Qui rapportera ces paroles?,* Charlotte Delbo stages her and her peers' experience in deportation under a thinly veiled fictitious guise.[17] Throughout the play's three acts, an all-female convoy in an unnamed concentration camp emerge as secular martyrs who sacrifice all not for a masculine God, but for their feminine *patrie, la France*, and for their sisters in arms. Given that the Catholic Church has canonized several individuals as martyrs among the Auschwitz dead,[18] the idea of nonreligious resistants as martyrs might initially seem problematic for readers—after all, neither Delbo nor her work are inherently religious. However, given the shared lexical field denoting martyrdom in situations of both secular and religious sacrifice in France, the image of the martyr will prove especially apt in the context of Auschwitz: while the young female martyrs of the Bible may die painful deaths for love and defense of their God, the 31 000 convoy die sacrificial deaths for the love of their friends, their country, and the values of the Republic. Although the object of veneration may be different, this deeply-ingrained sense of duty rests strikingly similar between the two cases, inscribing the convoy into a long historical dialogue of odor and sacrifice.

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[16] I paraphrase Yvonne's plaint in *Qui:* "Que la vie expire sur les lèvres, c'est normal. Qu'elle s'en aille par l'intestin, c'est ignoble (19)."

[17] An early, undated typed manuscript of *Qui* in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's Fonds Charlotte Delbo evidences that many of the play's characters were originally named after Delbo's closest friends in her convoy. However, through editing, Jeannette "Carmen" Serre becomes Renée, Lucienne "Lulu" Thevenin becomes Agnès, and Vittoria "Viva" Daubeuf becomes Gina.

[18] Pope John Paul II canonized as martyrs both Polish Franciscan Maximillian Kolbe (1982) and German Jewish-born Carmelite nun Edith Stein (1998).

While questions of God and religion may not be the primary concern of Delbo's work, the author nevertheless adopts a vocabulary evocative of religious martyrdom to describe her convoy's sacrifices in Auschwitz. Delbo clearly merges these religious and nonreligious lexical fields in the final fragment of *Une Connaissance inutile*, clearly outlining a belief in the convoy's secular martyrdom which will permeate her entire corpus. Entitled "Prière aux vivants pour leur pardonner d'être vivants," the fragment's title overtly evokes themes of religious redemption through the concepts of prayer and pardoning; functioning as a secular prayer, it closes the book in the same way that a prayer might close a mass. Despite the religious connotations of her closing fragment's title, Delbo clearly delineates that she uses this vocabulary of martyrdom not in a Judeo-Christian sense, but in a thoroughly secular one. She solidifies the image of the deportee as martyr by chastising the audience,

> Vous qui passez
> bien habillés de tous vos muscles
> comment vous pardonner
> ils sont morts tous
> Vous passez et vous buvez aux terrasses
> vous êtes heureux elle vous aime
> mauvaise humeur souci d'argent
> comment comment
> vous pardonner d'être vivants
> comment comment
> vous ferez-vous pardonner
> par ceux-là qui sont morts
> pour que vous passiez
> bien habillés de tous vous muscles
> que vous buviez aux terrasses

que vous soyez plus jeunes chaque printemps[19]

As the closing to a volume written predominately in prose, the final fragment's linear construction places a sense of urgency and immediacy on the sentiments conveyed in each line, its free verse remaining elegantly poetic through Delbo's use of repetition and parallel structures. Thanks to the direct cause-and-effect link she creates between the listener's actions and the deportee's sacrifice and eventual death, Delbo creates a powerful image of the deportee not as a martyr for God, but as a martyr for France. Instead of sacrifice stemming from religious credence, the self-sacrificing death of the secular martyr is framed as an act to maintain the quiet tranquility of nonreligious, quotidian life in her home country. Delbo presents this offering of the martyr's life and her suffering in Auschwitz as a tentative to save the lives of strangers, or at least, the lives of strangers as they know it, capable of peacefully sipping drinks on a café terrace and fretting over worries as banal as money.

Not having sacrificed him or herself to France, non-interned readers must justify their existence and prove themselves worthy of living in the post-Auschwitz world. Delbo cements this image of the deportee as martyr by begging us,

Je vous en supplie
faites quelque chose
apprenez un pas
une danse
quelque chose qui vous justifie
qui vous donne le droit
d'être habillés de votre peau de votre poil
apprenez à marcher et à rire
parce que ce serait trop bête

[19] Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz et après, t. II: Une Connaissance inutile* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970), 186. All further quotations from *Une Connaissance inutile* will be cited parenthetically.

à la fin
que tant soient morts
et que vous viviez
sans rien faire de votre vie (186).

Instead of a life governed by a duty to God, it is to the dead of Auschwitz, the martyrs of their country, to which common Frenchmen and women owe their debt of existence, and whose absolution they must therefore strive to obtain. This demand for sacrifice hearkens back to the fragment's title, "Prière aux vivants pour leur pardonner d'être vivants," which advances a strangely-Christian paradox through repetition of the word "vivants" in nominal and adjectival forms. Through this title, the author does not seek to absolve humanity of their silence, of their collaboration, or even necessarily of their firsthand ignorance of the death camps. Rather, the dual usage of the word "vivants" demonstrates Delbo's attempts to forgive her readers— the living– for being what they are in their very essence: living.

How can we forgive the living for living? This paradoxical necessity to absolve a being solely for being what it is evokes the Biblical consideration of all humans as sinful by pure virtue of existing in the postlapsarian world. In the Bible, it is not the individual's fault personally for being born into a perceived word of sin—according to the Bible we are all sinners, and this facet of our identity is inescapable, and could never be otherwise. However, while a newborn baby may not yet possess the faculties to sin knowingly, dogmatically, he is nevertheless considered a sinner in a collective sense as a descendent of Adam and Eve. Similarly, in the context of deportation, like this newborn baby, the un-interned's guilt does not necessarily stem from their concrete actions; instead, Delbo views them as needing absolution in a purely collective sense, as she struggles to forgive the civilian population for lives she believes they can't even fathom or appreciate in full.

Although Charlotte Delbo was an atheist, her works depict a unique, secular martyrdom rooted in a vocabulary commonly associated with Christianity. This careful codification of the nonreligious martyr proves especially significant in light of her convoy's French origins: one of the world's most fiercely secular countries, France considers Jean Moulin just as much a martyr as it does Jeanne d'Arc. Virtually unknown before his memorable Pantheonization two decades after his death, today Moulin's name figures ubiquitously over the French public sector, namesake for thousands of streets, *écoles*, and universities, eclipsed in this honor only perhaps by Charles de Gaulle. Biographer Douglas Johnson argues, "Jean Moulin has been called the greatest hero of the French Resistance. But it was 21 years after his death in German hands and 20 years after the liberation of Paris that he was so proclaimed. And the proclamation itself was very unusual. It was more like a canonization."[20] Johnson astutely underlines a unique conceptualization of the martyr in France as a figure that blurs lines of politics and religion. However, it becomes clear that in France, the doors between the secular and the religious swing both ways: just as Moulin's "canonization" demonstrates a treatment of a secular figure hovering on religious reverence, Jeanne d'Arc has equally found her way into the secular world, serving notably as a symbol and rallying point for the Front National.[21]

France's official lexicon for designating Resistance fighters similarly advances the vision of a state-sanctioned secular martyrdom. Beginning in 1915, the French government has employed an official vocabulary to honor secular martyrs. The *mention* 'mort pour la France' is awarded for "tout acte de décès d'un militaire ou civil tué à l'ennemi ou mort dans des

[20] Douglas Johnson, "The Mystery of Jean Moulin" in *The Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 2002, accessed December 14, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/2002/sep/01/books/bk-johnson1.

[21] The Front National's website evidences its multifaceted reappropriation of the saint into their political programming, including Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen's invitation to "tous les patriots français" for a commemoration of Jeanne's 600th birthday at her well-known Place des Pyramides statue in 2012. "Actualités Jeanne d'Arc", Front National, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.frontnational.com/terme/jeanne-darc/.

circonstances se rapportant à la guerre," a distinction emphasizing an individual's self-sacrificing death for the country.[22] Along with the *mention* "mort en déportation," the streets of the Republic are peppered with the recognizable blue and white signs advertising the honorable contributions of a street or square's namesake. Hailing from a country whose conception of the martyr frequently transcends boundaries of the saintly and the secular, the 31 000 women thus incarnate both Jean and Jeanne, existing on a plane somewhere between heaven and earth.

While the final fragment of *Une Connaissance inutile* elucidates Delbo's secular martyr conceptualization of her convoy, it is in *Qui rapportera ces paroles?* that one of the most disquieting sides of this sacrifice arises: although traditional martyr figures in Europe's long literary tradition die self-assured of their sacrifices' justness, the concerted efforts of the SS morph the women's own bodies into weapons used against them, anointing these new French martyrs in a stench of obscurity, self-doubt, and shame. The role of these thick odors in seeking to destroy the convoy's sense of self resonate with the larger historical framework of martyr deaths, individuals whose missions were legitimized by early writers through the sweet, perfume-like scents their bodies produced during their martyrdom and subsequent deaths. However, while the death of a martyr produced sweet smells, the odors of the women in Auschwitz alarmingly evoke the deaths of evildoers such as Judas Iscariot and William the Conqueror, individuals whose deaths are described as abhorrently foul-smelling. Early authors' descriptions of these malefactors' putrid demises function as potent critiques of their actions in life, evidencing a deep-seeded analogy between death odors and morality. In addition to bodily

[22] "Les Mentions," Office national des anciens combattants et des victimes de guerre, accessed November 11, 2014, http://www.onac-vg.fr/fr/missions/mentions/.

filth's use as an ideological weapon against the general camp populace, the foul odors of the women's bodies thus proved agonizing for its inversion of these coded olfactory deaths.

The Republic's official vocabulary of resistance martyrdom and cases such as Jeanne d'Arc and Jean Moulin demonstrate how notions of the secular and the religious often bleed into one another in France to describe extreme sacrifice. For this reason, even though Charlotte Delbo was not religious, exploring sources rooted in the Christian martyr tradition provides compelling insight into the scenes of sacrifice she witnessed and experienced while in Auschwitz. The parallels I outline between Delbo's olfactory descriptions and these early modern sources thus should not to be construed as an attempt to prove that Delbo was directly influenced the Bible, Chaucer, or the like. Instead, I hope to draw the reader's attention to a rich sociohistorical matrix linking individual morality to odor in postmortem image branding, one which becomes mapped out in a secular permutation throughout the works of Charlotte Delbo.

Susan Ashbrook Harvey provides a background of the long-established olfactory equations between good and bad in the Mediterranean in her book *Scenting Salvation.* As Harvey argues, these beliefs transcended notions of primitive symbolism, and instead functioned in a culturally cohesive manner amongst ancient people of the region:

> From one end of the Mediterranean to the other as far as ancient memory stretched, good smells were associated with all that was "good" in life and beyond: good faith, good health, good relationships… In turn, bad smells indicated the reverse: ill health, decay, disorder, disfavor, mortality, evil inclination, destruction. Furthermore, there was general agreement across Mediterranean people as to what constituted good or bad smells, enabling the proliferation of olfactory practices that displayed and expressed these associations as cultural codes. These codes were not based on symbolism as a disembodied language, but on the concrete view that smells participated in effecting the processes they represented…. To the ancient mind, then, odors fair and foul could order and classify human relations in the social or political spheres, as well as human-divine interaction.[23]

[23] Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 2.

These cultural beliefs would come to permeate the early modern literature of this region, as numerous medieval scholars conferred upon scent an ability to function as commentary on an individual's actions in life. When describing the tombs of martyrs and saints, many chroniclers evoked what would subsequently be referred to as an odor of sanctity, a scent which reaffirmed the actions of a martyr or holy person. Given the frequent usage of fragrant oils and incenses in important burials of the epoch, these sweet-smelling deaths may initially seem unsurprising. However, Annick Lallemand explains the inadequecy of this simpler answer: "L'explication par les rites funéraires apparait inadéquate, beaucoup trop simple pour rendre compte de la richesse symbolique du parfum pour les chrétiens… Par contre… dans les Actes des martyres, le parfum est l'image de l'union de l'âme avec Christ, qui participe à la joie céleste en accomplissant le sacrifice parfait."[24] Frank Graziano further expounds on the dual literal and figurative implications of this postmortem odor of sanctity: "The phrase 'odor of sanctity' hovers between its literal and figurative meanings. What appears originally to have been metaphoric—the 'odor' being one air or reputation of saintliness—increasingly assumed quite literal usage to denote the sweet fragrance exuded by the corpses of holy people in lieu of the stench of putrefaction to which the rest of us are destined. This odor of sanctity was regarded as a sign that one's holiness had been recognized on high." [25] The odor of one's corpse was thus commonly associated as a commentary on one's character in life, regardless of whether one had died the death of a martyr.

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[24] Annick Lallemand, "Le parfum des martyrs dans les Actes des martyrs de Lyon et le Martyre de Polycarpe," *Studia Patristica* 16.2 (1985): 187 and 192.

[25] Graziano, *Wounds of Love*, 80. Graziano employs a litany of examples to evidence how the sweet scent of the dead was used to reaffirm goodness, citing for example Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* which mentions the discovery of Mary Magdalene's purported remains: upon opening of this tomb, "so powerful an odor of sweetness pervaded the church that for seven days all those who entered noticed it (81)." According to another chronicler, there was "a strong fragrance, as if a storehouse of sweet spices had been opened (81)." He goes on to state that "The corpse of a fourteenth-century Italian nun 'despite its being plentifully covered in flesh and fat… similarly 'exhaled a gentle odor, a heavenly fragrance' just as the grave of another saintly woman exuded a 'supernatural fragrance so sweetly aromatic and unlike any earthly odors (81)."

In addition the link between a corpse's postmortem odor and the individual's sanctity and goodness in life, even the action of martyrdom itself came to take on a heavy olfactory significance.[26] In a short, yet pertinent article which paved the way for considerably more dialogue on the topic of martyrs and scents, Annick Lallemand analyzes the olfactory's role in reaffiriming sacrifice in "Le parfum des martyrs dans les Actes des martyrs de Lyon et le Martyre de Polycarpe." Lallemand evokes a description of odor surrounding the Lyon martyrs as they march proudly to their deaths: "Ils exhalent en même temps la bonne odeur du Christ si bien que certaines gens les croyaient oints d'un parfum profane."[27] She then compares the description of this sweet perfume emanating from the martyrs as evocative of the sacred oils used in marriage rites—thus, the smell emitted by the individuals who triumphantly greet their deaths evokes their union with and spiritual marriage to Jesus.

Polycarp's martyrdom receives a similar olfactory treatment upon his being sentenced to be burned alive. After saying a final prayer in which he offers God his life in sacrifice, numerous beauties transform what should be the grisly scene of Polycarp's pyre: in addition to his burning flesh becoming "comme un pain qui cuit ou comme l'or et l'argent qu'on purifie dans une fournaise," the scent exuded by the martyr also astounds the scene's spectators. Instead of emitting the odor of burning flesh, the habitual odor of the pyre and later of the crematorium chimney, Polycap's body emanates "une bonne odeur comparable à celle de l'ensens qui s'élève ou à celle de quelque autre des précieux aromates."[28] As Lallemand observes, the old bishop becomes "[une] fumée odorante qui monte vers Dieu. Après l'image du pain qui cuit, puis celle

[26] In addition to Harvey's *Scenting Salvation*, see Suzanne Evans, "The Scent of a Martyr," *Numen* 49.2 (2002): 193-211.
[27] Lallemand, "Le Parfum des martyrs," 187-188.
[28] Lallemand, "Le parfum des martyrs," 190.

de l'or et de l'argent qu'on purifie, le martyr est présenté comme une offrande odorante."[29] As Polycarp actively martyrs himself and dies, his body, and the act of martyrdom itself morph into olfactory externalizations of his sacrifice, redeeming his actions by evoking the aromatic incense used in church ceremonies. In addition to good deeds and moral character, sacrifice itself was thus affirmed in early literature through its alignment with pleasant odor. These scents, as we shall see, would be far away from the odors produced in the excruciating deaths of the 31 000 convoy's secular martyrs.

If pure souls could emit character-affirming odors postmortem, and if the act of sacrificing oneself could also be accompanied with a resultant olfactory affirmation, then it is only logical that a parallel tradition would exist where the wicked die deaths that are putrid and scatological. The death of Judas Iscariot is described in such terms in Acts of the Apostles: "… falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out."[30] Medieval historian Jacobus de Voragine provides a compelling analysis of Judas's scatological end: "[…] s'étant pendu [Judas] a crevé par le milieu du ventre et toutes ses entrailles se sont répandues; et il ne rejeta rien par la bouche ; car il n'était pas convenable qu'elle fût souillée d'une façon si *ignominieuse* après avoir été touchée par la glorieuse bouche de J.-C. Il était encore convenable que les entrailles qui avaient conçu la trahison fussent déchirées et répandues, et que la gorge par où la parole de trahison avait passé fût étranglée avec un lacet."[31] Voragine highlights Judas's ignominious death as a final punishment for his transgressions against Jesus; since Judas's black soul is denied the dignity of passing through lips that have kissed Jesus, it must pass through the

[29] Lallemand, "Le parfum des martyrs," 190.
[30] Acts 1:18 (KJV).
[31] Jacques de Voragine, *La Légende dorée de Jacques de Voragine : nouvellement traduite en français / avec introduction, notices, notes et recherches sur les sources, par l'abbé J. -B. M. Roze,* (Paris: É Rouveyre, 1902), 318-319. My emphasis.

anus, an orifice diametrically opposed both spatially and symbolically to the mouth. The construction of this mouth/anus binary, and the hypothesis that Judas's ignominious soul must pass through the anus because it is not worthy of passing through his lips evokes the dysenteric Yvonne's plaint later in *Qui:* "Que la vie expire sur les lèvres, c'est normal. Qu'elle s'en aille par l'intestin, c'est ignoble (19)." Although written hundreds of years apart, the similar comparison between the two descriptions of scatological death is striking: while Yvonne deems a dysenteric death "ignoble," Voragine qualifies Judas's excremental demise as "ignominious." Voragine's commentary on Acts of the Apostles aptly highlights a pervasive, engrained stigma attached to scatological deaths, ends which not only humiliate the individual, but which often smack of wrongdoing. Excremental deaths thus prove to be coded as abnormal and demeaning ways to die in European literature long before World War II.[32]

Voragine's analysis of Judas's death is fascinating in its causality: readers come to associate the vivid scatological death of Judas as a direct punishment for being history's most notorious traitor, an ignominious death to mirror an ignominious life full of treachery and deceit. However, the equation of scent, scatology and death to moral character was not a treatment reserved solely for religious figures, as is the case with Orderic Vitalis' description of the death of William I. Vitalis, whose famous *Historia ecclesiastica* is credited with leaving "one of the fullest and most graphic accounts of Anglo-Norman society in his own day,"[33] gives a similar

[32] The association of the souls of the wicked exiting the body through the anus appears also in secular literature in Rutebeuf's humorous *fabliau* "Le pet du vilain." Mistakenly believing that the soul exits the body through the anus, a demon sent to collect the soul of a villain accidentally absconds with the peasant's pungent fart instead. After unleashing this odor in hell, all of the inferno's demons are traumatized by the putrid stench of the peasant's "soul," and decide never again to accept a villain's soul in hell. Rutebeuf, *Œuvres Complètes,* ed. Michel Zink (Paris: Livres de Poche, 2001).

[33] "Orderic Vitalis," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed February 18, 2016, http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/431449/Orderic-Vitalis.

treatment to the postmortem image of the Conqueror.[34] In addition to Vitalis' emphatic olfactory descriptions, the case of the Conqueror itself presents interesting parallels to the world of Charlotte Delbo: it is the story of a man hungry for power who invaded and occupied a neighboring country believing himself the rightful inheritor to this land. Benedict Anderson alludes to this sort of ellipsis in William's modern image in *Imagined Communities*: "English history textbooks offer the diverting spectacle of a great Founding Father whom every schoolchild is taught to call William the Conqueror. The same child is not informed that William spoke no English, indeed could not have done so, since the English language did not exist in his epoch; nor is he or she told 'Conqueror of what?'. For the only intelligible modern answer would have to be 'Conqueror of the English,' which would turn the old Norman predator into a more successful precursor of Napoléon and Hitler."[35]

Long before the demise of Adolph Hitler, William's story would end with the anticlimactic and embarrassing death of one of Europe's most powerful men. According to Vitalis, upon the death of the Conqueror, his disloyal servants and family fled Rouen before a burial which nobody wanted to orchestrate. This burden was eventually taken up a goodly country knight. After a glowing eulogy from Gilbert, Bishop of Evreux, who asks mourners to forgive William's sins, for "in this present life no man can live without sin," a young man named Ascelin emerged from the crowd, vocalizing a sharp critique amongst the brouhaha: "the laud [burial site] on which you stand was the yard belonging to my father's house, which that man for whom you pray, when he was yet only duke of Normandy, took forcible possession of, and in the teeth of all justice, by an exercise of tyrannical power, here founded this abbey. I therefore lay

[34] My sincere thanks to Stephanie Britton of the University of Durham for introducing me to the work of Vitalis and for sharing her vast knowledge of this subject with me.
[35] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: New York, 1991), 201.

claim to this land, and openly demand its restitution, and in God's name I forbid the body of the spoiler being covered with earth which is my property, and buried in my inheritance."[36] Directly after Ascelin's plaint, an event occurs which reinforces William's ill deeds in life: "when the corpse was lowered into the stone coffin, they were obliged to use some violence in forcing it in, because through the negligence of the masons it had been made too short, so that, as the king was very corpulent, the bowels burst, and an intolerable stench affected the by-standers and the rest of the crowd. The smoke of incense and other aromatics ascended in clouds, but failed to purify the tainted atmosphere."[37] Not even the sweet odor of incense can cover up the stench of William's wrongdoings, which are further stressed through notions of corruption in the phrase "failed to *purify* the *tainted* atmosphere (my italics)." Although Ascelin's complaints and forbiddance of the Conqueror being buried in his father's land are resolved monetarily, the land itself nevertheless rejects William's corpse as is it lowered into the casket placed in the ground.

Vitalis provides his own analysis for these events, explaining to readers how they should interpret William's messy burial:

> A king once potent, and warlike, and the terror of the numberless inhabitants of many provinces, lay naked on the floor, deserted by those who owed him their birth, and those he had fed and enriched. He needed the money of a stranger for the cost of his funeral… His corpulent stomach, fattened with so many delicacies, *shamefully burst*, to give a lesson, both to the prudent and the thoughtless, on what is the end of fleshly glory. Beholding the corruption of that foul corpse, men were taught to strive earnestly… after better things than the delights of the flesh.[38]

The Conqueror's corpulence, a mimetic display of his gluttony for power, shames him in death by producing a scatological odor so foul that not even totems of the church can mask them. Like Judas, whose excremental death Voragine equates directly to his sins on earth against Jesus,

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[36] Orderic Vitals, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Oxford Medieval Texts, 1980), 420-421.
[37] Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, 422.
[38] Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, 422-423. My italics.

Vitalis stresses that William's bowels "s*hamefully* burst," and that this bursting of the bowels was not so much a fault of the stonemasons, who had not envisioned the extent of his abnormal corpulence. Instead, like Judas, the bowels' bursting in death is directly causal to William's actions in life, serving the purely didactic function of "[giving] a lesson, both to the prudent and thoughtless, of what is the end of fleshly glory." In a manner evoking Judas Iscariot, one of world literature's most notorious evildoers, William the Conqueror is thus punished for his misdeeds in life by a departure to the afterlife marked with an actual scatological bang, as the excremental embodies a potent postmortem critique of his wrongdoings in life.

When discussing scatological martyr deaths, it is impossible not to be reminded of Chaucer's *The Prioress' Tale.* Given the shared anti-Semitism between Hitler and Chaucer, this tale also creates compelling ripples with the world of the extermination camps. Chaucer tells the story of a young Christian boy who is brutally murdered by Jews who then throw his body in a cesspit.[39] Having learned a religious song at school, the boy's pure heart cannot contain its spiritual bounty as he begins to sing the song through a Jewish neighborhood, unaware of the act's offense to the inhabitants of the quarter. According to Chaucer, "From this point on the Jews conspired to drive this innocent one out of the world. To this purpose they hired a murderer who took up a secret place in an alley, and as the child went by, this cursed Jew seized and held him tight, and then cut his throat and cast him into a pit. I must say that they threw him into an outhouse, where these Jews purged their bowels."[40] While the child's death is scatological, in

[39] The motif of a young Jewish boy being thrown in a cesspit by Anti-Semites may also bring to mind Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird,* whose young protagonist is thrown into a heap of excrement by irate peasants, a trauma which causes the boy to become mute. Kosiński's purportedly-autobiographical novel caused a great deal of controversy when it was proven to be plagiarized in part from Polish language sources.

[40] "Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Prioress' Tale,' eChaucer, ed. and trans. Gerard NeCastro, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer, v. 565-573. For the original Old English with an interlinear translation, see "The Prioress' Prologue and Tale: An Interlinear Translation," ed. Larry D. Benson, accessed February 18, 2016, http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/pri-par.htm.

that his body is cast into a cesspit, a crucial difference separates the boy's death from those of Judas and the Conqueror: despite the young martyr's body being defiled in death through excrement, excrement is not the cause of death. In a symbolic act, the murderer slits the same young throat responsible for vocalizing the offensive song. However, the child's entrails rest intact, and do not "shamefully" burst as do Judas's or William's. While the scatological deaths of William and Judas serve to demean these figures in the eyes of the reader through the bursting of their bowels, the scatological end of Chaucer's young martyr paradoxically seeks to create sympathy in the mind of the reader. Although we can ascertain that the murderer meant to shame the boy's memory by casting him into the cesspit, Chaucer's description of the ignominious placement of the child's body serves as an attempt to brand him as a martyr degraded by a demonized group of people who are represented as being both physically and morally unclean, as stressed by the Jewish ownership of the outhouse.

By examining these texts, it becomes evident that scent and sacrifice are intricately entwined. Death odors become fused to identity in a complex olfactory matrix which seeks to affirm and applaud the selfless sacrifice of the good while punishing and critiquing the unworthy. This wealth of cases illustrating the implications of scents and scatological deaths in the European literary tradition comes to inform the modern era. For despite the difference in circumstances regarding their postmortem representation, in that Judas and William are critiqued where the young martyr is revered, the deaths of these three individuals share one final resonance with the woman of the 31 000 convoy. It becomes clear that each of these scatological deaths is directly causal to the person's deliberate actions in life: Judas's bowels burst as a result of his betrayal, William's bowels burst because of his insatiable gluttony for the goods of the English people, and the young martyr's body is cast in excrement due to his uncontrollable urge to

vocalize his faith through song, an innocent gesture not meant to offend the inhabitants of the sector he traversed. The woman in the convoy similarly die scatological deaths due to their conscious acts of resistance which drive them to the camps and their dysenteric demises. The actions of each individual thus catalyze their excremental ends, ascribing an agency which the resistants will come to feel acutely as their slow deaths call into question the utility of their decision to resist against the Nazis.

In *Qui Rapportera ces paroles?,* the death of the secular martyr and its resultant odor function in sharp contrast to the preexisting topoi equating odor and character in the European tradition. This tension between the women's noble mission of self-sacrifice and the confines of their weakening physical form weaves itself throughout Delbo's play, reaching a breaking point through confrontation with foul stenches. While the women may not have expected or strived to die the perfumed deaths of the martyrs, it becomes clear that their prewar selves could never have envisioned putrid scatological demises reminiscent of history's greatest villains. The actualization of this cultural alignment of odor and moral vindication proves especially difficult for the women as they endeavor to reconcile their current settings and scents with their pre-deportation identities, two factors which seem to be in stark opposition.

Throughout *Qui*'s three acts, its players strive to remain heroic in a world where the demands of their bodies are becoming increasingly insistent. Yvonne recounts the story of Claire, who sacrifices her life to save Sylvie, a friend who breaks rank in order to relieve herself in the forest:

> Une surveillante s'est jetée sur Sylvie qui était sortie du rang pour faire dans le fossé, s'est ruée sur elle à coups de bâton et Claire a couru pour lui arracher Sylvie, la ramener dans le rang. L'autre a laissé Sylvie et s'est tournée sur Claire. Elle lui assène des coups sur la tête, sur la nuque, sur les yeux. Oh !... Claire est dévorée de rage. Elle rend coup pour coup, avec ses poings, avec ses pieds. Mais l'autre ne la lâche pas. Je n'aurais pas cru Claire aussi forte. En voilà une qui

> arrive en renfort… Claire est à terre. Les deux furies la piétinent. (*Un cri.)* C'est Claire qui a crié. Elles lui ont fracassé la tête. Elles s'en vont. C'est fait (23).

In order to defend her friend, Claire acquires a heroic, superhuman strength, saving the life of her friend at the expense of her own. Claire's act of self-sacrifice is directly activated by Sylvie's bodily needs, and so it is in Auschwitz, where an act as trite as the need to relive oneself can result simultaneously in acts of extreme heroism, violence, and death

While inmates like Claire are still able to perform powerful acts of courage and sacrifice, the bodily demands of other women begin to cloud their judgment and to obscure their roles as resistant martyrs, dying deaths which evoke Judas more than than Jeanne. In a monologue ruminating on the convoy's prewar activities, Reine describes Yvonne's strong resistant character through a rhetorical question : "Qui aurait dit qu'Yvonne quitterait ses parents, le lycée où elle enseignait le grec, pour faire partie d'un groupe de francs-tireurs (27)?" Despite being endowed with the immense courage to leave behind all she held dear, it is a different courage that Yvonne struggles with as she is stricken by dysentery, grappling with an acute spiritual agony. She laments,

> J'avais cru jusqu'à ce que nous arrivions ici qu'un homme, qu'une femme, pouvait être dépouillé de tout, pouvait tout perdre, mais garder sa fierté. Quand je suis entrée dans mon groupe de combat, j'ai pensé à la torture, j'y ai beaucoup pensé pour n'être pas prise au dépourvu, pour m'habituer à y résister et j'avais acquise une force: la certitude de résister à la torture…. Voilà pourquoi jusqu'à notre arrivée ici je croyais que rien ne pouvait ôter à un être sa fierté. Rien, sauf la dysenterie. Tu ne peux plus te regarder toi-même quand tu t'en vas en eau sale, quand la diarrhée coule de toi nuit et jours sans que tu puisses rien pour l'arrêter, pour te cacher, pour te laver. Je m'en vais en eau sale. Ma force sort de moi en coulées puantes, là, maintenant, pendant que je reste immobile parce que ce sera pire si je bouge. Ma force s'en va, et ma volonté. Je me vide. Que la vie expire sur les lèvres, c'est normale. Qu'elle s'en aille par l'intestin, c'est ignoble (18-19).

Yvonne's short monologue proves thought-provoking in its extended metaphor of physical and emotional emptiness. Mirroring her constantly-emptying bowels, Yvonne frequently stresses the idea of absence and negative space through numerous negative constructions and through a

lexicon of phrases evoking emptiness such as "*dépouillé* de tout… pouvait tout *perdre*… *tu t'en vas* en eau sale, quand la diarrhée *coule de toi* nuit et jour… *Je m'en vais* en eau sale. *Ma force sort de moi* en coulées puantes... Je me *vide*. (18-19, my italics)." However, the act of excremental emptying transcends the purely physical purgation of her bowels. Yvonne makes constant allusions to her strength, her *force,* which drains out of her nonstop, stating "Ma force sort de moi en coulées puantes, là, maintenant, parce que ce sera pire si je bouge. Ma force s'en va, et ma volonté (19)." Dysentery paralyzes Yvonne physically, as she remains still – "ce sera pire si je bouge"— but even more dishearteningly, her disease brings about an ideological paralysis.

Discussing her pre-camp views of torture in her combat group, Yvonne talks of her own strength and conviction to resist torture, reflecting somewhat bitterly on her own naïve preconceptions of inflicted physical suffering: "Quand je suis entrée dans mon groupe de combat, j'ai pensé à la torture, j'y ai beaucoup pensé pour n'être pas prise au dépourvu, pour m'habituer à y résister *et j'avais acquise une force*: la certitude de résister à la torture (18)." Thus Yvonne's comments that "ma force sort de moi en coulées puantes" and "ma force s'en va, et ma volonté" take on a nuanced second significance: the *force* expelled through the anus is not only Yvonne's life force, and her will to live, but these "coulées puantes" more importantly strip Yvonne of her Resistante *force,* her armor, the strength with which she imagined herself endowed, her will to fight, and the memory of the proud resistant she once was, a woman once incapable of conceptualizing such debasing torture. Echoing Sartre's rhetorical question, "si on me torture tiendrai-je le coup?,"[41] until faced directly with torture in Auschwitz, Yvonne possessed no way of anticipating her own body's response, and the discrepancy between her

[41] Jean-Paul Sartre, "La république du silence" in *Situations III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 12.

anticipated and actual reaction to this pain proves excruciating and heartbreaking. Instead of withstanding abuse valiantly head on, as she had been convinced she would be able to do, Yvonne's dysentery challenges the very core of her resistant identity. Unable to endure her torture stoically, Yvonne can no longer even look at herself without shame: "Tu ne peux plus te regarder toi-même quand tu t'en vas en eau sale, quand la diarrhée coule de toi nuit et jours sans que tu puisses rien pour l'arrêter."

It is unsurprising that Yvonne never conceived of such scatological torture before Auschwitz, for to some, the link between dysentery and torture may seem tenuous. After all, dysentery seems more an illness than a form of torture – there is no blood, no *bourreau,* no other individual involved. Dysentery is an infection, not a virus, therefore no torturer could deliberately infect a person with the disease or use it as a tool of chemical warfare. While classifying dysentery as torture may initially seem maladroit, historian Terrence Des Pres repeatedly stresses that dysentery, and the conditions which fostered it, were not the result of the SS's passive negligence or an indirect result of internment. Although no dogs were released, no whips cracked, no pistols shot, the squalid conditions of the camps were not a byproduct of Nazi indifference. Rather, they were part of a deliberate and concerted effort to destroy deportees' sense of self-worth through excruciating immersion in bodily filth. Des Pres reiterates the torture aspects of this phenomenon: "When cleanliness becomes impossible and human beings are forced to live in their own excretions, their pain becomes intense to the point of agony. The shock of physical defilement causes spiritual concussion, and simply to judge from the reports of those who have suffered it, subjection to filth seems often to cause greater anguish than hunger or fear of death."[42] Although Yvonne's torment may not occur under the direct, constant

[42] Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 66.

supervision of the SS, the extreme suffering she endured was nevertheless inflicted on her deliberately by her captors in a tentative to destroy her completely through brutal, psychological torture.

Yvonne's dysentery proves even more thought-provoking when considered alongside Duras's *La Douleur.* Although bodily purgation exacted a dually physical and emotional catharsis in Robert Antelme's life after Buchenwald in the form of a nebulous *douleur,* the body suffering from dysentery in the camps paradoxically purges itself of the very elements it so desperately needs to stay alive, unable to retain the scant nutrients it receives. Like this body unable to absorb nutrients, the memories vital to the woman's continued survival, too, pass through their bodies prematurely. To evoke Delbo's pertinent discussion of dysentery's consequences in *Une Connaissance inutile*, "Vous direz qu'on peut tout enlever à un être humain sauf sa faculté de penser et d'imaginer. Vous ne savez pas. On peut faire d'un être humain un squelette où gargouille la diarrhée, lui ôter le temps de penser, la force de penser. *L'imaginaire est le premier luxe du corps qui reçoit assez de nourriture*…(88, my italics)" Stripped of the necessary nourishment to fuel their bodies and imagination, the women's previous memories and experience morph into this dysenteric excrement. Like the food scraps and dirty water which enter their bodies and rapidly exit, unstripped of any beneficial nutrient, the memories vital to the women's continued survival pass out of them unabsorbed, as their sense of bodily pride and their deeply-engrained inner resistant narrative escape through their ailing bodies.

Yvonne herself becomes aware of dysentery's role as a thief of memory. In a monologue which goes unheard by her peers onstage, she confides to the audience, "J'ai peur de perdre la mémoire, cette assurance que j'ai d'être encore moi—rester sur le qui-vive pour rester présent à soi-même et ordonner à son cœur de battre. J'ai beau lui commander, mon cœur ne répond plus à

la commande. La dysenterie vide aussi le sang du cœur (38).” Highlighting the conflict between her mind and body, Yvonne acknowledges that each wave of excrement passing through her takes with it part of her being and her memory, and that as the days go by she will worsen, continuing to empty herself spiritually and scatologically until nothing of her remains. It is in this context that Yvonne chooses to end her life. She announces to her friends her plan to accelerate her agonizing death by going to the infirmary, a place of healing in the outside world, but a euphemism for almost certain death in the Auschwitz universe. After having made her decision, Yvonne looks stoically at bodies under sheets being brought from the quarantine to the morgue, her gaze transfixed on this macabre procession. Françoise sharply critiques her, stating, “Ne regarde pas, Yvonne. Pourquoi regardes-tu? (41)” to which Yvonne curtly replies, “Aujourd’hui elles, demain nous (42).” Her gaze is unflinching; despite Françoise’s pleas with Yvonne to reconsider her plan, Yvonne refuses to change her mind, preferring to expedite her death and face it head-on, just as she gazes courageously and without interruption at the parade of cadavers which she will soon join.

The next day, Yvonne hears the call for the quarantine: “On appelle pour le lazaret. Au revoir toutes!” According to Delbo’s instructions, “*Elle va vers l’endroit où se forme la colonne des malades. Elle marche difficilement, mais fièrement* (43).*”* Like the martyrs of Lyon or Polycarpe, martyrs which die dignified, perfumed deaths, despite her weakened form, Yvonne walks with agency and pride to her own certain death. Although Mounette begs her to wait a day to regain her courage, Yvonne responds “Reprendre courage, c’est une illusion qu’on se donne, une duperie. Je ne reprendrai pas courage, d’abord parce que je ne l’ai pas perdu. C’est mon corps qui perd la vie. Je suis devenue moi et une seconde: une seconde détachée, clairvoyante, douté d’un sens d’observation affuté, qui regarde le premier s’en aller (39).” Through her

emphasis on the stratification between her body and mind and her assertion that her courage is not lost, readers catch a final glimpse of Yvonne's fiery resistant character which continues to stay strong, despite its painful awareness that the body which holds it is inescapably withering away. The audience never sees Yvonne again after her decision; like so many of her peers, in what Gene Plunka refers to as a "sheer attrition of bodies" throughout *Qui,* Yvonne disappears to a fate unknown.[43] Françoise highlights these alarming absences, interrogating the audience, "Peut-on jouer une pièce avec des personnages qui meurent avant qu'on ait eu le temps de les connaître? Moi non plus, je n'ai pas eu le temps de les connaître (49)."

Though the cause of Yvonne's death remains uncertain like so many others in the play, the reader is given reason to believe that she dies a death unrelated to her illness. In the next scene, Laure breathlessly informs her peers that she has left the *lazaret* on the advice of a nurse, who informed her of an impending selection for the gas. As Yvonne does not return with Laure or in any subsequent part in the play, it is suggested that she has died during this selection. However gruesome a death, it seems fitting, and perhaps even minutely comforting. "Que la vie expire sur les lèvres, c'est normale. Qu'elle s'en aille par l'intestin, c'est ignoble," Yvonne once said of her dysentery (19). After Laure's horrific revelation, the reader cannot help but wonder whether Yvonne did not ultimately die the "normal" death from the lips that she had desired after all instead of the "ignoble" scatological death whose prospect horrified her so greatly. Although her cause of death is up to interpretation, one thing is certain: Yvonne stresses that her decision to die is a conscious one, stemming not from cowardice, but from the pragmatic realization that her physical body is dying, and that she still possesses the agency to end this suffering as herself

[43] Gene Plunka, "The Holocaust as Literature of the Body: Charlotte Delbo's *Qui Rapportera ces paroles?* and Michel Vinaver's *Par-dessus bord," Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 28.1 (2009): 43

on her own terms. The final words pronounced upon Yvonne's life and death come from the young Mounette, who can say no more than "elle était valliante" in a final, fleeting eulogy to an individual steadfast to her end (45).

Yvonne would not be the only woman in *Qui* to face such spiritual concussion from filth. While Yvonne may dread the filth expelled from her body, the young Mounette fears the inverse, describing a vivid nightmare where fetid mud flows into her mouth. Readers learn the backstory of *Qui's* Mounette,[44] one of the youngest members of the convoy, through a rhetorical question posed by Reine: "Qui aurait dit qu'une petite dacto comme Mounette laisserait sa machine, ses flâneries dans les grands magasins, son coiffeur et ses rendez-vous avec son amoureux sous l'horloge de l'Opéra, pour transporter des grenades, pour les jeter dans la vitrine d'un café rempli de soldats ennemis tous en armes (27)?" Despite Mounette's young age, Delbo is careful to stress Mounette's Resistance connections, underlining that this sweet *gamine* was in fact a Resistance fighter as dedicated as her older co-detainees. In a monologue describing her nightmares at Auschwitz, Mounette describes a scatological scene *à l'invers* which further demonstrates the capacity of the foul-smelling to obliterate memory.

Mounette's dread of violation by an external filth highlights her hyperconsciousness of her body's liminality, an abject phenomenon which Julia Kristeva believes puts individuals into stark dialogue with their own mortality. In her *Pouvoirs de l'horreur,* Kristeva hypothesizes that the expulsion of bodily matter such as excrement and vomit subconsciously reminds us of the traumatic expulsion from the body of our mothers, fostering an extreme consciousness of the world exterior to our bodies which forces us to confront the transience of our own beings.

[44] Delbo's inspiration for the character of Mounette was likely Raymonde "Mounette" Salez, deported to Auschwitz at the age of 23. "Raymonde, dite 'Mounette' SALEZ – 31645," Mémoire Vive, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.memoirevive.org/raymonde-dite-mounette-salez-31645/.

Excrement and waste thus disturb us not for their foulness, but strike us in our very cores by highlighting of the terrifyingly permeable boundaries which exist between our being and all that is external to it, Kristeva argues,

> Ces humeurs, cette souillure, cette merde sont ce que la vie supporte à peine et avec peine de la mort. J'y suis aux limites de ma condition de vivant. De ces limites se dégage mon corps comme vivant. Ces déchets chutent pour que je vive, jusqu'à ce que, de perte en perte, il ne m'en reste rien, et que mon corps tombe tout entier au-delà de la limite, *cadere,* cadavre. Si l'ordure signifie l'autre côté de la limite, où je ne suis pas et qui me permet d'être, le cadavre, le plus écœurant des déchets, est une limite qui a tout envahi. Ce n'est plus moi qui expulse, 'je' est expulsé. La limite est devenue un objet. Comment puis-je être sans limite ? … Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles.[45]

Written contemporarily to Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur,* Dominque Laporte's *Histoire de la merde* similarly envisions excrement as a substance reminiscent of death*:* "Corpses are no more and no less than waste one buries. The Christian West has long responded with equal terror to the smell of shit and corpses."[46] Excrement, vomit, even mud thus all prove to function in a matrix of the abject not for being unclean, but because they "perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre" and put the individual in confrontation with his or her own mortality. Mounette's fear of filth infiltrating the boundaries of her body therefore proves evocative of the fear and disgust experienced by Yvonne during her struggle with dysentery.

Mounette describes her recurring nightmare which forces her to confront her own powerlessness over her body: "Je ferme la bouche serrée parce que la boue est au ras de mes lèvres, quand enfin c'est plus fort que moi, j'ai trop peur, je crie. La boue me descend dans la gorge par la bouche et par les narines, m'emplit l'estomac d'un gargouillis fétide, m'asphyxie (33)." Like the need to breathe or excrete, needs which can be suppressed only temporarily,

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[45] Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 11-12.
[46] Dominque Laporte, *History of Shit,* trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 60.

Mounette's fear cannot be stifled forever. Instead, her horror crescendos until it reaches a breaking point, exploding out of her in a scream through an orifice whose muscles can no longer be controlled. However, instead of filth flowing out of this orifice, for Mounette it gushes in, filling her stomach in a "gargouillis fétide," a phrase which evokes Delbo's description of the deportee as a "squelette où gargouille la diarrhée" in *Une Connaissance Inutile* (88).

Mounette's graphic dream of this pervading filth and foul odor proves even more disturbing for what it replaces: the young girl confides in her friends that she has lost the face of her mother. Mounette fixates specifically on this one body part: "Oh! ma mère… Je ne la vois plus. Cette nuit j'ai rêvé que je rentrais à la maison et ma mère ne me regardait pas. C'était que je ne reconnaissais son visage…. Je plissais les yeux, je voulais voir son visage… je ne la voyais plus. Le visage de ma mère s'efface… J'ai perdu le visage de ma mère (44)." Mounette's lament places a strong emphasis on the *regard* and on the act of sight, and of visual memory, as she laments her inability to reconstruct images of the past, notably the face of her mother. The face of Mounette's mother, an emblem of her past and of her life at home, thus fades into obscurity as Mounette's own face occupies a key place in her dreams, a face which must constantly fight the urge to scream, a face which finds itself in constant opposition with invading deluges of filth.

Dysentery, the foul, and the foul-odored thus shook the core of the women in *Qui* by interrogating their self-constructed identities as secular martyrs and resistants. However excruciating this identity crisis may have been, the scatological in *Qui* also paved the way for great courage and the chance to reaffirm an identity many of the women had thought lost. When the weakened Sylvie must break ranks to relieve herself, incurring the fury and blows of the guards, Claire sacrifices her own life by using her body to shield her friend. Although dysentery threatens to destroy her core and obliterate the individual she once was completely, the dying

Yvonne walks defiantly to the *lazaret,* choosing to end her fading life on her own terms. Even Mounette continues to protect her comrades after she has died. Like so many other deaths in *Qui,* the spectators do not know the circumstances surrounding Mounette's demise, only that it has occurred. However, Mounette's life, and even death, prove lifesaving for Françoise, a character whose name not only evokes the county for which she fights, but who has long understood to be the voice of Charlotte Delbo herself in *Qui.* [47]

At the play's beginning, Françoise tells Claire of her plans to commit suicide, and an argument ensues, where the scandalized Claire informs her that she does not have the right to die, neither as a resistant, nor as a role model to the younger women of the convoy: "Un combattant ne se suicide pas… et surtout il y a les petites: Mounette, Denise et sa sœur, Rosette….. Elles t'admirent parce que tu es une grande. Elles t'écoutent, elles te suivent. Si tu te suicides, elles ou certaines d'entre elles, t'imiteront. Suppose que parmi elles il y en ait une qui ait une chance de rentrer, une seule, et qu'à cause de toi elle perde cette chance. Même si tu dois mourir dans quinze jours et faire un [cadavre torturé], il faut que tu tiennes (14, 16)." Claire's argument resonates deeply for Françoise, who perseveres based on her desire to protect Mounette as one might a younger sister. Despite Françoise's actions, Mounette still dies. However, upon Mounette's death, Françoise recognizes a change in her own spirit and a renewed sense of purpose in the camp: "Quand Mounette est morte, Mounette pour qui j'étais restée – Mounette que j'aurais voulu porter jusqu'au retour parce que la vie lui avait fait tant de promesses, que c'était pitié, ce gâchis—, quand Mounette est morte, j'ai été tentée à nouveau, avec violence, de

[47] Claude Schumacher states, "It is always dangerous to confuse author and creation when analysing a work of fiction, in this instance author and character, or—more precisely— Charlotte Delbo and her principal character, Françoise. But here we can safely assert that Françoise, present in all the 'Auschwitz plays,' is clearly the writer's double and speaks on Charlotte Delbo's behalf." See Claude Schumacher, "Charlotte Delbo: theatre as a means of survival" in *Staging the Holocaust: The Shoah in Drama and Performance,* ed. Claude Schumacher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 218-219.

renoncer. Mais Denise s'est trouvée seule. Il n'y en avait plus guère, parmi celles qui étaient encore début alors, qui auraient pu l'aider. Je suis restée pour elle (49)." Although Mounette's scatological nightmares obliterate her own mother's face from her memory, her perseverance through foulness ensures the survival of another motherly figure, Françoise, who goes on to transmit the group memory of the convoy throughout her narration of *Qui*.

Through Mounette's death, Françoise realizes that her own reasons for survival extend past Mounette and even past herself: her fight to survive proves rooted in a duty to the collective of the convoy. When Mounette dies, there is still Denise, yet another young woman who desperately needs the help and comfort of *une grande.* Françoise thus recognizes a new lease on life and a renewed desire to live through the death of Mounette, which shows her the immense courage she still has left to protect others, a courage she feels a duty to share with the vulnerable young women of the convoy who are still alive. Françoise proves successful in supporting Denise, and the two of them alone subsist to the play's end. As these two sole survivors directly address the audience in an *envoi,* we realize the poetic aptness of Claire's earlier supplication: "Suppose que parmi elles il y en ait une qui ait une chance de rentrer, une seule, et qu'à cause de toi elle perde cette chance. Même si tu dois mourir dans quinze jours et faire un [cadavre torturé], il faut que tu tiennes (14,16)." By encouraging Françoise to give up the possibility of a dignified death for the sake of the younger women, Claire's words strike the core of the convoy's martyr identity; in a fitting end to the play's dialogue of sacrifice, it is due solely to Françoise's selfless attempt to sacrifice herself for Denise that Françoise manages to save herself as well.

Thrust into battle with their own bodies, the characters in *Qui Rapportera ces paroles* stood courageous against a pervading matter which threatened to destroy them completely. When confronted with soul-crushing foulness, these women based on the 31 000 convoy fought back

against this real and symbolic odor, channeling their deeply engrained identities as resistants to enable their own sacrifice. Willing to lay down their own lives for their friends and country, the women often find themselves paradoxically catalyzed into action by the very foulness which shakes them to their Resistance cores. Reminiscent of the Christian martyrs of the past, the deaths of Claire, Yvonne, and Mounette push back against omnipresent filth and activate their secular martyr senses of self. The 31 000 proves to be a convoy rooted in notions of individual sacrifice for the collective. But if one has to die in order to martyr oneself, what of the convoy's members who survived? Can one martyr oneself and still live?

In what he refers to as the "afterdeath" of the Holocaust, Lawrence Langer describes the continued sense of loss and bereavement experienced by deportees after Liberation:

> Delbo's findings provide a sobering contrast to those Holocaust commentators who speak glibly of overcoming the past and the triumph of the human spirit. Of course, the postwar attitudes of the other forty-eight survivors varied, but one refrain occurs often enough to give us pause. Fully half of the survivors she traced up to 1965 mentioned constant or recurrent physical or mental symptoms traceable to the illnesses, beatings, exhaustion, and malnourishment they endured during their ordeal in Auschwitz and later camps like Ravensbrück and Mauthausen. The postwar recognition they received from the French government for their Resistance activities did little to negate this somber "catalogue of consequences."[48]

Compounding this grim "afterdeath" felt by survivors, sometimes even non-survivors had difficulties navigating the boundaries between life and death for former deportees. Langer recounts a troubling anecdote: "Charlotte Delbo told me that several years after the war the government held a commemorative ceremony for some of the French men and women who died in the Nazi camps. While sitting in the audience, she was stunned to hear from the podium her own name being read. It seemed a bizarre perversion of her discovery that one could die in Auschwitz and still be alive. Her paralysis lasted only an instant; then she modestly raised her

[48] Lawrence Langer, "Introduction to *Auschwitz et après* second edition," *Auschwitz and After* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014), xxv-xxvi.

hand and murmured, "Non, Monsieur: présente."[49] This haze between life and death in postwar existence is articulated most clearly by Mado, one of Delbo's fellow survivors. Even though she has returned from Auschwitz, married, and had a child, Mado feels agonizingly hollow inside. She confesses, "Je ne suis pas vivante. Je suis morte à Auschwitz et personne ne le voit."[50] While these 49 survivors may have survived Auschwitz, they rest acutely aware that an irretrievable part of them died there along with their sisters in arms, metamorphosing them into living martyrs who exist somewhere between the past and the present.

In *Qui rapportera ces paroles?,* Charlotte Delbo employs lengthy descriptions of filth and foul odors in order to describe acts of extreme identity-questioning violence. The women of the play's unnamed convoy endure agonizing scenes of filth, as the foul, and most specifically, the foul-odored, threaten an erasure of their resistant identities. Secular martyrs for France, Delbo's play transcribes these women into a long cultural dialogue between goodness, evil, and the olfactory, further augmenting the gravity of their scented encounters. Despite the agony faced in the camp's unforgiving environment, confrontations with scent could also paradoxically activate the very resistant identity they threatened to destroy. By calling into question the women's self-constructed resistant narratives, the foulness of the camps unexpectedly reaffirms it, permitting the women to act courageously both as agents of their own lives and as protectors of the lives of those close to them.

The Amnesic anosmia and scented memory of Charlotte Delbo

[49] Langer, "Introduction to *Auschwitz et après,"* xxv.
[50] Charlotte Delbo "Et toi, comment as-tu fait?" in *Qui rapportera ces paroles?,* 297. This same anecdote is presented in *Mesure de nos jours* in a non-theatrical reprise.

The role of scent in Delbo constitutes an odd paradox: although it threatened an obliteration of memory in *Qui,* seeking to obscure the women's mission as valiant resistants, upon Delbo's return from the camps it functions as a key expression of the deportee's recollection and expression of the past. In *Une Connaissance inutile,* Delbo demonstrates that although the memories of the camps are painful, to forget them after the sacrifice of one's friends would be even more agonizing for the survivor. It is for this reason that the olfactory occupies a unique place in Delbo's writing: despite its ability in Auschwitz to foster an excruciating spiritual concussion, due to the strong bond it shares with memory, scent is crucial in both the deportee's remembrance of the past and return to daily life. However, in addition to highlighting the olfactory's ability to evoke the past, Delbo's work equally elucidates the strong bond between the nose and the mind, a connection unparalleled to the other senses. This unique bond ultimately flourishes as the reader realizes that scent's power in evoking memory is due to its significant shared resonances with the inner-workings of memory itself.

Delbo's focus on scent is unusual; not unlike the rest of history in a broad sense, when scholars think of the Second World War and of the atrocities of the *univers concentrationnaire,* their visions of the past rarely include the olfactory. While we pore over auditory survivor testimonies, contemplate the searing images in films such as *Nuit et Brouillard,* and meditate on the tactile nature of the soft hair of deportees woven into coarse cloth by the Nazis, we often choose to relegate scent from our representations of this period. This absence, however, is troubling, for as Terrence Des Pres reminds us, "We tend to forget how camp prisoners looked and smelled, especially those who had given up the will to live, and in consequence the enormous revulsion and disgust which naturally arose among prisoners… the prisoner was made

to feel sub-human, to see his self-image only in the dirt and stink of his neighbor."[51] Odor not only figured prominently in excremental assault, the concerted effort of the SS to dehumanize prisoners through prolonged exposure to fecal matter and filth, but more importantly, it was a crucial part of the deportee's day-to-day existence, and possibly one of the few aspects of this existence that scholars neglect to study in detail.

It is clear that odor played a significant role in the Nazi dehumanization and erasure of self in its prisoners, even if scholars rarely discuss its full crucial position in deportees' everyday lives. However, if scent constitutes yet-another lacuna in our non-deportee knowledge of this period, it is worth noting that this elision is not without reason; while it's possible that historians study scent less frequently due to a Kantian aversion or a valorization of the other senses, the olfactory is also much more difficult to evoke, catalogue, and contain than the audio, visual, or haptic. Spaces of remembrance can easily show films, play recordings, or include interactive exhibits, but odor presents a unique set of problems and constraints. In a 2012 *Washington Post* article on the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, journalist Katherine Boyle recounts her conversation with a volunteer at the museum about a collection of deportee shoes taken from the arrival area of Auschwitz, on loan from the Auschwitz State Museum in Poland: "'I never really understood why people come here from all over the world to see the shoes,' said [the volunteer]… 'For one thing, it's one of the few exhibits you can smell,' he says of the faint, rubber-tinged fumes that become more nauseating the longer you stand in the room."[52] So it is that even in curated museum spaces we are rarely encouraged to smell – if it happens, it is more

[51] Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 60-61.
[52] Katherine Boyle, "At the Holocaust Museum, treading quietly through the unspeakable," *The Washington Post*, August 24, 2012, accessed November 18, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/at-the-holocaust-museum-treading-quietly-through-the-unspeakable/2012/08/23/734524bc-eb15-11e1-9ddc-340d5efb1e9c_story.html.

likely than not completely accidental, such as the case with the shoes. It is no wonder then if scent should rarely figure into the modern generation's understanding of past events.

Although it is practical to examine the olfactory in order to better understand the lives of deportees, smelling and odor also function on a largely symbolic plane. In my first chapter, I discussed the metaphor created by Marguerite Duras between the odor of Antelme's dysenteric bowel movements and the incomprehensibility of his memories to his non-interned wife and family. Duras categorizes it as "Merde que personne n'avait encore vue… elle était inhumaine... Dès qu'elle sortait, la chambre s'emplissait d'une odeur qui n'était pas celle de la putréfaction, du cadavre… mais plutôt celle d'un humus végétal, l'odeur des feuilles mortes, celle des sous-bois trop épais… C'était là en effet une odeur sombre, épaisse comme le reflet de cette nuit épaisse de laquelle il émergeait et que nous ne connaîtrons jamais."[53] Like the "unhuman," completely foreign odors that obscure his dying body, Robert's memories of the extreme suffering he endured in Buchenwald and Dachau will always remain foreign and incomprehensible, forever masked to those who were not there with him.

Whereas Marguerite Duras's treatment of odor largely problematizes the collective memory of the non-interned population and their inability to grasp fully the suffering of the deported, for Delbo both odor and its absence color her relationship to her own memories as a survivor of the extermination camps. In a fragment entitled "Le Ruisseau" in *Une Connaissance inutile,* Delbo recounts a fortuitous opportunity to bathe in a stream, her first opportunity to wash herself in nearly two months in Auschwitz. As she describes the incident, the episode refracts temporally, flashing between her arrival to the camps, her encounter with the stream, her

[53] Duras, *La Douleur*, 73-74.

immediate return from Auschwitz, and the present day from which she writes. These four temporal layers become linked through an intricate web of smells both remembered and forgotten, as Delbo interrogates her memory's veracity. Each of these temporal levels is marked by the presence, or absence of a specific scent. It is thus through the olfactory that Delbo addresses her larger fears of her memory fading, as she states "Dans mon souvenir, et j'ai beau solliciter ma mémoire, il n'y a que le ruisseau et moi. Ce qui est faux, absoulument faux (53)."

Delbo writes from the present of her odorless bath in the stream, an absence of smell which compounds several other lacunas in her memory of Auschwitz and this day. Although she recognizes that the pervading stench of the camps must have been present that day at the stream, present-day Delbo cannot recollect the slightest odor. Not even the natural setting around her produces odor in her memory: she states, "Ce qui m'étonne, quand j'y pense maintenant, c'est que l'air était léger, clair, mais qu'on ne sentait absolument rien. Oui ce qui m'étonne, c'est que l'air n'ait pas eu la moindre odeur de printemps. Pourtant, des bourgeons, de l'herbe, de l'eau, cela doit bien sentir quelque chose. Non, aucune odeur dans mon souvenir (56)." With the double significance of "sentir" as to smell or to feel, Delbo's phrase "on ne sentait rien," highlights one of many links between scent and memory in this fragment.

While she might forget about the odor of this day, this almost-pastoral odor she insists must have been there, other parts of this trip to the stream remain crystal clear to Delbo. She reflects, "Les poils de pubis, qui avait été rasés à l'arrivée, avaient repoussé. Ils étaient tous collés par la diarrhée et j'avais beaucoup de mal à les démêler. Si j'avais pu les rendre à leur longueur et à leur frisure, j'aurais eu une vraie sensation de propre, mais il aurait fallu tremper des heures (62)." Delbo stresses the scatological's capacity to annihilate all sense of propriety through this caked matter which prevents her feeling a "vraie sensation de propre," despite this

serendipitous opportunity to clean herself. While her own scent may elude her, this tactile memory of her excrement-encrusted pubic hair remains fixed in her memory, opening up a dialogue of femininity which will be continued later on. Similar to this olfactory lacuna in Delbo's own memory, the reader becomes conscientious of gaps in what is recounted to us, moments where like Delbo, we are required to read between the lines in order to put the pieces back in order. Having rolled her dress around her waist, and having thrown the stream's cold water around her pubic area, Delbo explains "Il était temps d'attaquer un autre endroit. D'ailleurs, ce que je frottais, je ne le voyais pas, tandis que je voyais mes cuisses et mes jambes, mes pieds, noirs de crasse (62)." Unable to look directly at the place she is washing, Delbo's memory of her own body remains masked to her that day, much like the scents that elude her. Although she cannot directly see the area which she rubs frantically, the resultant freed blackness which flows over her thighs, legs, and feet testify to a truth that she herself is incapable of seeing, a pervasive filth dislodging itself slowly from crevices of her skin hidden from her and from her reader.

Delbo's lacunar memory is thus highlighted by the juxtaposition of certain senses she does remember—the feeling of the cold water, the sight and tactile memory of her matted pubic hair— and others, such as the scent of spring, that she does not remember, and as we shall see, perhaps could not remember. Compounding her recognition that she did not smell the natural odors which must have been present at the stream, Delbo's anosmia similarly casts a shadow over herself and her own personal odor. Despite having pubic hair so thoroughly caked in diarrhea that only hours' of soaking could have untangled them, Delbo cannot remember at all how her body smelled. From her location in the present, Delbo not only questions whether she has forgotten these odors, but she wonders aloud whether she ever smelled them at all. She offers

a possible explanation for this lack of smell: “Il est vrai que je ne me rappelle pas non plus mon odeur, quand j’ai retroussé ma robe. Ce qui montre bien que mes narines était encrassées par notre propre puanteur et qu’elles ne sentaient plus rien du tout (56).” Deportation scholar Ernst van Alphen qualifies this anosmia as a “death of the sense of smell.” He states, “The stench in the camp was unbearable. The constant stench of the crematorium, the stench of one’s own body and that of others, so many smells numbed one’s senses so that none could be specifically smelled.”[54] Although her nose was likely incapacitated, and with good reason, Delbo is painfully conscientious of this absence in her memory. Her inability to recollect this scent, despite haptic and visual clues, proves scarring to her by highlighting perceived errors in her recollection and committal to memory of events such as her day at the stream.

The other women of Delbo’s convoy were also prone to this olfactory ambiguity, which extended not only to a “death of the sense of smell,” but to a complete and utter confusion in regards to scent after being subjected to a gamut of previously unimaginable foul odors. In Claude-Alice Peyrottes’ documentary *L’histoire du convoi du 24 janvier 1943-Auschwitz-Birkenau,* in which she interviews 11 of its surviving members, 31 000 convoy member Simone Sampaix relates a similar episode where smell becomes muddled and obscured. She recounts an almost-humorous anecdote of an Auschwitz spring day:

> C’était en printemps, tenez. C’était un dimanche après-midi où on travaillait pas. On était derrière le bloc, derrière où juste à côté mais à l’ombre, ou au soleil, je ne sais plus enfin bref, assises, mais alors, Adia [?] s’assoit et dit “oh les enfants, que c’est bon de se reposer en plein air… *(elle s’étire)* ... que c’est bon… on entend les oiseaux qui chantent, et ça sent bon, ça sent les fleurs.” …J’ai dit c’est sur quoi tu es assise ? Elle dit “ je me suis assise sur les fleurs,” et j’ai dit oui lève-toi. Sur une crotte ! *(elle rit)* Et elle trouvait que ça sentait bon. On ne se souvient que des

[54] Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 175-176.

> choses comme ça, on rit, … mais on peut pas se rappeler de plus mauvais moments. On les garde profondément là *(elle touche sa poitrine)* .. c'est entré en nous…[55]

While this woman's olfactory confusion between a turd and flowers borders on the comedic, as Simone Sampaix herself acknowledges, this sort of sensory, or perhaps scentsory, confusion was extremely painful, giving way to more dire implications in Delbo's text.

Just as scent possesses a Proustian way to trigger memories unexpectedly, it is Delbo's reflection on this absence of odors in her recollection of the stream which elicits another olfactory scene in her memory: the shower upon her arrival in Auschwitz, the last time she bathed before the stream. Before entering the shower, Delbo claims to have doused herself with one last vestige of her life in freedom, dabbing the space between her breasts with the provocatively-named perfume Orgeuil. Through this odor, Lawrence Langer further reiterates the image of the deportee as a martyr getting ready for battle: "The name of the perfume intensifies the symbolism of the gesture, as she seeks to clothe her naked flesh with an aroma of dignity as armor against the ordeal before her."[56] Richard Stamelman adds that perfume functions as a "symbol of beauty, individuality, self-concern, and the freedoms of civilized life—perfume calls into being a narrative of resistance, one in which human dignity and pride rise up briefly to revolt against an inescapable system of genocide."[57] Delbo explains how she came to empty her perfume flask: "Jusqu'au départ j'avais économisé ce parfum, au point de me contenter parfois de déboucher le flacon et d'en aspirer l'arôme, le soir avant de m'endormir. Toute nue au milieu des autres, j'avais regardé tendrement le flacon – Orgueil de Lelong… et j'avais versé lentement

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[55] Claude-Alice Peyrottes and Alain Cheraft, *L'histoire du convoi du 24 janvier 1943-Auschwitz-Birkenau* (2001), 55:16. I would like to express my extreme gratitude and thanks to Claude-Alice Peyrottes for her assistance in procuring a copy of her rare film, and for much illuminating conversation on Delbo.
[56] Lawrence Langer, *The Age of Atrocity: Death in Modern Literature* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 218-219.
[57] Richard Stamelman, *Perfume: Joy, Scandal, Sin- A Cultural History of Fragrance from 1750 to the Present* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), 312.

tout l'Orgueil entre mes seins. Ensuite, sous la douche, j'avais pris garde de ne pas savonner la coulée du parfum pour en conserver la trace (60)." This perfume, whose scent was a source of pleasure and comfort before the departure, serves a final purpose in Auschwitz: by dousing perfume on herself, Delbo performs a small, yet potent act of resistance, refusing to let her perfume be confiscated upon intake, all the while arming herself for battle metaphorically with this symbol of human refinement.

While the martyrs of the past may exude an "odor of sanctity" in death, in "Le Ruisseau" perfume acts as armor as Delbo chooses to shield herself with an "aroma of dignity," a *beau geste* which seems symbolically apt given Delbo's emphasis on the olfactory. However, Delbo's specific choice of the perfume Orgueil proves equally provocative in the context of her lacunar memory: her memory of this proves to be anachronistic. Lucien Lelong's perfume Orgueil was first released in 1946, three years after Delbo's arrival in Auschwitz, appearing to commemorate the war's end.[58] It is therefore impossible that Delbo could have had this perfume among her possessions upon her arrival to Auschwitz. After her obsessive struggles to remember faithfully the scents and events of her internment, it is ironically the one scent Delbo does remember which we know to be false.

However, a symbolic punch is packed: even if it was not Lelong's Orgueil that day in the Auschwitz shower with Delbo, this distinctively French symbol of feminine elegance nevertheless paints the image of scent as source of comfort and pleasure to Delbo and her peers upon their abrupt arrival to Auschwitz, an invisible totem of their Frenchness and their femininity. After carefully shielding her perfumed swath of skin from the shower, Delbo

[58] Stamelman, *Perfume,* 316.

reminisces on her friends' reactions to her odor: "'Ce que tu sens bon!' avait dit l'une. 'Laisse-moi m'asseoir près de toi un instant. De bonnes odeurs, nous n'en humerons plus.'… 'Humerons,' le mot est resté dans ma mémoire, avec la voix de celle qui l'a prononcé mais je ne sais plus qui c'était et je ne revois plus son visage (60-61)." Not only does the odor of the perfume evoke their country and their femininity, but the sweet scent itself serves to bring the women closer together spatially and emotionally, as Delbo's friends crowd around her to breathe in her perfumed odor of comfort upon their arrival to the camp. Though this odor has dissipated, like the face and identity of Delbo's companion, the comforting qualities of this scent linger in the air, whatever perfume it may have been that day.

The anachronistic memory of this perfume would not be the only problematic odor attached to Delbo's memories after Liberation. "C'est mysterieux, l'odorat" Delbo writes of her return from the camps; "Il y avait longtemps que j'étais rentrée, et je prenais alors au moins deux bains par jour—une vraie manie… il y avait des semaines que j'étais rentrée que je sentais toujours sur moi l'odeur du camp, une odeur de purin et de charogne… (58-59)." Delbo's immediate return is thus marked by a glut of odors; as the *matière crasse* clogging her nostrils becomes expelled, she is bombarded by the suffocating stench of her own body as she returns to life as a free woman. This onslaught of odors mirrors her sudden onslaught of memory, as both her own scent and trauma rest perniciously impervious to erasure. As she comments in a later fragment, "Vous direz qu'on peut tout enlever à un être humain sauf sa faculté de penser et d'imaginer. Vous ne savez pas. On peut faire d'un être humain un squelette où gargouille la diarrhée, lui ôter le temps de penser, la force de penser (88)." Just as her clogged nostrils prevent Delbo's cognizance of her odor in Auschwitz, Delbo's proximity of the camps strips her ability to process Auschwitz contemporarily. However, with the imminent threat of death lifted, home

in her own bed, Delbo becomes inundated with scent and sentiment as she struggles to synthesize her deportation, unable to cleanse herself of foul odors and memories.

For survivors of the Nazi camps, scent had the ability to set off a bizarre, perversely-Proustian foray into the past, a link which some chose to embrace purposely in order to remember. Survivor Imre Kertesz wrote in his novel *Fiasco,*

> For a time, I awoke each morning on the barrack forecourt at Auschwitz. It took a while for me to realize that this perception was evoked by a constant olfactory stimulus. A few days before, I had bought a new leather strap for my wristwatch. At night I put the watch on a low shelf directly by the bedside. Most likely that characteristic smell, reminiscent of chlorine and a distant stench of corpses, had lingered on the strap from the tanning and other processes. Later on I even used the strap as a sort of sal volatile: when my memories flagged, lay low inertly in the crannies of my brain, I used it to entice them from their hiding places—smelling them to pieces, so to speak. I shrank from no means and no effort in waging my battle with time, wresting from it my due right. I crammed myself with my own life. I was rich, weighty, mature, I stood at the threshold of some sort of transformation. I felt like a wild pear tree which wanted to bear apricots.[59]

While Kertesz chose to embrace the olfactory deliberately, for others, odor's unexpected ability to transport them to the past was a far more painful experience. Delbo similarly recounts the experience of Mado, a fellow deportee who could be forcibly re-transported to the camps by something as benign as a rotten potato. In an incident recounted in both the final volume of the *Auschwitz et après* trilogy, *Mesure de nos jours* and in its theatrical reprise, *Et toi, comment as-tu fait?,* Mado states, "Le temps ne passe pas. Quand tu te rappelles n'importe quel jour de là-bas, n'importe quel moment qui revient, porté par une odeur… Un jour, je crois passer devant les cuisines: c'est que j'ai laissé une pomme de terre pourrir au fond de mon panier à légumes, et aussitôt tout revient: la boue, la neige, les coups de bâton parce que passer par la était défendu."[60] Through scents, Auschwitz reaches through time and space to former deportees like Mado,

[59] Imre Kertesz, *Fiasco*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville House, 2001), 74.
[60] Delbo, *Qui*, 296-297.

pulling her back to the camp and the past through an odor as innocuous as that of a rotten vegetable.

The olfactory acted as such a powerful part of quotidian life in Auschwitz that even the thought of odor haunted deportees upon their return. The only set of sisters to return from the convoy of 31 000, Lucienne 'Lulu' and Jeanne 'Carmen' Serre sat around their Marseilles kitchen and recounted their return to Claude-Alice Peyrottes.[61] For Lulu, the first memory she holds on to of Auschwitz is that of the gluey mud, followed closely by the camp's putrid odor. She explains,

> Mon deuxième souvenir que je garde depuis, depuis Auschwitz, et Birkenau, c'est l'odeur. L'odeur des fours crématoires. Quand on était jeune on habitait un quartier près de la Porte d'Aix… Il y a une rue qui s'appelait rue de Turenne et qui tombait là et au coin il y avait une usine… [où] on brûlait des os…. Ils brûlaient les cadavres des bêtes mortes. Ils devaient faire probablement du savon, quelque chose comme ça je sais pas exactement mais il y avait cette usine. Le matin quand je passais au travail, je passais en retenant le nez en vitesse. Mais à Birkenau nuit et jour cette odeur sans arrêt sans arrêt. Et bien quand je suis revenue de déportation tout le monde a raconté… c'est pas les souvenirs mais ce qu'on s'en rappelle et qui fait mal... Et beh moi, c'était mon cauchemar, je rêvais l'odeur. Pendant des mois j'ai rêvé l'odeur. C'est pas croyable, rêver une odeur.[62]

While this odor of burning flesh was just a disgusting annoyance to be endured nose-pinched during her childhood by the soap factory, this previously irritating odor takes on a horrifying new significance after Lulu's sick initiation into the world of Auschwitz. In a move that defies all reason, she claims to dream odored dreams. "C'est pas croyable, rêver une odeur," she states. Lulu knows what she has dreamt, but her belief in her own experience's implausibility reflects one of the largest worries of the deportee: how to "expliquer l'inexplicable," as Delbo states at the beginning of *La Mémoire et les jours.*[63] Lulu's conflicted memory evokes the atemporal

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[61] 'Carmen' was a nickname given to Jeanne Serre during her Resistance activities, and was the name she commonly went by during her deportation. "Jeanne, dite "Carmen", SERRE – 31637," Mémoire Vive, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.memoirevive.org/jeanne-dite-carmen-serre-31637/.
[62] Peyrottes, *Convoi du 24 janvier,* 37:45.
[63] Charlotte Delbo, *La Mémoire et les jours* (Paris: Berg International, 1991), 11-12.

envoi which closes *Qui*, posing somber unresolved questions in a dialogue between Françoise and Denise:

> DENISE: Nous savions que vous ne comprendriez pas, que vous ne croirez pas, car cela nous est devenu à nous-mêmes incroyable.
>
> FRANÇOISE: Pourquoi iriez-vous croire à ces histoires de revenants
>
> à ces histoires de revenants
>
> de revenants qui reviennent
>
> sans pouvoir expliquer comment (66) ?

Lulu's incredulousness at dreaming odor is rooted in this same cynical fear of outside disbelief expressed by Denise and Françoise. Endeavoring to synthesize her deportation and its aftermath through the same worrisome eye of the uninitiated, Lulu sees nothing but hopelessly implausible events that she herself can scarcely believe.

The traumatic odor of the camps thus continued to haunt survivors on myriad levels upon their return. A perverse memento of their internment, odor's effect on repatriated deportees was made even more terrifying due to its unpredictability—seemingly-innocuous scents possessed the capacity to trigger instantaneously a deluge of agonizing memories. Lulu's expression of her odored dreams' implausibility belies an additional fear of the deportee, who, interrogating herself from an outside perspective, wonders how anyone could believe what she has lived. Odor proved to be a crucial component in the deportees' continued readjustment to life after deportation—like so many other actions and rites rendered useless in the camps which subsequently needed to be "re-learned," the deportee needed to remember how to smell again, to condition herself to strip odor of the distorted connotations it had taken on in Auschwitz. Like Mado and the potato/Auschwitz kitchen or Lulu and the soap factory/crematoria odor, Charlotte Delbo discusses the uncomfortable union of scents from the Auschwitz world and the world of her

return in *La Mémoire et les jours*. Using the metaphor of a snake shedding a foul-smelling skin, she explains her gradual adjustment to the life she had left behind:

> Expliquer l'inexplicable. L'image du serpent qui laisse sa vieille peau pour en surgir, revêtu d'une peau fraîche et luisante, peut venir à l'esprit. J'ai quitté à Auschwitz une peau usée – elle sentait mauvais, cette peau – marquée de tous les coups qu'elle avait reçus, pour me retrouver habillée d'une belle peau propre, dans une mue moins rapide que celle du serpent, toutefois. Avec la vieille peau s'en allaient les traces visibles: les prunelles fixes au fond des orbites plombées, la démarche tirée en avant, les gestes peureux. Avec la nouvelle peau revenaient les gestes de la vie antérieure: se servir d'une brosse à dents, de papier hygiénique, d'un mouchoir, d'un couteau et d'une fourchette, manger posément, dire bonjour en entrant, fermer la porte, se tenir droit, parler, plus tard sourire des lèvres, et, plus tard encore, sourire à la fois des lèvres et des yeux. Retrouver les odeurs, les saveurs, l'odeur de la pluie. À Birkenau, la pluie faisait ressortir l'odeur de diarrhée. C'est l'odeur la plus fétide que je connaisse. À Birkenau, la pluie rabattait sur le camp, sur nous, la suie des crématoires et l'odeur de chair qui brûle. Nous en étions imprégnés. Il a fallu quelques années pour que la peau neuve se reconstitue, se consolide. Débarrassé de sa peau morte, le serpent n'a pas changé. Moi non plus, en apparence... Comment se défaire de quelque chose enfoui beaucoup plus profond : la mémoire et la peau de la mémoire. Je ne m'en suis pas dépouillée. La peau de la mémoire s'est durcie, elle ne laisse rien filtrer de ce qu'elle retient, et elle échappe à mon contrôle. Je ne la sens plus.[64]

In addition to recovering "gestes de la vie antérieure" such as using toilet paper or a knife and fork, the act of smelling itself becomes a gesture of the past to be rediscovered. Delbo explains her newfound reaction to the smell of rain, which like everything else, has become warped in the *univers concentrationnaire:* "Retrouver les odeurs, les saveurs, l'odeur de la pluie. À Birkenau, la pluie faisait ressortir l'odeur de diarrhée. C'est l'odeur la plus fétide que je connaisse. À Birkenau, la pluie rabattait sur le camp, sur nous, la suie des crématoires et l'odeur de chair qui brûle. Nous en étions imprégnés." Although rain and water function often as symbols of purity, renewal, and an almost-baptismal cleansing, in Auschwitz this natural phenomenon paradoxically does not clean, but takes on opposing connotations, functioning in a matrix of foulness by exacerbating the already unbearable stench of diarrhea and anointing the deportees with the essence of their cremated peers. To rediscover odors as she once smelled them, and to strip them of the distorted significations they took on in Auschwitz, Delbo must shed her foul-

[64] Delbo, *La Mémoire et les jours,* 11-12.

smelling Auschwitz “peau usée,” a metaphorical act of discarding which mirrors Antelme’s dysenteric catharsis: both are simultaneous acts of purgation and renewal. This “peau usée” similarly parallels the “matière crasse” which clogs her nostrils at the stream: in order to smell and process what has happened to her, Delbo must expel both the “matière crasse” and the “peau usée,” which cloud her olfactory field, pungent symbols of the camp whose strong odors block out everything else in her scented memory.

In “Le Ruisseau,” Delbo thus equates four temporal scenes to four distinct issues regarding memory, issues reinforced by the other women of her convoy and by Delbo herself in her other works. To summarize these four temporal tableaus, while first describing herself at the stream, Delbo acknowledges a presence of foul odor that must have been present but that she was unable to process contemporarily due to her proximity to the camp, and the resultant “death of the sense of smell.” She then proceeds to discuss the shower and the scent of Orgeuil, a scent she does claim to remember, but which ultimately proves to a false memory through the anachronistic placement of Lelong’s Orgueil. Thirdly, upon her return, she discusses an inundation of smells and manic conscientiousness with her own odor which parallel her onslaught of repressed memory. Free from the camp, she is finally able to process the scents and sentiments of her deportation, but the sudden avalanche of the two prove to be crisic and scarring. Finally, from the current day, she interrogates her memory of the stream, and her inability to remember her own scent that day. Even though she has recognized that her encrusted nostrils must have blocked the odors around her, making it logical that she would not remember her own smell, her inability to recollect this smell compounds many other lacunas in her memory of this day, and underlines her larger concern that her memory is slipping away.

Our olfactory memory thus possesses a remarkable ability not only to transport us to the past, but to help us synthesize the events of our lives. Delbo's mapping of odor onto memory in regards to her deportation creates a further dialogue between memory, scent, and their parallel inner-workings. As Delbo and the women of her convoy demonstrate, the olfactory proves an efficient *mise-en-question* of testimony because at its core, odor and testimony operate much the same way, functioning together on a triad of levels. Firstly, through their testimony, the 31 000 convoy illustrates that odor has a Proustian way of unexpectedly conjuring the past a way more sudden and abrupt than the other senses. Whether it be the odor of a soap factory, a potato, or even the smell of rain, the olfactory proves to be a sudden, unpredictable portent of memory. Although the act of smelling these scents is usually unintentional, it triggers an active desire to learn how to cope with both odor and memory constructively, as the women must re-learn how to smell in order to live with these olfactory outbursts.

Secondly, when discussing odors, we encounter difficulties and most commonly describe them with similes and metaphors to create a point of referent. As Dan Sperber states, "Even though the human sense of smell can distinguish hundreds of thousands of smells and in this regard is comparable to sight or hearing, in none of the world's languages does there seem to be a classification of smells comparable, for example, to color classification…. There is no semantic field of smells."[65] If the description of smell is largely rooted in in this inadequate descriptive language reliant on comparisons, what, then, for those of us who have no point of reference? Just as Duras describes the "merde inhumaine" of Robert as "une odeur sombre, épaisse comme le reflet de cette nuit épaisse de laquelle il émergeait et que nous ne connaîtrons jamais," so, too,

[65] Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 116.

are the memories of the deported separated by a veil for those of us who were not there.[66] How can one understand that a perfume smells like Lelong's Orgueil if one does not already know how Orgueil smells? And by extension, how can one truly comprehend the testimony of a survivor if one has no direct referent to the atrocities they describe?

Finally, odor and memory converge in their complete unpredictability and resistance to recollection—they collide in their elusiveness. As Hans Rindisbacher reminds us in *The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature*,

> The olfactory with its virtual lack of recall potential for smell qua smell seems in its textual representation to be one stop further removed from reality than other senses, but, by the same token, especially close to memory. The linguistic restrictions for the sense of smell are particularly dramatic insofar as language has not developed an abstract terminology for referring to smells. Smell is, with its storing and retrieving characteristics, an associative and expansive rather than a distributive and limiting sensory mode….The sense of smell is so often considered the most apt to trigger memory, because its very linguistic structure brings up an Other, a reference to the outside.[67]

This "virtual lack of recall potential" of the olfactory makes odor a complicated witness: conjuring the memory of a smell after the fact is as complicated as Delbo's efforts to remember the holes in her memory of the stream, memories both olfactory and not. Furthermore, not only is odor difficult to recall accurately after the fact, but it is almost destined to be forgotten in a way, just as memory. Paul Ricœur powerfully asserts, "To memory is tied an ambition, a claim—that of being faithful to the past. In this respect, the deficiencies stemming from forgetting… should not be treated straight away as pathological forms, as dysfunctions, but as the shadowy underside of the bright region of memory, which binds us to what has passed before we remember it. If we can reproach memory with being unreliable, it is precisely because it is our one and only

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[66] Duras, *La Douleur*, 74.
[67] Hans J. Rindisbacher, *The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 14-15.

resource for signifying the past-character of what we declare to remember."[68] While images and sounds may frequently become seared in one's thoughts, to remember a smell *ex post facto* is a far more difficult endeavor. Odor's resistance to voluntary recollection thus makes it seem biologically destined to be forgotten, just as time inevitably erodes memories both pleasant and painful.

***Sentir le passé*: Embracing scented memory**

In his praise for the writings of the Marquis de Sade, Roland Barthes wrote this famous dismissal of written language's shortcomings: "Le langage a cette faculté de dénier, d'oublier, de dissocier le réel: écrite, la merde ne sent pas."[69] Shit does not stink on the page, because it has been stripped of its defining characteristic, its foul odor which identifies it as shit. How telling is Barthes' point of comparison. So it continues with the link between excrement and memory: while memory, like the odor of shit, can be re-presented through words and testimony, it can never be communicated fully on the page. Survivors may testify in vivid detail to the events of their deportation, but our understanding of their memories will be forever separated by this metaphorical shit, matter which no amount of fine writing can bring off the page. Voluntary recollection can prove difficult for both odor and trauma, and in this way we as readers are perhaps luckily or unluckily doomed to suffer the same anosmia as the 31 000 women. Odor and memory, two unique, volatile sides of existence, thus come to stand in for each other in the work of Charlotte Delbo due to their shared strengths and weaknesses, and their ability to weave in and out of one another. It is perhaps no surprise then that Charlotte Delbo's memory box, the mausoleum for the intake photos of her deceased Auschwitz peers, would be a Hermes perfume

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[68] Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 21.
[69] Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 140-141.

box.[70] Evocative of her mystery perfume in the Auschwitz showers, this battered box once emblematic of luxury conforms perfectly in shape to the precious objects it houses. How fitting, then, that Charlotte Delbo should choose this object with its cardboard peeling off the edges, marked with the faint handwritten title "Photos Auschwitz" as the external home to her memory. Not some grand, expensive, or dignified container, as one might choose for a funeral urn or casket, but a simple, tattered emblem of scent.

In their olfactory descriptions of deportation and its aftermath, Charlotte Delbo and the members of her convoy harness one of the most problematic senses to represent both unthinkable personal suffering and to meditate on remembrance, its utmost importance, and the difficulties inherent in its transmission. The olfactory's link to the deportee runs deep, and often functions in sharp contrasts. However, Delbo's musings on this volatile sense and its divergent significances do not contradict each other; instead, they deepen our understanding of the deportee's complex relationship to scent throughout the entire trajectory from deportation to her return and the present. During their deportation, excrement and its odors played a key role in the dehumanization of an unnamed convoy in *Qui,* a quasi-fictitious group which may be read as Delbo's 31 000 convoy. For these women, foul odors sought to eradicate their past by interrogating the deportee's self-constructed narrative of martyrdom and resistance. This conflict between the women and odor became heightened in its resonance with a rich European literary tradition of evoking good deeds with pleasant odors and wicked deeds with foul odor and scatological deaths. However, the women described in *Qui Rapportera ces paroles?* frequently

[70] Elisabetta Ruffini, ed., *Charlotte Delbo: Une mémoire à mille voix* (Bergamo: Il filo di Arianna, 2014), 52.

overcome these feelings of shame rooted in odor, using these moments of adversity to affirm the courageous identities still housed in their weakened bodies.

Although the olfactory could function as an agonizing form of spiritual torture, it nevertheless held a place of paramount importance to the deportee upon her return. Despite the painful memories elicited by odor, the olfactory occupied a key role in problematizing both the individual memory of Charlotte Delbo as well as that of the deported population on a whole, given the parallels between scent and memory. Scent evokes memory in a sharp and surprising manner, producing jarring collisions with the past for the deportee not effectuated by the other senses. Similar to odor, the memories of the deportee's experiences pose difficulties when attempting to describe them to those with no points of reference, constituting a crucial concern in the transmission of these experiences. Finally, like traumatic memories, scent is difficult to evoke accurately *ex post facto*, and in a way is destined to be incomplete not only for the receivers of testimony, but to fade with time even for those who experienced them firsthand. However, it is for these shared strengths and weaknesses that scent proves especially adept at externalizing memory, as a sense that shares in memory's assets and pitfalls. Despite the aversion and indifference of historians and philosophers such as Kant, scent takes on a new significance for Delbo and her peers in the 31 000 convoy. Although the memories she evokes will never reach our minds or noses directly, her work externalizes her traumatic past through the capricious yet crucial sense of smell. Through a continued emphasis on the olfactory in her work on deportation, Charlotte Delbo constructs narratives which imbue memory with scent, or perhaps more so, which imbue scent with memory.

PART II: Scatology in Fiction

Par-dessus bord *and* Les Bienveillantes: *Reading the excremental on both sides of the barbed wire*

The transnationally traumatic memory of the Nazi extermination camps has long catalyzed fierce debates on how Holocaust literature should represent or re-present the memory of trauma to non-survivor audiences. Unlike most other forms of fiction, works portraying the Holocaust exist under a microscope of unique criticism. Not only must their authors constantly defend how they have chosen to portray the past, but all too often, they must additionally rationalize their work's very existence, and what right they have to portray a history that they themselves have not experienced. Perhaps the world's most well-known, widely read, and highly controversial of Holocaust survivors, Elie Wiesel has notably emerged in the debate to vocalize his vehement disapprobation of a literature of the Nazi camps. Despite being an outspoken advocate of the importance of testimony, Wiesel paints a grim image of Holocaust literature. He asserts, "There is no such thing as a literature of the Holocaust, nor can there be. The very expression is a contradiction in terms. Auschwitz negates any form of literature, as it defies all systems, all doctrines… A novel about Auschwitz is not a novel, or else it is not about Auschwitz. The very attempt to write such a novel is blasphemy…"[1] Wiesel's divisive opinion has not precluded a transnational Holocaust literature emerging from every single European country. However, the purportedly "blasphemous" offerings of several French language authors have incited additional

[1] Alvin Rosenfeld and Irving Greenburg, eds, *Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 4. Wiesel himself inadvertently proved how powerful Holocaust literature can be in his glowing praise of Jerzy Kosinski's 1965 *The Painted Bird* as "one of the best indictments of the Nazi era… written with deep sincerity and sensitivity." Although originally marketed as an autobiographical work, the best-selling, award-winning novel was ultimately proven to be a hoax: the episodes recounted within never happened to Kosiński, and adding insult to injury, were partially plagiarized from Polish works untranslated and unknown to the novel's Anglophone audience. See discussion of the *Painted Bird* hoax and Wiesel's inadvertent praise of Kosiński's deception in Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso, 2000), 55-57.

controversy, proving themselves unique through an attention to bodily functions which maps the excremental's sea of complexities over a multitude of imagined characters. Even though the accounts of each protagonist may be fabricated, and cannot further illuminate the firsthand experience of deportation as testimony can, fiction proves invaluable for another reason, occupying a place of vital importance in addressing collective and contemporary reckonings of the war. Like deportees, several French language authors envision the world of the camps as being irrevocably colored by an excrement imbued with prismic significances.

Despite their similar focus on World War II, it may initially appear that Michel Vinaver's *Par-dessus bord* and Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* share but superficial similarities. Written over 30 years apart, one is a play while the other is a novel. *Par-dessus bord* is the invention of a native Frenchman, while *Les Bienveillantes* is the brainchild of an American expat who would only be granted admittance into the French national flock after his novel's controversial Goncourt win. And finally, while Vinaver's play looks at the war primarily through the eyes of a survivor, Littell inverts this gaze to give us unfettered access into the mind of a fictitious perpetrator. However, these divisions of time, genre, and nationality bode little for the cores of each work, which prove tightly bound in their interrogations of the scatological.

Although there are other works of French Holocaust fiction that broach the scatological,[2] the joint reading of Vinaver and Littell proves the most compelling introduction to this binary. In the first section of this dissertation on testimony, I examine the excremental in deportation

[2] Notable examples include Daniel Zimmermann's *L'Anus du monde,* which has already benefitted from Gary Mole's convincing analysis of its scatological elements. I also think of Romain Gary's *La vie devant soi,* a work whose shared themes of prostitution, excrement, and Holocaust memory resonate deeply with *Par-dessus bord.* I stress these strong commonalities briefly in Chapter III, but believe that the rigorous comparative model needed to contrast these two sharply-similar-yet-divergent works lends itself better to an independent article rather than a book chapter.

through the eyes of non-Jewish Resistance writers. Vinaver and Littell instead appropriate this codification of the scatological to examine the camps through the prism of the war's Jewish population, be it Vinaver's jaded Auschwitz survivor Alex Klein or the Jewish victims unlucky enough to cross the path of Littell's Max Aue. Neither author experienced deportation firsthand, yet both were born into Russian Jewish families, growing up in strangely crossed expatriate lifestyles: the New Yorker Littell received his Baccalauréate during an extended period in France and the French Vinaver finished high school in New York's Lycée Française, fleeing the war in Europe with his parents.[3]

Despite an overall ambivalence to their Russian-Jewish roots,[4] both Vinaver and Littell ultimately felt compelled to write larger than life—almost unmanageable—fictitious accounts of the genocide of the European Jews and its memory. Vinaver's play clocks in at a staggering six hour run time, whereas Littell's novel tallies in at nearly 900 pages, reminiscent of Russia's sweeping 19th century historical novels. The unruliness of these massive works become tamed through music. Vinaver's play is structured symphonically around six movements, with concurrent dialogues fostering a thematic polyphony of voices. Littell's novel is similarly divided into sections named for Baroque dances, ranging in length from 18 pages (the opening

[3] For more biographical information on Michel Vinaver, consult Edward Baron Turk, *French Theatre Today: The View from New York, Paris, and Avignon* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 204-219. For more on the life of Jonathan Littell, see Asaaf Uni, "The Executioner's Song," *Haaretz*, May 30, 2008. Accessed February 7, 2016. http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/988410.html.

[4] Vinaver stated, "Mes parents appartenaient totalement au milieu russe d'émigration... La judéité, elle, était totalement absente. Ma famille n'était ni pratiquante ni croyante, n'avait aucune attache avec la judéité sur le plan religieux ni même identitaire. Je ne savais pas que j'étais juif. Je l'ai appris avec Vichy. Je ne me sentais pas russe non plus, même si la langue était présente à la maison. Je me sentais français." Similarly, when asked if he considered himself Jewish, Littell responded "Not at all… in fact, I think I have been in more churches than synagogues. For me, Judaism is more a historical background. My father says you are a Jew because the people who want to murder you define you as such. Well, if someone wants to slit my throat because I am a Jew he is a raving idiot." See Michel Vinaver and Fabienne Darge, "Michel Vinaver, dramaturge du réel," *Le Monde*, January 23, 2009. Accessed February 7, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2009/01/23/michel-vinaver-dramaturge-du-reel_1145896_3246.html#Styw0f60CsvWF4Ip.99, and Unii, "Executioner's Song," op. cit.

Toccata) to just under 300 pages (Menuet en rondeaux). In their respective chapters I'll explore in greater detail each author's transposition of these two specific, very different music modes to literature. However, the broader metaphor of music lends an additional gravity and *largesse* to these accounts of the war and deportation, reminiscent of the intricate sea of players working together in both harmony and dissonance throughout the experience of war.

If each project demonstrates a marked musical quality, then the memory of the war in the two works proves to be conducted by masculine protagonists in both senses of the word. Like an orchestra conductor Max and Alex lead, driving discussion on the Holocaust and spurring other characters to debate and confront the war within each work's pages. Max and Alex similarly conduct in the term's scientific sense, serving as mediums through which our own memories of the war are filtered and colored. Both Auschwitz survivor Alex and SS man Max find their perceptions of the war significantly influenced by a latent, yet omnipresent female sexuality crystallizing around a key woman in each individual's life. Alex's memories of Auschwitz refract largely through the prismic memory of his parents, notably his concert pianist mother forced into the Auschwitz brothel. As the adult Alex continues to digest the experience of deportation, he maps the image of his mother onto his fiancée Jiji. It is similarly through identification with his twin sister Una that Max begins to process the enormity of the tableaus he has witnessed during the Nazi's total war on Jews. As Max enacts transgressive modes of scatological behavior alone in his sister's house, his subconscious pushes him to align Una with the female Jewish victims of the war. Despite Aue's insistence that he feels no guilt for his actions, it is only through relating his sister to his memories of specific female victims that he is able to comprehend the true horrors of the Nazis and the graveness of his complicity as he erupts in a simultaneously sexual and emotional orgasm.

Unlike Delbo and Antelme, who both penned their memoirs shortly after Liberation, the fictitious protagonists of *Par-dessus bord* and *Les Bienveillantes* recount their pasts decades after the war's end. The distance between the traumas in each man's past and the present era from which he reflects permit each work to explore collective responses to the war and deportation: both protagonists and readers digest the past with a pronounced historical distance. For Vinaver, this reckoning of memory occurs on the page, evidenced in a toilet paper manufacturer's uncomfortable attempts to woo survivor Alex for his perceived excremental expertise. The darkly humorous misunderstandings of the period advanced by those around Alex prove consequential of 1960s French society and its continued recalcitrance towards confronting the war's memory directly. For Littell's protagonist, the invitation to examine memory through the scatological occurs largely off the page through the parallel Aue forges between reader disgust of excrement and of his perpetrator perspective, aspects of his work he deems to be equally "scabrous." Littell's alignment of the revulsion surrounding both bodily functions and exploration of the war's perpetrators potently highlights the divide between victim history and perpetrator history which has long governed World War II studies. Through the distanced postwar reflections of their fictive protagonists, the works of Michel Vinaver and Jonathan Littell encourage us to look on both sides of the barbed wire, using the scatological as a means to interrogate our conscious and subconscious perceptions of deportation in a modern era where its memory is becoming ever more distant.

Chapter III: "Inter urinas et faeces nascimur": Scatological memory in Michel Vinaver's *Par-dessus bord*

"Les détenus sont des excréments. Mais on peut faire de l'argent avec la merde."
- *David Rousset,* L'univers concentrationnaire[1]

"Tu sais ce qui disait le patron ? Le théâtre mon fils est comme les chiottes et comme le cimetière – quand il faut y aller faut y aller."
- *François Truffaut,* Le Dernier Métro[2]

Michel Vinaver's *Par-dessus bord* is a theatrical work which has both nothing and everything to do with the memory of deportation. The story of Ravoire et Dehaze, a failing family-owned toilet paper company and its last-ditch attempt to resurrect itself, Vinaver's sprawling play proves as bitingly comedic as it is unsettling. Although readers and spectators may most notably take away its humorous critique of 1970s consumer society, Vinaver's dizzying opus forcibly revives the memory of the Second World War by juxtaposing images of the Holocaust with those of both excrement and money. While this second coupling may produce a more overtly recognizable association thanks to the works of Freud and Baudrillard, Vinaver's association of deportation and excrement proves an equally logical pairing when one considers Terrence Des Pres's concept of excremental assault.[3] Michael Fox articulates the saliency of this binary: "*Overboard* forces the spectator toward a similar experience of the body, produced through the play's excremental assault. The play's contrapuntal structure and its instability of meaning eventually overload the spectator's cognitive and interpretive facilities, engendering in the spectator the free play of both cognitive and non-cognitive associations and affective processes… The

[1] David Rousset, *L'univers concentrationnaire* (Paris: Fayard, 2010) 146.
[2] *Le Dernier Metro*, directed by François Truffaut (1980; Irvington, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2009), DVD.
[3] See Sigmund Freud, *Dreams in Folklore*, trans. D. E Oppenheim (New York: International Universities Press, 1958); Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation: Ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974); David Cook and Arthur Kroker, eds., *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1986), and Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

pervasiveness of the excremental in *Overboard*, therefore, serves both to break down the spectator's cognitive faculties and force the spectator toward an experience rooted in the body."[4] Confronted directly with such candid discussion of excrement, spectators' associations and preconceptions towards bodily functions begin to dissolve. By being immersed in a scatological world, readers come to imbue a systematically shunned substance with alternative associations and meanings.

However, it is not only our understanding of the excremental which Vinaver seeks to challenge. Written over a two-year period from 1967 to 1969, *Par-dessus bord* is very much a product of its time. In foregrounding the excremental, the play creates a parallel between two hushed subjects in contemporary society: excrement and the memory of the Second World War. Completed as Marcel Ophuls began his controversial, eye-opening documentary *Le Chagrin et la pitié*, *Par-dessus bord's* corrosion of prevailing attitudes surrounding excrement and deportation can similarly be viewed as a work striving to break the metaphorical mirror of the French psyche described by Henry Rousso in his 1987 *Le Syndrome de Vichy.* If Ophuls and his contemporaries who dared to challenge the Gaullist vision of occupied France were lambasted by nationally bruised egos as "fouilleurs de merde," then Vinaver takes pride in adopting this derogatory mantle, directly excavating in excrement to unearth the traumatic memory of the war.[5] Although *Par-dessus bord* would not have the same catalytic impact on the "miroir brisé" as Ophuls's documentary (1969), Louis Malle's *Lacombe, Lucien* (1973), or the French translation of Robert Paxton's *Vichy France* (1972), and initially generated less discussion than these other works,[6] its

[4] Michael Fox, "Anus Mundi: Jews, the Holocaust, and Excremental Assault in Michel Vinaver's Overboard (Par-dessus bord)," *Modern Drama, vol. 45* (2002): 55.
[5] Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 113.
[6] Rousso's "Vichy Syndrome" argues that works such as these three challenged longstanding national perceptions of wartime France by forcing the country to confront its own complicity and collaboration during the Occupation, issues long suppressed in the French psyche. These painful, controversial representations of the war period pushed

existence serves nevertheless to foster dialogue on the uncomfortable, painful subject of the war through theater, a medium flourishing in France as a tool of social commentary in the 1960s and 1970s.[7]

Par-dessus bord opens and maintains its brash conversation with the past through the presentation of its sole former deportee, Alex, newly engaged to the daughter of a toilet paper company head honcho. Through a sea of interweaving plot lines in the intricate spectacle, Alex emerges as a childhood Holocaust-survivor-turned-beatnik-jazz-café-owner poised to take over the reins of the business. Despite his total lack of marketing experience, Alex's ascension in the company stems directly from his prolonged exposure to excrement during his youth at Auschwitz, a place he refers to as "mon jardin d'enfant," where his cultivated Latinist father would die a squalid death in the camp latrines and where his concert pianist mother's prodigious talent for Mozart would spare her young son from the crematorium at great personal expense. Although no direct mention is made, Vinaver intimates that this dark past leads Ravoire and Dehaze board members to perceive Alex as an expert of excrement, and thus uniquely qualified for the job in question.

While Alex may be the only Holocaust survivor who appears onstage amid the play's vertiginous parade of characters, the ghosts of his parents, murdered at Auschwitz, lurk offstage in the wings throughout the play's entirety. In addition to disturbing resonances between Alex's life and his father's, Alex's mother, a concert pianist forced into prostitution in Auschwitz,

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back against the pervading conceptualization of Vichy France as a country of resisters, fostering a sort of national identity crisis. Rousso likens this shattering of the country's own self-image to the breaking of a mirror.

[7] I think notably of Jean Genet's *Les Paravents* and Aimé Césaire's *Une tempête*, both of which employ scatological tropes in order to criticize contemporary issues such as the Algerian War and decolonization. Written in 1941 in the middle of the Occupation, Picasso's play *Le désir attrapé par la queue* similarly harnessed bodily functions in order to comment on the period in which he wrote. See also Franck Évrard, "Scatographies dans le théâtre français contemporain (Genet, Beckett, Vinaver)," *Littérature* 89 (1993): 17-32; Sidney Shrager, *Scatology in Modern Drama* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1982).

begins to creep into the forefront of Alex's thoughts and imagination as the play progresses. In his interactions with his fiancée, Jiji, Alex resurrects the memory of his mother by pointedly and deliberately mapping her onto the new woman in his life. However, as Alex begins to work out his own past, culminating with a dark quasi-parody of Auschwitz staged at his jazz club, he remains unconscious of the twists of fate which lead him back to an equally suffocating excremental environment through his involvement with Ravoire et Dehaze.

As a result of his immersion in the company's capitalist milieu, Alex begins to flounder through direct confrontation with both excrement and money, a substance which proves to be bodily waste in its purest form. For as psychoanalyst Reszanyi notes, money is not just similar to excrement, but the two are one and the same. In a speech to ad men filled with Freudian overtones, Reszanyi comically extolls excrement's sublimation as money in our psyches, a pairing he considers as stemming from the anal phase of infancy:

> [Cette] phase anale de notre développement se caractérise par le fait que nous attachons un sens symbolique au produit anal… [l'enfant l'utilise] pour affirmer son indépendance vis-à-vis d'autrui en le brandissant comme sa propriété…. le jeu le don la propriété l'usage des armes trouvent leur origine dans la phase anale du développement de l'individu et ne cessent d'ailleurs jamais d'être reliés à cette phase par le jeu des sublimations ainsi la catégorie de la propriété n'est pas simplement transférée de la matière fécale à l'argent mais bien plutôt l'argent est la matière fécale vécue sous une forme qui n'a pas besoin d'être refoulée parce qu'elle a été déodorisée déshydratée rendue brillante (121).

Throughout the play, Alex will find himself confronted not only with excrement itself, a token of his past linked to the toilet paper the company produces, but with its sublimated representations, which become ominously grafted onto both money and female sexuality. Due to his childhood in the oppressively excremental environment of Auschwitz, the company subconsciously perceives the young survivor as an expert of excrement, and thus a financial resource to be exploited. If we are to believe Reszanyi, that money and fecal matter are one and the same, then this corporate

conceptualization of Alex as a moneymaking tool morphs him into excrement itself in its sublimated form.

Alex's continued attempts to navigate the present are mired down by an excremental past he cannot shake, a phenomenon he recognizes in varying levels of awareness. Bodily waste proves to be inextricably bound to Alex's memories of his parents: while Alex's father's death is blatantly scatological, Alex's mother becomes equated to fecal matter through a long cultural dialogue linking female sexuality to excrement, a pairing I refer to as the sexcremental. Working for a company whose existence revolves around the act of excreting, who is motivated by financial gains of money, or sublimated excrement, and whose ad mockups prove sexcremental through sexualized imagery of women defecating, Alex inhabits a universe where bodily waste pervades his past, present, and ominous future.

From his very first scene to his last, Alex is marked by his psychic scars as a survivor of deportation, unable to extricate this dark chapter of his childhood from the seemingly unrelated episodes of his adult life. As the play closes, Alex's wedding speech belies his uncertain future. Floundering once more in the mire of his childhood, Alex plummets headfirst into a brave new financial world in a trajectory paralleling the death of his father, escaping the cesspit of Auschwitz only to be cast in the muck anew by a society indifferent to his past misery in their own callous search for profit. However, *Par-dessus bord* is more than a tale of one man's struggle with the past. Vinaver's play proves equally imbued with collective meaning, providing a pointed chronicle of an entire nation's inner turmoil as it, too, grapples with its traumatic memory of the war.

Due to his formative childhood in Auschwitz, Alex comes to embody deportation, forcing all who come in contact with him to confront the past in varying levels of directness. By the

play's end, the young man's attempts to diffuse this raw, painful memory rest largely unsuccessful. Alex's testimony falls on indifferent ears as the result of a national repression, deemed by the ruthlessly ironic Vinaver as a collective constipation of both brains and bowels. This critique becomes further inscribed into a realm of pointed social commentary through bursts of Rabelaisian inspiration, hearkening to an author immediately identifiable in France as a master of scatological satire.[8] In a clever pastiche of Gargantua's famous *torchecul* scene dripping in sarcasm, Vinaver provides his own scathing commentary on the deleterious effects of this national blockage on both individual and collective reckonings of the past. Through its darkly humorous presentation of postwar life's silence, *Par-dessus bord* thus functions as a potent laxative. Thanks to its links between memory and an omnipresent scatology, Vinaver's play invites those who come in contact with to become *fouilleurs de merde* in their own right, interrogating France's messy history through reopening a flow of conversation long blocked up in the collective subconscious.

Movement I: The Anti-Play

Vinaver's effectiveness in addressing the memory of deportation is due in large part to *Par-dessus bord*'s unique structure as a play: its incredible length, almost-total lack of punctuation, division into "movements" and continuously-intercalated dialogues all account for it being read far more frequently than it is staged, creating a work that is as literary and musical as it is theatrical. [9] While these elements may complicate *Par-dessus bord's* staging, they similarly

[8] Rabelais' scatology attacks everyone and everything from early modern relations between church and state in France to the pretentiousness of a Limousin schoolboy. See Jeffrey C. Persels, "'Straitened in the bowels,' or Concerning the Rabelaisian Trope of Defecation," in *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 31 (1996): 101-112, and Jae Num Lee, "Scatology in Continental Satirical Writings from Aristophanes to Rabelais," in *Swift and Scatological Satire* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 7-22.

[9] The last major full production of the play by the Théâtre Nationale Populaire in 2008 clocked in a six hour runtime (with intermissions.) Although the heart of the play's commentary on the war lies in the text itself, hence my decision to exclude discussion of subsequent stagings, further information on this production is available through the

endow Vinaver's work with an innovative approach to the still-taboo memory of the war, permitting its countless moveable parts to weave in and out of one another seamlessly, posing significantly more questions then they answer. A better understanding of *Par-dessus bord'*s circumvention of conventions is necessary in order to understand the play's unique and pointed approach to excavating the past.

In addition to its resonance with characters who will be thrown overboard in various manners of speaking, the title *Par-dessus bord* proves largely significant of its author's desire to break with the past and the conventions it encompasses.[10] In his notes for the play, Vinaver states explicitly his intention to begin his work with a clean slate unbound of limits or constraints:

> *On jette par-dessus bord :*
> -le théâtre
> -la décence (pudeur), le respect, les us et coutumes, les lois et réglements [sic]
> …
> --la société (Ravoire et Dehaze)
> -la Société (Alex/Jiji)
> …
> -les méthodes anciennes devenues inopérantes[11]

Joining these thematic elements destined to be thrown overboard, decisions such as the eschewal of all punctuation save the question mark strike readers as noticeable refusals of convention. The

company press kit. See "*Par-dessus bord* de Michel Vinaver,*"*Agence Dominique Racle Consultants, accessed March 12, 2016, http://www.agencedrc.com/actualites/par-dessus-bord-de-michel-vinaver/.

[10] In this continuous state of hurling things overboard, be they characters or conventions, simultaneous act of discarding and regenerating, perhaps most ironic is that the play itself was initially thrown overboard by Vinaver's publisher Gallimard. Michelle Henry summarizes the barrage of criticism leveled against Vinaver's play: "D'ailleurs *Par-dessus bord* n'obtient pas, loin de là, le succès espéré. Chez Gallimard, qui a édité deux romans et deux pièces de Vinaver, le texte est refusé ; Jacques Lemarchand y relève une 'complaisance au dialogue pour le dialogue', Gaston Gallimard, du 'bavardage', des 'longueurs' et de la 'confusion' et la pièce lui paraît, 'tant sur le plan de la lecture que sur celui de la représentation vouée à un échec certain…" Although the play would eventually find a home at L'Arche through the encouragement and enthusiasm of publisher Robert Voisin, like the guests in the final movement at Alex's wedding, the play's initial readers were perhaps too impatient to listen to Alex and his story. See Michel Vinaver, *Ecrits Sur Le Théâtre*, ed. Michelle Henry (Lausanne: L'Aire, 1982), 234.

[11] Vinaver, *Ecrits*, 239.

play's resultant rhythmic constructions thus valorize the act of questioning, the only punctuation which remains unchanging. While the lack of punctuation may initially disorient readers of the play, seeming to be chaotic verbal diarrhea with no periods or commas to regulate the flow of speech, Vinaver views this notable omission as an act promoting freedom from restraint on numerous levels. He defends his decision as a:

> Désir de rendre le comédien (mais même le lecteur) plus libre et inventif dans sa saisie du texte; de le mettre plus près de la réalité des choses dites… parce que la ponctuation—qui est une aide à la compréhension mais aussi un confort et une habitude—fait obstacle au jaillissement des rythmes, des associations d'images et d'idées, gêne les assemblages, les recouvrements de sons et de sens, empêche tout ce qui est confusion. Elle organise, elle fige, alors que le propos, ici, est d'atteindre la plus grand fluidité que le langage (comme il m'est donné de l'écrire) permet.[12]

Vinaver thus arms his readers and performers with the ability to compute, process, and interpret as they wish, unguided, or perhaps unencumbered by the punctuation we have come to expect in a written work, free to establish our own verbal and mental cadences. By eliminating this element of writing frequently taken for granted, the reader hits the ground running, interrogating this absence from the very moment it becomes apparent. Given the play's heavy themes and invitation to social awareness, it is telling that even on a level of punctuation, Vinaver's play encourages those who come in contact with it to question and to interpret as they see fit.

This rhythmic fluidity of *Par-dessus bord's* punctuation-free phrases parallels on a smaller level the play's resistance to genre, another facet of the play left up to interpretation by readers. As Vinaver himself states, "la vie elle-même est un mélange de genres," and it is perhaps for this reason that the play has decidedly musical characteristics.[13] Gene Plunka discusses this musical effect brought about by the play's free-form phrases: "Eschewing plot, character, and direct

[12] Vinaver, *Ecrits*, 240.
[13] Michel Vinaver, "Entretien avec Michel Vinaver, à l'occasion de la mise en scène de *Par-dessus bord* par Christian Schiaretti," YouTube video, 4:56, recorded on April 16, 2008, posted by "La Colline - théâtre national," May 14, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByYVXYLoPDY.

discourse, *Overboard* instead is structured like polyphony in which scenes and diction overlap to produce a rhythm similar to a musical score." [14] This rhythmic aspect of the play is further suggested by its partitioning—instead of acts or scenes, *Par-dessus bord* is divided into movements, a specific term rooted in a wide spectrum of interpretations. In addition to reinforcing the play's titular concepts of movement, progression, and generation, the 'movements' which structure the play encompass everything from its virtuosic interdisciplinality to its unapologetically ironic humor, seen in a gleefully juvenile pun.[15] Through this unique structuring, Vinaver reinforces the notion of dialogue as a polyphony of voices by morphing *Par-dessus bord* into a theatrical symphony, a work of intricate virtuosity which is similarly split into movements. By extension, like a symphony, in order to appreciate the work in its entirety, readers must listen to the constituent voices working together and weaving in and out of one another, instead of listening to one isolated line, dialogue, or as it were, solo instrument. In the same way that the notes played by different instrumental lines on a score serve to comprise a musical chord, when heard together, the voices in *Par-dessus bord*'s interwoven dialogues counterpoint one another to create thematic chords throughout the play's entirety, tonal resonances which like their musical counterparts can be considered ideologically as harmonic or more often than not, sharply-contrasting and dissonant.

The play's uniqueness thus stems in part through this polyphony of voices, seen through continuously intercalated dialogues: action becomes decentralized as each scene is marked by a series of smaller ones which occur simultaneously. These parallel conversations which flow in and out of one another and interrupt each other often seem to have no connection to the other

[14] Gene Plunka, "The Holocaust as Literature of the Body: Charlotte Delbo's Qui rapportera ces paroles? and Michel Vinaver's Par-dessus bord," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (2009): 45.
[15] I would be remiss if I neglected to note the bawdy aptness of structuring a play about excretion into "movements," as in bowel movements.

events onstage. However, upon closer examination, the juxtaposition of these dialogues almost always proves suggestive and ironic. While Vinaver's intercalated dialogues add a literary quality to the play,[16] they serve more importantly to push the boundaries of meaning offstage, leading readers to draw their own conscious and involuntary conclusions. As the characters converse simultaneously in separate locations in separate dialogues, seemingly unbeknownst to the others onstage, Vinaver places the reader or spectator in the unique position of being able to reunite these fundamental parts, to question or interpret the resonance of these thematic chords on one another.

Movement II: Exploring the sexcremental

Par-dessus bord's complex relationship with the past crystallizes through the character of Alex, the focal point in an intricate constellation of excrement, money, and the contentious memory of the war. As Alex dredges up the all-too-personal memory of his childhood in Auschwitz, casting himself and his fiancée Jiji in his deported parents' image, those around him become caught in the collateral whirlwind: as the war's shadow creeps slowly over those who surround Alex, their conflicted attitudes towards his deportation begin to testify in their own right to the country's unease with the past. The memory of Alex's parents and deportation begins to seep out of Alex's dialogues, going on to color seemingly unrelated characters and conversations. In addition to Alex's largely conscious projection of his mother onto Jiji, the shadow of Rosa Klein pervades the rest of the play through allusions to a scatological female

[16] Vinaver was perhaps inspired by one of the most memorable intercalated dialogues in French literature, Rodolphe's insincere verbal seduction of Emma at an agricultural fair in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, pointedly intercut by the fair's president awarding monetary prizes for manure, among other things. Just as Flaubert's ironically-juxtaposed dialogue jabs aptly at lothario Rodolphe's dishonesty, so too do intercalated financial and scatological dialogues equally accentuate *Par-dessus bord*'s suggestive confluence of money, excrement, and deportation.

sexuality. While excrement may more overtly conjure the memory of Alex's father, the substance proves equally bound to Rosa Klein's experience as a prostitute in Auschwitz through a long literary tradition associating female sexuality with excrement, seeking to taint the feminine by association through vectors such as sexual desire and desirability, childbirth and prostitution. [17] The figure of the prostitute serves as the acme of this association as an individual who is paradoxically both an object of desire, a financial commodity to be bought, and an object of revulsion, a *déchet,* a refuse. While the contrast between prostitutes as objects of worth and waste may initially seem stark, given money's likening to fecal matter, sex workers' theoretical equation to excrement becomes even more pervasive and demeaning than their non-prostitute peers. Through the omnipresent and ironic references to this sexcremental yoke foisted upon women, Vinaver reinforces the new excremental environment which begins to suffocate Alex while implicitly evoking his mother.

Although physically absent from the stage, the deceased Rosa Klein remains a force present in the action of *Par-dessus bord* through her very alive son. The play's sole Holocaust survivor, deported at the age of five and a half, Alex continues to be bound to the ghosts of his parents decades after their death. Although he has grown up and opened his own jazz club in Montparnasse, Alex's identity as a Holocaust survivor remains rigid and fixed to his adult self. Notes Michael Fox, "Jewishness, death, and the Holocaust haunt each of Alex's scenes and all of his dialogue."[18] Even Alex's surname, Klein, conjures the formative and traumatic time spent at Auschwitz in his youth. When recounting his past, Alex describes his mother as being from

[17] Like so many other names in *Par-dessus bord,* the first name of Alex's mother, "Rosa," proves to be richly nuanced. Although Vinaver's play was released first in 1969, the name Rosa evokes Madame Rosa, the female protagonist of Romain Gary's 1975 *La vie devant soi,* an aging Jewish-Holocaust-survivor-turned-prostitute-turned surrogate mother whose name conjures both Auschwitz and prostitution par excellence.
[18] Fox, "Anus Mundi," 44.

"Stojanow in Ukraine" and his father as a native of Lviv, the city whose horrific Jewish pogroms mark much of the dialogue between Alex and Jiji. His parents would then move to Warsaw, where Alex's father would teach Roman history at the University. Despite his heavy Eastern European origins, Alex's last name, "Klein," is not markedly Eastern European or uniquely Jewish, standing in stark contrast to the play's only other Jewish character, Ravoire et Dehaze's head accountant, who is given the common Jewish surname "Cohen."[19] Instead, Alex's surname is German for small or young, highlighting the indelible fusing of his youth at the hands of the Germans to his adult identity.

Alex introduces us to his mother in his first conversation with Jiji, the fiancée whose identity will begin to bleed into Rosa Klein's. He states,

> Cinq ans et demi et huit ans quand j'en suis sorti normalement les enfants qui savaient marcher marchaient droit au four crématoire mais ma mère était une extraordinaire pianiste elle était la plus grande interprète vivante de Mozart le commandant du camp avait une passion pour Mozart alors il a trouvé pour ma mère une place au bordel ma mère était très jolie très mince avec de grands yeux noirs des cheveux noirs très longs de longs doigts très fins… deux fois par semaine il la faisait venir pour la soirée il restait sans bouger dans un fauteuil de cuir rouge à fumer son très long cigare pendant qu'elle jouait des sonates toutes les sonates (65-66).

The cause and effect of this passage is clear: Alex's mother saves her child from the crematorium, the standard path for Auschwitz's young, by agreeing to prostitute herself. This postpartum act proves heavy with consequence: Alex's mother's sexual activity serves not only to create his life, but to sustain it outside of the womb by shielding him from the gas chamber.

Prostitutes have long evoked a complicated binary as objects of both desire and disgust in the French literary imagination. Though the notion of a prostitute may conjure vague rumblings

[19] Contrasted with "Cohen," from the Hebrew for "priest," the surname Klein originates from German, Dutch, and Yiddish. Joseph Losey would explore this resultant ambiguity surrounding individuals named "Klein" in his 1976 film *Monsieur Klein.* Alain Delon stars as Robert Klein, a sleazy Catholic art dealer in occupied France who profits from Jews desperate to liquidate their assets and leave the country. Mistaken for a Jewish neighbor of the same name, the Catholic Klein is ultimately swept up in a roundup and deported east to an uncertain fate.

of Kristeva's abjection, a theory in which the mother figure also plays a central role, prostitution most notably occupied a unique space in French thought as an expression of uncleanliness and bodily filth in the century before *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*'s publication in 1980. As Alison Moore writes in her essay "Fin-de-Siècle Sexuality and Excretion":

> The role of excrement in the construction of a civilizing identity was apparent in a number of European cultures throughout the nineteenth century… The notion of criminals, the poor in general, and prostitutes in particular as representing the 'refuse of society' was a widespread notion in both state-sponsored and literary discussions of 'the social question' in Britain and France. In the 1830s the French town planner Jean-Baptiste Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet had explicitly related prostitutes to excrement, noting that an abundance of both was inevitable in an urban district, and hence, 'the authorities should take the same approach to each': regulation, control, abjection, and invisibility.[20]

In prostituting herself, Alex's mother becomes simultaneously an object of worth and waste, a decision which becomes magnified in the already-excremental environment of Auschwitz. Johnathan Strauss further elucidates the fine line drawn between desire and disgust present in the figure of the prostitute: "As if one had turned a prism, the prostitute exposes another facet of an unspoken fantasy hidden in the violence of disgust: miasma, putrefying, abject, and horrible, she was nonetheless an object of desire. She demonstrates that one can feel both disgust and desire for the same object and that the two affects are not therefore mutually exclusive."[21] This fine line between desire and disgust notably evokes one of French literature's most famous call girls, Zola's titular Nana. Minor character Faucher likens Nana to a golden fly emerging from a dung heap only to jump from man to man, poisoning them with her toxic excremental touch:

> Elle avait poussé dans un faubourg, sur le pavé parisien; et, grande, belle, de chair superbe ainsi qu'une plante de plein fumier, elle vengeait les gueux et les abandonnés dont elle était le produit. Avec elle, la pourriture qu'on laissait fermenter dans le peuple, remontait et pourrissait l'aristocratie. Elle devenait une force de la nature, un ferment de destruction, sans le vouloir elle-même, corrompant et désorganisant Paris entre ses cuisses de neige, le faisant tourner comme des femmes, chaque mois, font tourner le lait. Et c'était à la fin de l'article que se trouvait la

[20] Alison Moore, "Fin-de-Siècle Sexuality and Excretion," in *Sexuality at the Fin de Siècle: The Makings of a "Central Problem,"* eds. Peter Cryle and Christopher E. Forth. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 129.
[21] Jonathan Strauss, *Human Remains: Medicine, Death, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 165.

> comparaison de la mouche, une mouche couleur de soleil, envolée de l'ordure, une mouche qui prenait la mort sur les charognes tolérées le long des chemins, et qui, bourdonnante, dansante, jetant un éclat de pierreries, empoisonnait les hommes rien qu'à se poser sur eux, dans les palais où elle entrait par les fenêtres.[22]

Even outside of the concentrationary universe, the image of the prostitute elicits an often-antithetical set of responses. Pianist and prostitute, it is because of her worth as a musician that Alex's mother is ironically morphed into a being incarnating waste, cast doubly in the mire both from her new position and the milieu in which she is forced to perform it.

Vinaver's placement of Rosa Klein in the Auschwitz brothel may initially seem surprising or improbable to readers– some seventy years later, the existence of government-sanctioned prostitution in the Nazi camp apparatus is still not common knowledge. However, multiple brothels did exist, known in German as the *Sonderbau*, and their presence was not limited to the regime's most notorious death camp. As Robert Sommer, one of the foremost – and only— experts on the taboo subject of camp brothels, explains: "By the end of the Third Reich, camp brothels had been opened in ten of the major concentration camps— Mauthausen and Gusen (July and October 1942), Flossenbürg and Buchenwald (July 1943), Auschwitz-*Stammlager* (main camp) (October 1943), Auschwitz-Monowitz (November 1943), Neuengamme (May 1944), Dachau (April 1944), Sachsenhausen (August 1944), and Mittelbau-Dora (February 1945)."[23] Auschwitz's brothel existed in the camp's block 24, in a place of

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[22] Emile Zola, *Nana*, 1880. Project Gutenberg E-book. http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5250/pg5250-images.html. For more on Nana's dual status as object of arousal and waste, see Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-century France* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 200-205.

[23] Richard Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women in Nazi Concentration Camp Brothels," in *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel. (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 47. Consult Sommer's article for an excellent summary of the origins of camp brothels, among other pertinent information. Sommer's more comprehensive work on the subject, his 2009 *Das KZ Bordell* is still lamentably unpublished in English.

prominence next to the camp's notorious 'Arbeit macht frei' gate. Polish political prisoner Tadeusz Borowski describes an outsider's view of the camp bordello in a letter to his fiancée:

> [The brothel's] windows are left slightly open at all times, even in winter. And from the windows—after roll-call—peek out pretty little heads of various shades of colour, with delicate shoulders, as white and fresh as snow… Altogether there are, I am told, fifteen little heads, not counting the old Madame …. The Madame does not lean out of the window, but, like watchful Cerberus, officiates at the entrance to the Puff. The Puff is for ever [sic] surrounded by a crowd of the most important citizens of the camp. For every Juliet there are at least a thousand Romeos. Hence the crowd, and the competition… It is not unusual for a Juliet to have a steady admirer, and, along with promises of undying love and a blissful life together after the war, along with the reproaches and bickering, one is apt to hear exchanges of a more basic nature, concerning such particulars as soap, perfume, silk panties, or cigarettes.[24]

While the forced prostitution of women in any environment is distressing, the existence of sex workers in a site synonymous with mass murder is even more unfathomable. Although one might initially wonder if camp prostitution functioned as an additional attempt to debase female prisoners, the government-sanctioned bordellos operated for even more nefarious reasons: to further enslave and placate both men and women through sex and the allusion of wellbeing.

In addition to the hope that a government-vetted forum for sex would cut back on homosexual interactions between men, concentration camp brothels were part of a larger enticement plan rolled out by Nazi higher-ups to incentivize male prisoners in minor, yet key, positions of power. As Laurence Rees argues,

> The Nazis could see that one of the keys to the smooth running of the camp was the attitude of inmates who had managed to gain the relatively privileged jobs— mostly the surviving Polish political prisoners who had first entered the camp in 1940. This class of prisoner was not subjected— as a rule— to the ruthless and regular selections that other inmates endured. But the Germans wanted a better way of motivating them. A brothel, with entrance dependent on vouchers issued by the Nazis, was a reward for good behavior for about 100 of these key inmates and a clear incentive to behave even better in the future.[25]

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[24] Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, trans. Barbara Vedder (New York: Penguin, 1976), 106-107.
[25] Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz: A New History* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 196-197.

It was thus not as a direct attempt at the degradation of women but as a tool to promote men to work harder that the official decree for camp brothels would emerge from surprisingly high up in the Nazi chain of command. Sommer elucidates the origin and structuring of the *Sonderbau:*

> Himmler did not want to accept that the efficiency of camp prisoners was only 50 percent compared to civilian workers. To improve this, he suggested granting in *der freiesten Form* (most free manner) certain privileges to hardworking camp prisoners, such as access to *Weiber in Bordellen* (women in brothels) and *Akkordlohn* (small piecework pay). In his opinion, denying the necessity to "provide" women to satisfy sexual needs of male camp prisoners would be *weltund lebensfremd* (out of touch with the world and life)… The brothel visit, a maximum of one per week, was, however, available only to *Spitzenkräfte* (top-notch workers). To go to the brothel, they had to write a short application to the camp commander, who then had to grant permission. The prisoners had to pay two *Reichsmark* in bonus coupons, out of which the forced sex worker in the brothel would receive 0.45, the guarding prisoner 0.05, and the SS 1.50 *Reichsmark.*[26]

Himmler's logic is chilling: in an environment where millions of men, women, and children were being brutally murdered and where those lucky enough to avoid the gas were being worked and starved to death, it was still somehow "out of touch with the world and life" to expect that male prisoners could subsist without sexual activity.

Despite the pain and suffering their prostitution engendered, the forced sex workers in the camp brothels were actually envied by some. Laurence Rees summarizes the situation:

> [The women's] experience in the Auschwitz brothel is one of the hidden stories of suffering in the camp... But in Auschwitz at the time, the women who worked in the brothel were not so much pitied as envied. "The girls were treated very well," says [inmate and bordello patron] Ryszard Dacko. "They had good food. They took walks. They just had to do their job." Nothing demonstrates more effectively the immense power of context in human relations than Dacko's apparently callous statement that they "just had to do their job." For, in the context of Auschwitz, where torture and murder were commonplace, it was possible for him to see the life of a woman in the brothel as a "good" life. With so much other suffering around him, it clearly never occurred to him to ask, "Ought I to be having sex with this woman?" Instead, it is clear what was on his mind— that he had endured "three and a half years without a woman" and here was his opportunity to put that situation right.[27]

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[26] Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women," 46.

[27] Rees, *Auschwitz: A New History,* 197. Borowski proved acutely conscious of this fine line between victim and perpetrator teetered upon by Auschwitz johns, writing, "As guests from Birkenau, we were offered priority in this regard also, but we declined the favour; let the criminals use the facilities intended for them." in *This Way for the Gas,* 107.

Although they would receive less than a quarter of the Reichsmark bonus coupons johns paid to sleep with them, the women were treated far better than the camps' other inmates, perhaps as much to ensure the women's complicity as to ensure that inmates would see sexual activity with these women as a reward—it is difficult to imagine inmates working as hard to earn the 'privilege' of sleeping with the emaciated women in the camp's general population. In exchange for having sex with roughly six men a day who rotated out in supervised, fifteen-minute increments during a two-hour window in the evening after work, many of the women in the brothels were told that they would be freed from the camp after six months, a promise which of course never materialized.

Much in the way that excremental assault turned inmates' bodies into weapons used against themselves, as prisoners began to associate their own bodily functions with shame and inner uncleanliness, by being forced to use their bodies to incentivize male inmates' productivity, women's bodies became part of the arsenal used to keep them enslaved. Using sex as a reward for obedience and hard work in the Nazi war machine sought to harness women's bodies as tools of submission and subservience in order to discourage resistance and revolt, paradoxically ensuring that the same system which kept them confined and prostituted was held well. While it may be hard to feel sympathetic to these Auschwitz johns, through their tacit complicity, their perceived ability to be bought and incentivized by sex, they also paradoxically participated in constructing the walls that kept them caged in Auschwitz.[28] However, even more disturbing, the brothels made male prisoners not just passive, but active participants in the Nazi war apparatus. Robert Sommer concludes, "It reveals a new cynical dimension of the Nazi terror: to exploit the

[28] Robert Sommer ultimately questions the efficiency of the "rewards" system, arguing that, "The solution to the productivity dilemma could have been easily effected through increased food rations for the prisoners, better hygienic conditions, and abrogation of the daily terror." See Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women," 47.

labor of male prisoners, a few were granted the right to sexually exploit women who were forced into prostitution. In that way, the SS brought perfidy to a new extreme in which victims themselves became perpetrators."[29]

"Ta mère était la grande Rosa Klein," states company accountant Cohen to Alex knowingly in their first encounter. "Il paraît," retorts Alex (119). Rosa Klein's chute from pianist to prostitute becomes the one central strand of many in a recurring dialogue surrounding female sexuality and excrement. In addition to Alex's references to his mother's prostitution, the ultimate expression of a woman turned into excrement through her sexuality in an environment incarnating bodily filth, the play's tangential dialogues similarly link the scatological to female sensuality. The suggestiveness of these pervasive, tacit allusions serve to reinforce the excremental nature of the new environment in which Alex finds himself, the business world of Ravoire and Dehaze where his status as a Holocaust survivor will ultimately lead him to be pushed into a metaphorical cesspit, dooming him to relive the excremental death of his father.

One of these first seemingly unrelated instances where the women/excrement binary emerges is in a conversation between company owner Dehaze and R.P. Motte, a Dominican priest trying to raise money to fight the raising popularity of the birth control pill. Motte reaches out to the cash-strapped Dehaze, attempting to guilt him into a donation by stating, "L'Eglise n'a jamais frappé à votre porte sans que vous répondiez à l'appel (42)." Motte continues his efforts to elicit a financial contribution from Dehaze through crafting a metaphor the priest thinks will resonate with him: excrement. While referencing Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae,* Motte continues, "Le pape avec son encyclique dans un mouvement d'une extrême audace … a

[29] Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women," 55.

donné un coup d'arrêt à cette diarrhée mais c'est à nous de suivre à présent et de serrer les fesses et de travailler les masses en profondeur avec tous les moyens qu'offrent les techniques modernes de persuasion (42)." Sexual activity becomes a scatological act, with an increase in sexual activity compared to diarrhea, an increase in excremental activity. Motte's logic becomes clear: if the metaphor is extended, then money, another paper product, becomes the metaphorical toilet paper that would mop up the diarrhea of birth control, making it logical that he should ask Dehaze, a toilet paper manufacturer, for the means necessary to clean up the mess.

In addition to describing the endemic use of birth control through a scatological metaphor, Motte also binds the excremental to the sexually-active women who use this form of contraception: "La base remue dans l'église il y a des mouvements centrifuges… La pilule est l'excrément de notre civilisation elle a fait régresser l'humanité de deux ou trois dizaines de siècles les institutions les plus stables subissent un ébranlement c'est un peu le retour au chaos (41)" Through a lexicon which continues to stress the titular concept of movement, with the Church's conventions being thrown 'overboard' by its lusty faithful, Motte deems any nonreprodutive female sexual activity to be excremental.[30] The coprophagic metaphor he advances of the pill as "l'excrément de notre civilization," of women ingesting feces in order to

[30] While the equation between birth control and excrement here proves demeaning to women's reproductive health, Motte's metaphor is equally rooted in a more practical association. Although modern readers may associate the bidet with excrement, this device is one of the world's oldest forms of contraception, given as a stipulation in ancient Greek wedding contracts, and which continued to be used worldwide until the popularization of the birth control pill. A tool whose sole purpose for centuries was as a contraceptive method, it was not until later that bidets became linked to anal cleansing. See Museum of Contraception and Abortion (Vienna), "The bidet is for vaginal rinsing: A brief history of the widely unknown contraception device," http://en.muvs.org/topic/the-bidet-is-for-vaginal-rinsing/ and "Museum of Contraception & Abortion Text of the Audioguide, http://en.muvs.org/museum/audioguide_text_en.pdf, both accessed May 23, 2015. Characters in Gary's *La vie devant soi* also reference the bidet as a form of birth control in Africa up to the mid-20th century, suggestively referring to contraception as 'hygiene.' States Momo, "[Mon copain le Mahoute] était né à Casbah à Alger et il était venue en France seulement après. Il n'y avait pas encore d'hygiène à la Casbah et il était né parce qu'il n'y avait ni bidet ni eau potable ni rien … Le Mahoute m'a dit que les femmes qui se défendent ont maintenant une pilule pour l'hygiène mas qu'il était né trop tôt." Romian Gary, *La vie devant soi* (Paris: Collection Folio, 1975), 13. Gary's novel lends itself especially well to comparison with Vinaver given the shared trope of Jewish prostitutes who have been deported to Auschwitz.

have sex unencumbered by the prospect of children, stresses the debasing nature of the association of women and fecal matter as well as its roots in organized religion and resonance with the figure of the mother.

If having sex for non-procreative purposes is steeped in associations with excrement, then even procreative sex and motherhood cannot escape the influence of the sexcremental. Jack, an American marketing consultant sent in to revamp Ravoire et Dehaze with his colleague Jenny, tries to convince the company's employees that in order to become profitable again, the company must essentially rebrand the act of excreting, and by extension, the toilet paper they sell. He zealously encourages the room full of uneasy ad men he commands by reasoning, "C'est une région privilégiée saint Augustin a dit inter urinas et faeces nascimur entre les urines et les matières fécales nous sommes nés dans quelques centimètres carrés tout se concentre la souffrance et l'amour et l'extase et la saleté on sort de là et ça sort de nous et on s'essuie (137)." While Jack sees fecality as a unifying aspect of humanity, Augustine most likely intended his comment as a very Catholic reminder that all humans are born unclean as sinners, and that, baptized in filth by our mothers as we enter the world, the fleshly uncleanliness which defines postlapsarian existence can only be cleansed through religious redemption. Georges Bataille would later respond to this sexcremental legacy bequeathed to women and mothers, rationalizing the resultant shame as such: "The sexual channels are also the body's sewers, we think of them as shameful and connect the anal orifice with them."[31] In quoting Augustine, Jack comically affirms the polar opposite of what the early philosopher states, that instead of seeing this scatological birth as an evidence of a spiritual uncleanliness, humans must celebrate this miracle

[31] From Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme,* cited in Anthony George Purdy, *Literature and the Body* (Rodopi: Atlanta, 1992), 161.

of life which unites us all by buying quality toilet paper for this most "privileged" region of our bodies. Jack's citation of Augustine resonates finally with the story of Rosa Klein by creating another link between her and bodily filth, as she comes to incarnate excrement not only as an Auschwitz deportee and a prostitute, but through her role as a mother to Alex.[32]

Compounding her overwhelming presence in death through dialogue, Rosa Klein is given a new life onstage as her son pointedly fuses her memory onto the identity of his fiancée. The bizarre relationship between Alex and the new woman in his life emphasizes the protagonist's recurring mantra extolling randomness and the futility inherent in analyzing reason in any action—or *aktion*—whatsoever. The couple's initial meeting establishes Alex's refusal to look for answers or meaning in life as a clear byproduct of his deportation, a leitmotif which will continue throughout the play. Alex and Jiji become engaged the day they meet due to Alex's passivity and Jiji's bohemian headstrongness. No sooner is the matter settled that Alex begins the comparisons between Jiji and his mother. Vinaver introduces Jiji to Alex and the audience through the following Beckettian dialogue with club employee Butch:

> BUTCH: Alex a girl she asks to talk to you
>
> ALEX: Anybody we know?
>
> BUTCH: No she says it's on account of her birthday

[32] Jack furthers this Augustinian dialogue of female sexuality and excrement by humorously evoking Jonathan Swift's 1732 "The Lady's Dressing Room," where a star-struck young lover rifling through his beloved's dressing room becomes permanently scarred by the knowledge that "Celia shits!" Jack's evocation of Swift proves curious in a slight misremembering of Swift's poem—he erroneously describes the poem's culmination as the masculine lover Strephon opening up a door and walking in on Celia defecating, whereas in the poem he accidently sticks his hand in her chamber pot, a veritable "Pandora's box" which taints his views of all women afterwards as foul-smelling, defecating beings. Jack's telling error parodies the archetypical cuckolding scene, with Swift's protagonist scarred for life not by catching his love in flagrante with another person but by catching her perform the banal, quotidian action of excreting, an act to him which seems even worse. This humorous and pointed substitution between female bowel movements and sexual faithfulness once again highlights Vinaver's continual association between female sexuality and the excremental. As a result of this scarring experience, the protagonist suffers from a permanent disgust of all women; this unwillingness to confront past 'horrors' may equally resonate with France's inability to confront its traumatic past. "The Lady's Dressing Room," Poetry Foundation, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/180934.

ALEX: Tell her to fuck off on reprend

BUTCH: She says her name is Jiji

ALEX: Ah c'est Jiji?

BUTCH: You know her?

ALEX: No (*entre Jiji)* va t'asseoir là Jiji et reste sage...

JIJI: Je viens de célébrer mon anniversaire

ALEX: Est-ce que je t'ai déjà vue ?

JIJI: Quelle importance ?

ALEX: Aucune (60-61).

While it may seem innocuous, the lack of importance and passivity which Alex ascribes to any prior encounter with Jiji is his first step in linking her to his past, as it foreshadows their discussion of the Nazi *aktions* in Ukraine, and of Alex's continual awe at the incomprehensibility of such acts. After immediately inscribing Jiji into this dialogue of incomprehensibility evocative of the war, Alex proceeds to draw physical comparisons between her and his deceased mother. As he describes his mother's journey to the Auschwitz brothel to Jiji, Alex pauses for a moment to compare his new fiancée's breasts to his mother's: "ma mère était très jolie très mince avec de grands yeux noirs des cheveux noirs très longs de longs doigts très fins… des petits seins pointus comme les tiens (66)." The body part which links the two women is of course consequential, simultaneously representative of both maternity and of the sexualized female body. From his very first encounter with Jiji, Alex thus initiates an eerily incestuous dialogue between the two women whose status becomes cemented through a bizarre, theatrical post-war *aktion*.

After creating an initial physical link between Jiji and his mother, Alex proceeds to fuse Jiji to his mother's experience in the war. Alex's next encounter with Jiji occurs directly after her participation in an unusual art happening, in which all of her hair was unexpectedly shaved off. Jiji stresses the largely improvisational aspect of the project to Alex, stating that "Ça fait partie

des choix Oldenburg [le directeur/metteur-en-scène] n'avait pas prévu ça ou autre chose les acteurs peuvent faire des choses n'importe lesquelles pourvu que ça entre dans les temps entre le début et la fin d'une action et que ça n'empêche pas les autres acteurs de faire ce qu'ils ont à faire (76)." As Jiji explains, her head was shaved in this project entirely by hazard, permitted in the largely-undefined scope of the event as a gesture happening "between the beginning and the end of an action." In addition to her description of the *non-mise-en-scène* of the project, Jiji uses the word 'action' once again to describe the experience, telling Alex that: "il y en a deux qui me tiennent la tête et le troisième déplie puis affûte un rasoir droit il me rase mes cheveux s'éparpillent dans la piscine en même temps que toutes sortes d'autres choses flottantes qui peu à peu encombrent la piscine Oldenburg appelle ça les flotteurs ce sont les résidus de toutes les actions le moment venu (75-76). " Oldenberg's evocation of "actions" and deeming of Jiji's shed hair as "flotteurs" fuses the past to the excremental, as her hair functions dually as a residue of the past while floating in a basin, evocative of a toilet, with the use of the word "flotteur" further suggesting a toilet through its flushing mechanism.

This randomness of Jiji's "action" leads Alex to reflect on the past, as he forms a parallel between this seemingly meaningless act of female castration and another sort of *aktion*. Jiji's bald head and repetition of the word 'action' in this happening celebrating randomness cause Alex to link her to both his mother and the events of her Ukrainian homeland: "Quand tu es entrée chauve pendant l'éclair d'un instant j'ai vu maman comme je ne l'avais pas vue depuis comme je ne l'avais jamais vue… pendant que tu parlais je voyais j'ai vu j'ai revu les actions ça se prononçait 'aktion' c'était le même mot un peu la même chose pas tout à fait c'était à Lvov en Ukraine ça se décomposait en petits épisodes des épisodes indépendantes la différence (76)." Jiji's shaved head changes her appearance so much in the eyes of Alex that fixed elements of her

face now seem different to him, noting that her appearance has become more Jewish as a result of this modern *aktion*. Likening Jiji once more to his mother and the religion of his family, Alex observes, "ton nez est devenu plus long tes yeux sont plus grands."

While the link between Jiji's artistic happenings and the *aktions* in Ukraine become immediately apparent to Alex, he realizes that they are not necessarily clear to Jiji, and thus takes the time to explain to her and to the audience the resonances between the two phenomena:

> La différence c'est que les actions dont tu parles sont elles-mêmes des flotteurs dans leur banalité elles atteignent une fantastique intensité justement parce qu'elles ne se raccrochent pas à aucune cause à aucun passé les actions allemands sous l'occupation échappaient aussi à l'entendement pourquoi faisaient-ils ceci et pas cela? Pourquoi comme ceci et pas comme cela? Dans les détails nous les Juifs étions les flotteurs nous ne pouvions pas nous defender pare que nous ne pouvions pas comprendre parce qu'il n'y avait rien à comprendre… L'anéantissement des Juifs attends on tourne autour d'un point intéressant pourquoi les Allemands qui avaient le sens de l'organisation s'y sont-ils pris de telle façon que vécus dans le détail et de dedans les événements particuliers ont toujours paru accidentels (75-77) ?

Alex's equation of Jews as "flotteurs" reinforces the link between excrement and deportation once again through evoking a toilet's flushing mechanism, a move which seeks to reinforce (or perhaps even foreshadow) the Jews' sense of helplessness as Nazi policy grew increasingly stricter. As Michael Fox observes, "What interests Alex is the way in which the incomprehensibility, apparent randomness, and indeterminacy of the German *aktions* prevented the Jews from constructing any psychic defense to the Nazi terror."[33] Although readers and spectators have already witnessed Alex's doctrine of refusing meaning in his initial encounter with Jiji, it is here where we first begin to see the roots behind this belief, an effect stemming directly from the terror exacted on him, his parents, and their country during the war.

In addition to spurring Alex's reflection on his parents, Jiji's transformation does not go unnoticed by her own father. Lubin's hostility towards Alex and all that he represents as a Jewish

[33] Fox, "Anus Mundi," 45.

survivor of the camps becomes immediately clear in his reaction to Jiji's shaved head, a change in appearance he mistakenly attributes to Alex's presumed sexual proclivities. [34] In a conversation with a coworker, he recounts his and his wife's scandalized, puzzled reactions to Jiji's modern *aktion:*

> Et puis l'autre jour [Jiji] est arrivée à table avec des cheveux qu'on lui connaissait pas ma femme a voulu les toucher et c'est tombé c'était une perruque dessous le crâne ras comme un œuf cet homme l'a obligée à se faire tondre comme une putain à la Libération comme ma femme en faisait une dépression nerveuse j'ai un copain il est détective privé je lui ai demandé de me rendre ce service… En fin de compte j'aurais préféré rien savoir c'est un Israélite qui a fait les camps de concentration un enfant d'Auschwitz quoi… Raflé avec sa famille et revenu tout seul complètement déboulonné naturellement (92-93)

Jiji's bald head unearths memories of the war for her fiancé and father, and the very different ways each man interprets this stark image is telling. For Alex, Jiji's baldness immediately triggers the memories of his mother and deportation, images which colored his own very personal experiences as a child during the war. However, Lubin's visceral reaction to Jiji as a *femme tondue* evokes France's collective memory rather than his own personal experience, seeing his own daughter as a symbol of the vigilante revenge which sought to exorcise France's national humiliation. Deportation does not even figure into the constellation of negative images and sentiments Lubin constructs at the sight of his daughter, an absence made even starker through his disgust towards Alex's past suffering. Confronted with the memory of deportation through Alex, Lubin immediately shuts down, asserting that, "En fin de compte j'aurais préféré rien savoir," an attitude and discomfort which will later resonate with the play's other characters and, as Vinaver intimates, with the country as a whole.

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[34] Similar to other characters' names, the family name of both Jiji and her father lends itself to interpretation. The surname "Lubin" may conjure the memory of Lublin, one of the cultural centers of Jewish Poland. Selected during World War II as the headquarters of Operation Reinhardt, Nazi Germany's operation to exterminate Polish Jews, Lublin would later become host to a massive ghetto and to the extermination camp Majdanek, established at the edge of the city. It is a surname which reinforces Jiji's bond to Alex and the *aktions* while simultaneously serving as an ironic allusion to her father Lubin's poorly-masked anti-Semitic viewpoints.

Although the comparison is made unwittingly, Lubin's likening of Jiji to a "whore at Liberation" binds his daughter even further to Alex's mother, as both Rosa Klein's prostitution and the public shaving of the *femmes tondues* create disturbing tableaus of powerless women degraded and demeaned through their sexuality, victims of mob mentalities. While the phrase "putain à la Libération" may also remind readers that one of France's most ubiquitous curse words is rooted in a derogatory image of sexual women, it's also worth noting that a great deal of the *femmes tondues* were not just women likened to prostitutes for their perceived betrayal, but actual prostitutes who saw the Germans as nothing more than paying customers. As historian Antony Beevor asserts, "A large number of the victims [*femmes tondues*] were prostitutes who had simply plied their trade with Germans as well as Frenchmen, although in some areas it was accepted that their conduct was professional rather than political."[35] In addition to prostitutes, Beevor notes that many of the young women perceived as having consensual sexual rapports with Germans were young mothers whose husbands were POWs or fighting abroad, and who as a result saw liaisons with Germans as a way to support their families during the absence of their primary breadwinner. Both inside and outside of internment camps, many women in the Second World War thus saw sex not as an erotic activity but as a survival strategy.[36]

While absent in body in *Par-dessus bord,* the spectral memory of Alex's mother, Rosa Klein, weaves in and out through the play, casting its shadow over both her son's new fiancée, Jiji, and the Ravoire et Dehaze boardrooms drawn to excremental visions of women as sexual

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[35] Antony Beevor, "An Ugly Carnival," *The Guardian,* June 5, 2009, accessed June 26, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/jun/05/women-victims-d-day-landings-second-world-war.

[36] In the same way that both prostitutes and non-prostitutes became entangled with German soldiers in occupied France, the camp structure similarly lent itself to female prisoners outside the brothels forming survival relationships with the men around them, in what historian Anna Hájková refers to as "rational relationships." See Anna Hájková, "Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto" *Signs* 38.3 (2003): 503-533.

beings. Although she does not die at the bottom of a latrine like her husband, closer examination highlights Rosa Klein's equal suffocation in excrement at Auschwitz, cast doubly in the mire as both a forced sex worker and as a prisoner of the concentrationary universe. As Alex himself realizes, his encounter with Jiji serves to catalyze a deluge of memories tied to his late mother, as he begins to see oedipal resonances between the two women both physically and ideologically. However, as his involvement with Ravoire et Dehaze extends deeper and deeper, what the young man does not realize is that he himself is following a trajectory mirroring his father's, wandering further down a path which will culminate in his own swan dive in excrement before an uncertain future ahead.

Movement III: Like father, like son: From the lecture hall to the latrine

While the parallels Alex creates between Jiji and Rosa Klein occur more overtly, closer examination reveals that the young survivor is bound equally to the ghost of his father as he begins to follow in his metaphorical footsteps. The reader and Jiji alike are first presented to Alex's unnamed father as the newly-minted couple discuss their marriage plans:

> ALEX: Ton père a donné sa bénédiction?
>
> JIJI: Mas pas de dot il est représentant en papier hygiénique et les affaires vont comme ci comme ça quoi plus ou moins c'est calme
>
> ALEX: Il est mort au fond d'un chiotte le mien (61)

The strange inverse symmetry between the couple's fathers immediately catches the reader off guard. As Terrence Des Pres comments, citing former deportee S.B. Unsdorfer, "The new prisoner's initiation to camp life was complete when he 'realized there was no toilet paper.'"[37] Although linked by excrement, the two men are fundamentally divided in that Jiji's father,

[37] Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 54.

largely unsympathetic to Alex's religion and plight as a survivor, is a fabricant of toilet paper while Alex's father incarnates a world characterized by this same product's absence.

If excremental imagery becomes fused to Alex's father through his death, then Alex is quick to prove that this association was not always the case, contrary to the barrage of Nazi propaganda seeking to align Jews with vermin and feces. Instead, the undignified death of Alex's father in the Auschwitz latrine stands in stark contrast to the life he once lived before the Nazi regime stripped him of his dignity: "Ils ont abattu mon père avec plusieurs autres malades alors qu'ils chiaient dans les feuillées ils trouvaient que ça durait trop longtemps mon père était un latiniste distingué spécialiste de l'histoire de Rome (67)." Once a scholar of a society known for its excremental openness,[38] Alex's father undergoes a drastic change by being immersed in an alarming new social order distinguishable by an omnipresence of excrement.

Like Rosa Klein's experience as an Auschwitz prostitute, the excremental death of Alex's father was unfortunately a horrifying reality for many deportees. Terrence Des Pres asserts that, "Prisoners in the Nazi camps were virtually drowning in their own waste, and in fact death by excrement was common. In Buchenwald, for instance, latrines consisted of open pits twenty-five feet long, twelve feet deep and twelve feet wide. There were railings along the edge to squat on, and 'one of the favorite games of the SS, engaged in for many years,' was to catch men in the act of relieving themselves and throw them into the pit: 'In Buchenwald ten prisoners suffocated in excrement in this fashion in October 1937 alone.'"[39] A parallel thus emerges in the degradation of Alex's parents: educated commodities of value to society, one a renowned musician and the

[38] The phrase "Pecunia non olet" is attributed to the Roman emperor Vespasian, who, upon realizing urine's power as a cleaning agent, imposed a urine tax on merchants who wished to buy the product, commonly used as a laundering and tanning agent.
[39] Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 58-59.

other an erudite scholar, both are thrown overboard in the inverted social order of Auschwitz. Although Rosa's selfless gesture to prostitute herself serves ultimately to save the life of her son, it does nothing to secure her own survival, where like her husband, the values and skills which allow her to flourish in the outside world prove as useless as the rationale which would propel the Nazi terror apparatus. Both Rosa Klein and her unnamed husband forcibly undergo an inversion from elite sectors of prewar society to societal dredges, ending their lives in spaces which incarnate waste —the brothel and the latrine—and which strive to morph them into metaphorical excrement.

The parallels between Alex and his father begin to crystallize in the terse conversation between Alex and Cohen, the Ravoire et Dehaze accountant asked by Jiji's father to investigate his daughter's fiancé. Lubin solicits the help of Cohen in unearthing Alex's past based solely on Cohen and Alex's shared religion: "c'est justement parce que vous vous tenez tous au coude à coude que je me suis décidé à venir vous voir en me disant que peut-être M. Cohen accepterait par amitié pour Lublin de se renseigner sur cet individu vous êtes tous en relation les uns avec les autres peut-être par des amis communs vous le rencontrez (118)." Although Jewish himself, Cohen withstands Lubin's demeaning preconceptions of Jews and goes on to investigate Alex for Jiji's father, who callously bemoans, "Enfin il ne reste plus tant de Juifs en France pourquoi est-ce qu'il a fallu qu'elle ail en dénicher un? Pour Marguerite c'est difficile à avaler elle a un frère et un oncle curés elle-même est très pratiquante moi je ne dis pas que j'aurais pas préféré qu'elle tombe sur un Durand ou un Dupont mais c'est pas tellement la race à laquelle il appartient qui me turlupine… c'est le personnage un déboussolé un maniaque peut-être un sadique (117-118)." Lubin's remarks on the apparent lack of Jews in France contrasted with the discussion of his wife's family prove even more insensitive in light of Alex's utter lack of family, orphaned at a

young age. Suite to Cohen's inquiry, "de toute la famille il ne reste personne autre que toi ?, " Alex will soon quip acidly "Ça ne suffit pas (120)?"

Although the uncomfortable tone of the conversation between Cohen and Alex may stem partially from Alex's prickly nature – his initial first response to Jiji is instructing Butch to "tell her to fuck off on reprend"—it is perhaps Alex's recognition of Cohen's lapdog status which results in the hostility of their initial encounter:

> ALEX: Que me voulez-vous ?
>
> COHEN: Lire en toi
>
> ALEX: A quelle page voulez-vous ouvrir le livre?
>
> COHEN: Ta mère était la grande Rosa Klein
>
> ALEX: Il paraît
>
> COHEN: Une fois je l'ai entendue dans un récital de sonates de Mozart à la salle du Conservatoire
>
> ALEX: Très touchant j'espère qu'il y avait du monde et qu'elle a eu du succès
>
> COHEN: Elle était si frêle mais avec un port de tête inimitable et une fois qu'elle s'est mise à jouer c'était un géant on m'a dit qu'elle est morte à Buchenwald
>
> ALEX: A Auschwitz
>
> COHEN: C'est ton père qui était professeur d'histoire de Rome à Varsovie? Il est mort?
>
> ALEX: A Auschwitz
>
> COHEN: Toi-même tu as connu Auschwitz?
>
> ALEX: Ça a été mon jardin d'enfant
>
> COHEN: Comment en es-tu sorti?
>
> ALEX: Élégamment (119)

In this brusque dialogue, made even more uncomfortable due to Cohen's obliviousness in recognizing his interlocutor's obvious distaste for him, Alex systematically shuts down all of Cohen's prying inquiries to his past through sarcastic replies. Despite his desire to "lire en [Alex]," Cohen's ignorance and inability to read the conversation accurately manifests itself clearly through the disparity in personal pronouns, visible as Alex noticeably uses the formal

'vous' with Cohen despite the older man's incessant use of the informal 'tu' pronoun. Cohen's imperviousness to Alex's feelings thus propels his insensitive and voyeuristic inquiries into the younger man's past.

Even with the curt, bitter sarcasm which characterizes his responses to Cohen, Alex inadvertently lets the older man read into him by evidencing the psychic scars left on him from the Nazis' incomprehensible actions. Stressing the camp's formative role in his adult life, he refers to Auschwitz as his "jardin d'enfant", underlining the didactic role of this experience as a perverse substitution for a kindergarten.[40] The long-term effects of Alex's immersion in excrement become even clearer in his discussion of the post-Auschwitz philosophy of randomness which governs his existence:

> COHEN: Tu connais ceci? *(sortant de sa poche une brochure et lisant)* 'Contribution à une nouvelle approche de la théorie des fonctions de plusieurs variables complexe' par Alex Klein communication à l'Académie des sciences sous le parrainage de M. Dieudonné et de M. Lochy
>
> ALEX : Videz vos poches maintenant voyons si on y trouve encore quelque relique touchante
>
> COHEN: Tu as complètement abandonné la recherche mathématique
>
> ALEX: Dans un grand éclat de rire
>
> COHEN: Comment te l'expliques-tu ?
>
> ALEX: Je ne cherche pas les explications (119)

Cohen's inquiry into Alex's discontinued studies echo an earlier comment of Lubin's to a grocer client: "[Alex] a fait des communications à l'Académie des sciences fallait que ça soit d'un haut niveau et puis il a laissé tomber (93)." Although Alex's choice to leave a promising career in academia seems unfathomable to Cohen and Lubin, Alex sees his decision to stop studies as a phenomenon that cannot and does not need to be explained, the same way he marvels at the

[40] Given Vinaver's extreme literariness, the imagery of the garden may further stress the formative nature of this experience by also evoking the garden in Voltaire's *Candide*, or the Garden of Eden whose events and inhabitants prove formative in shaping all humanity after it through the biblical notion of sin.

meaningless and incomprehensibility of the Nazi *aktions* in Ukraine. However, after his experience in deportation, it is logical that Alex would choose to distance himself from a career based almost entirely on analysis, explanation, and the search for reason behind any given phenomenon, principles antithetical to Alex's post-Auschwitz doctrine of meaninglessness. Alex's departure from academia, deprived of any true signification, will thus come to mirror the chute of his father from the lecture hall to the latrine, as Alex abandons his studies for an ambiguous future in excrement. In the scenes leading up to the play's conclusion, a symbolic restaging of Auschwitz at Alex's club and a conflicted speech at his wedding will all testify to his uncertain future ahead, thrown headfirst overboard into the new excremental environment of Ravoire et Dehaze.

Although physical traits and verbal clues link Jiji to Rosa Klein and Alex to his father, the connection between the younger couple and Alex's deported parents solidifies through a morbid theater performance, or 'happening' at Alex's club. Michael Fox argues that "Alex's heartlessness and his all-consuming, nihilistic anger over the Holocaust - as well as the Holocaust's absolute penetration into the play's central narrative of the vicissitudes of the toilet paper manufacturer Ravoire et Dehaze - is most clearly staged in Overboard's fifth movement. This movement, entitled "The Triumph" (with an unmistakable allusion to Lene Reifenstahl's 1933 pro-Nazi film, The Triumph of the Will), involves the staging by Alex at The Clinic of a macabre parody of Auschwitz."[41] Played out at Alex's club, l'Infirmerie, the name of Alex's business immediately conjures both images of healing and of sickness and disease, and of camp "infirmaries" which more often than not hastened the deaths, rather than the survivals, of prisoners. Jiji and Alex pick four volunteers for a theater project which, similar to Jiji's shaved

[41] Fox, "Anus Mundi," 50-51.

head 'happening' and the *aktions* in Ukraine, defies all reasoning, existing and thriving as a creation without a clearly-defined meaning. In this scene within a scene, the chaos of the physical objects onstage in the club further stresses disorder and meaninglessness. Vinaver sets the stage as such: "*Sur l'estrade de l'Infirmerie il n'y a plus d'instruments mais des objets quelconques: oreiller hache, faux, vêtements, légumes, seau plein de lait, cochon attaché à un piquet, lunettes en vrac, bidet, livres anciens, télévision….. Jiji, au moyen d'un pistolet à l'eau désigne telle ou telle personne parmi les clients* (168)." The props' designation as "objets quelconques," along with Jiji and her water pistol selecting clients at random, prove to be a tangible representation of randomness, alluding back to the Nazi genocide which Alex found so unfathomably inexplicable. The hodgepodge of household and personal items strewn across the stage also eerily evoke the newly-ownerless objects abandoned after the arrival of a fresh transport on the Auschwitz train platform, where deportees' most prized possessions would be funneled back into the Reich in order to help finance the deaths of their former owners.

In a dialogue whose vaguely-sexual mother imagery resonates with *Par-dessus bord's* larger brushstrokes concerning excremental female sexuality, Jiji provides instructions for the people chosen for the *aktion:* [42]

> JIJI : vous êtes des rampants vous ne savez pas encore marcher vous n'êtes pas encore nés *(les quatre désignés s'aplatissent sur le ventre parmi les objets)* vous allez tout faire maintenant pour ne pas naître allez-y tout vous avez deux minutes à mon chronomètre pour faire tout tout *(sans se redresser ils entreprennent des actions désordonnées en utilisant des objets)* vous entrez dans la baignoire qui est votre mère *(ils basculent dans la baignoire)* vous ne voulez pas sortir vous construisez une barricade dans le vagin de votre mère qui est la mère de tous les déshérités de tous les orphelins de Jésus-Christ des damnés de la terre Trotski Guevara Ford Rockefeller et vous criez vous criez mais le monde ne vous entend pas (*descendue de sa balançoire, Jiji jette pêle-mêle dans la baignoire objets et liquides tandis que les quatre crient)* (168-169)

[42] While perhaps more vague in the original, referred to as the 'quatre désignés' in the French text, working from the English text, Michael Fox describes the participants as the "four chosen people," subtly linking the participants to Judaism. See Fox, "Anus Mundi," 50.

The symbolism in the event is oppressively evident, as Jiji literally bombards the participants in the bathtub with randomness through a potpourri of objects and liquids. Asserting that the world does not hear their plaints, Jiji's assertion of the world's deafness to the participants' cries will not only evoke the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust, but will come to foreshadow Alex's wedding speech, where his reflections on his traumatic childhood fall on deaf and disinterested ears.

If the staggeringly-direct imagery wasn't clear enough, a dark intervention from Alex cements the link, fantasizing a dark 'happening' which will kill them all:

> ALEX: Jiji
>
> JIJI: Alex
>
> ALEX: Sais-tu ce que nous allons faire parce que ça a assez duré regarde ces gens mais regarde ces gens
>
> JIJI: Ces gens sont les gens
>
> ALEX: Précisément
>
> JIJI: Qu'allons-nous faire Alex ?
>
> ….
>
> ALEX: Nous allons Jiji nous allons équiper cette cave en chambre à gaz c'est assez facile c'est une question de canalisations
>
> …
>
> ALEX: Des pommeaux de douche ici et ici en rangées serrées en haut à l'angle des murs et du plafond et puis un soir qui ressemblera à tous les autres soirs
>
> JIJI: Et toi et moi ici dedans ?
>
> ALEX: Tous les gens et toi et moi (171)

Alex's cold and calculated discussion of specifications for the proposed gas chamber thus push this theatrical 'happening's' depiction of the Holocaust from the metaphorical to the overt, as this suicidal fantasy foreshadows Alex's uncertain fate following the wedding. Through the 'happening' which takes place, Alex transforms the space of the theater not into a place of understanding or reflection, but a site of catharsis where he can vent his frustration at the

Holocaust through reveling in randomness. However, the 'happening' comes to extend past purely personal release through its emphasis on spectatorship, seen through the gesture of selecting participants from l'Infirmiere's audience. Whereas readers only hear Jiji's secondhand description of her shaved head 'happening,' this new *aktion* is staged for all to see and witness firsthand, bringing to the surface notions of spectatorship, voyeurism, and performance, as readers and spectators become conscious of both their gaze towards this play and their role as onlookers to history.

The discussion of the proposed gas chamber is interrupted by the arrival of a group of Ravoire et Dehaze employees to the club. It is thus in the context of this new *aktion* that Alex will meet his future co-workers and be offered a job, immediately binding Alex's involvement in Ravoire et Dehaze with his past as a Holocaust survivor. This parallel imagery between Alex's ascension in the business world and the excremental environment of his parents crystallizes in the play's final movement, "Le festin de mariage" where the metamorphosis linking Alex to his father becomes complete. In addition to cementing the link between the young couple and Alex's parents, the union of Jiji and Alex will evidence the protagonist's parallel progression to his father, having left an academic life of reason to be led back to an uncertain future and an unsettling chute into the excremental.

Raised in the *anus mundi* of Auschwitz, to borrow Heinz Thilo's famous epithet for the camp, it is no wonder that Ravoire et Dehaze sees Alex as in possession of a unique excremental expertise, and thus exceptionally qualified to market their toilet paper. However, while the promise of a new job might initially evoke positive connotations of fresh starts and new beginnings, Alex's involvement with the company proves to be a portent of much darker, murkier implications. It is implicitly understood that Alex's involvement will resurrect the

failing company, as Ravoire et Dehaze glibly harnesses his past suffering in Auschwitz as a modus to generate profit, morphing the survivor into a financial object. Gene Plunka explains the formation of the company's subconscious associations between Alex's status as a survivor and his perceived business prowess:

> The underlying reason for bringing Alex into middle management of Ravoire et Dehaze is his survival in Auschwitz, where he was treated as excrement, even watching his father perish in the feces of a latrine. Since there was no toilet paper in Auschwitz, which Alex describes as his "childhood playground" (89), he obviously lived in excrement… Thus, the executives at Ravoire et Dehaze view Alex as the personification of the motivated piece of excrement needed to explicate the intricacies of the toilet paper industry. Although Alex's excrement is associated with pain and suffering, the managers at Ravoire et Dehaze tend to ignore that aspect and focus on its association with business and profit mongering.[43]

Although money has come to replace excrement, the company's pimping of Alex's Holocaust experiences subject him to a new excremental assault, lest we forget Reszanyi's equivalence of the two substances: "l'argent est la matière fécale vécue sous une forme qui n'a pas besoin d'être refoulée parce qu'elle a été déodorisée déshydratée rendue brillante (121)"[44]

Alex's unease with his new job as well as the company's callous indifference to his past emerge in his wedding speech, which reveals an uncertain future for him still colored by his time at Auschwitz. Before past and present become fused through dialogue, their pairing is immediately suggested through the event's choice of music, linking the Mozart sonatas Alex's mother would play for the Auschwitz commandant to the wedding scene: "le flot de musique est fait de pop, free jazz, sonates pour piano de Mozart…(173)." In a scene mimicking the Infirmiere's staged *aktion*, where Jiji hurls at participants "vous criez vous criez mais le monde

[43] Plunka, "The Holocaust as Literature of the Body," 49.
[44] Freud also observes more cynically in his 1911 paper "Dreams in Folklore," "How old this connection between excrement and Gold is can be seen from an observation by Jeremias: gold, according to ancient oriental mythology, is the excrement of hell." See Sigmund Freud, *Dreams in Folklore*, trans. D. E Oppenheim (New York: International Universities Press, 1958).

ne vous entend pas (169)," Alex's reflections on his life and the Holocaust similarly fall on deaf ears:

> – Bravo
> – Vive la mariée
> – Discours
> ALEX: Mon père est mort en tombant dedans maintenant moi
>
> – Plus fort
> ALEX : J'entre dedans je titube je
>
> – On n'entend pas
> ALEX : Tombe dans le gouffre
>
> – Sono
> ALEX : Mais pas en chute libre ce serait monotone rebondir de paroi en paroi beaucoup plus amusant
>
> – Une fois de temps en temps
> ALEX : L'écho de chaque choque vous précède
>
> – Laissez les soucis
> ALEX : L'entrée de la normalité avancez descendez on ne résiste pas à la tentation tiendrons-nous le coup ? C'est la question on ne s'aventure pas dans cet au-delà où je vous vois grouiller croupir vous putréfier ah si vous saviez
>
> – Vous êtes bien bichonnée
> ALEX : Ce que ça dégage mais le sort en est jeté j'ai Ariadne ma sœur et son fil à couper le souffle suffisait d'y penser peut-être n'en revient-on pas jamais pu cesser d'essayer de me suicider toujours trahi par ma constitution robuste les damnés sont récupérés on croyait vous baiser on l'a été adieu lumière tiens Jiji faisons le premier pas ensemble tiens-moi la main c'est glissant (180)

Alex immediately binds himself to his father and his fate in Auschwitz, contrasting his father's falling into the latrine with his own metaphorical chute into the excremental void: "[je] tombe dans le gouffre." So is the cycle complete. Like his father, throughout the course of the play Alex ends a successful career in academia only to be corralled into a stifling environment, tumbling firsthand into the mire of his new job through the excrement associated with both the company's toilet paper and the money that drives it.

It is not solely for the links between himself and his deceased father that Alex's speech casts uncertainty on his own future. His cryptic assertions, "jamais pu cesser d'essayer de me suicider toujours trahi par ma constitution robuste les damnés sont récupérés on croyait vous

baiser on l'a été adieu lumière tiens Jiji faisons le premier pas ensemble," resonate with the staged *aktion* at l'Infirmière through both its discussion of suicide and the reprise of the word 'damnés,' evoking Jiji's description of the *aktion* participants symbolically exterminated onstage as "les orphelins de Jésus-Christ des damnés de la terre (169)." Alex's trip to the altar proves equally imbued with contrasting connotations of life and death, as observed by Michael Fox: "Although *Overboard,* like a classical comedy, ends with a wedding. Alex's reference to 'Ariadne my sister' could be an allusion to the daughter of Minos of Crete, who, according to Homer, was abducted by Theseus, abandoned by him, and killed by Artemis… The altar to which Alex and Jiji are lead is therefore double coded as a place of sacrifice as well as celebration… [leaving open] the question of tragedy and comedy, or of whether Alex is redeemed or sacrificed."[45] The imagery in Alex's speech thus contributes to a sense of foreboding and uncertainty: just as excrement proves to be coded dually as a substance of wealth and death, Alex's discourse proves replete with images stressing either his new life as a husband and company employee or his imminent demise, as he and Jiji take their first steps together towards the unknown.

Movement IV: Overboard: Digesting a complicated past

With its culmination in the passive crowd at Alex's wedding, it becomes clear that *Par-dessus bord* extends past the fate of one specific family, serving additionally as a marked interrogation of the memory of postwar France as a collective. Vinaver sustains parallels between collective memory and the act of excreting throughout the entirety of the play, advancing the image of a chronically-constipated country too repressed to regulate its own

[45] Fox, "Anus Mundi," 53.

healthy digestion. Similar to Marguerite Duras's parallel between Robert Antelme's dysentery and his deluge of cathartic testimony in *La Douleur*, company members in *Par-dessus bord* wrestle with the same quandary in reverse. While board members hold a seemingly innocuous debate on whether their sluggish sales are the result of a national bowel blockage, readers come to align France's physical constipation with a constipation in the national coming-to-terms with the war:

> BATTISTINI: L'objet fondamental étant d'augmenter la consommation per capita une campagne fondée sur les témoignages du corps médical
>
> PEYRE: Les dangers de la constipation chronique
>
> BATTISTINI: Le consommateur moyen va à la selle zéro virgule quatre-vingt-trois fois par jour
>
> PEYRE: Le Français dans l'ensemble est constipé
>
> DUTÔT: Chiez deux fois par jour
>
> BATTISTINI: Et notre marché double (158)

In their quest to turn a profit, the ad men view the "constipation chronique" of the country as their largest impediment. Employing a lexicon which evokes the war and deportation, discussing the needs for campaigns and testimonies, the trio act nobly for ignoble reasons. They seek to loosen the bowels of the French both literally and figuratively not to improve the country's poorly-regulated digestion but to line their own pockets.

The links between excrement and collective responses to trauma crystallize through the suggestive intercalation of dialogues. In one of the most notable cases, a conversation between Alex and Jiji weaves in and out of a company ad-pitching session. The juxtaposition begins by criticizing the exploitation of Alex's Holocaust experience by Ravoire et Dehaze, aided in part by a Rabelaisian critique, but ends on a note which underscores the endemic repression of the past in France and the resultant complication of national memory. Jiji informs Alex of an encounter with Oldenburg, the visionary behind her shaved head *atkion*. She nonchalantly states,

"[Oldenburg] est de passage à Paris il veut te rencontrer … je lui ai dit de passer un soir à l'Infirmerie… je lui ai parlé des actions des Allemands à Lvov contre les Juifs ça l'a intéressé… Il pense qu'on peut faire quelque chose avec ça…. Je lui ai parlé aussi du commandant du camp et de ta mère… Il trouve ça prodigieux (146-147)." Oldenburg's interest in Alex's past is ironically intertwined with a dialogue of board members in a humorous brainstorming quest to market the perfect toilet paper. Although the strands of dialogue seem to function independently, the tonal resonances of the two converge upon the idea of the war and the callous, individualistic exploitation of Alex for personal gains. In the same way that Ravoire et Dehaze seeks to capitalize on Alex's past, Oldenburg sees Alex's Auschwitz experience solely in terms of his own profit, hoping to harness Alex's trauma in the name of theater. So disinterested is he in the human implications of Alex's story that he glibly describes the suffering of Alex's mother as "prodigieux," unable to see this tragic past as anything more than artistic tinder. The placement of these intercalated dialogues thus hint at two different forms of exploitation, simultaneously reinforcing each entity's questionable motivations towards engaging with Alex's past.

Vinaver propels his critique into the collective with the help of an homage to François Rabelais, a name immediately synonymous in France with the scatological and social satire. In addition to riffing himself on notable Rabelaisian stylistic tropes,[46] Vinaver inserts Rabelais directly into his text though his characters' conversations. In a dialogue interwoven with Jiji's discussion of Oldenburg, publicity agent Jaloux extolls the publicity prowess of the great Rabelais : "les zèbres qui travaillent avec moi là-dessus j'ai commencé à leur lire le chapitre de Gargantua sur le sujet et croyez-moi Rabelais était un vrai publicitaire… 'Ravoire et Dehaze

[46] Vinaver's inspiration in Rabelais is present not only in the play's satiric tone, but manifests itself equally through stylistic choices. The excessively long, humorous list which figures into the company's brainstorming names for a new toilet paper evokes Rabelais' gleeful predilection for long, scatological lists which play with word sounds, seen notably in the enumeration of books at the Library of St. Victor in *Pantagruel* (chapter VII).

invente un moyen de se torcher le cul, le plus seigneurial, le plus excellent, le plus expédiant que jamais feut vu. Mousse et Bruyère.' Est-ce que ça ne dit pas tout (147)?" Jaloux's near-verbatim reappropriation of Gargantua's declaration[47] comically reinforces the perverseness of the company's interest in Alex: while Gargantua's invention of a *torchecul* serves as an indicator of the young giant's ingenuity, and of his thirst for education and ability to self-instruct, the quest that the employees of Ravoire et Dehaze undertake to invent *their* own perfect *torchecul* is not the result of a desire to learn or of self-betterment, but is motivated purely by money, greed, and indifference to the past of Alex.[48]

The deliberate choice of Rabelaisian imagery proves further bound to Alex's experience in the Holocaust through leitmotif linking female sexuality and excrement. While not mentioned in Vinaver, the labor of Gargamelle, Gargantua's mother, is induced by an overindulgence in tripe. Although her son is subsequently born from her ear, Gargamelle's scatological birthing of Gargantua immediately recalls Augustine's observation "Inter urinas et faeces nascimur " and the excremental debasement of Alex's mother.[49] Furthermore, both Rabelais and his twentieth-century counterparts in search of their own perfect *torchecul* code excreting as an erogenous act, and it is for this reason that the company ad men plagiarize from the corpus of the 16th century author. While Rabelais' Gargantua concludes that the perfect *torchecul* is a warm, feathery gooseneck slung between his legs, a clearly sexualized image, the ad first created by Jaloux et. al

[47] The original citation comes from the *Gargantua* chapter "Comment Grandgousier congneut l'esperit merveilleux de Gargantua à l'invention d'un torchecul," and reads: "J'ay (respondit Gargantua) par longue et curieuse experience inventé un moyen de me torcher le cul, le plus seigneurial, le plus excellent, le plus expedient que jamais feut vue." François Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes, t. I,* ed. Pierre Jourda (Paris: Garnier, 1962), 54-55.
[48] For more on the links between the scatological and Gargantua's (Renaissance Humanist) education, see David LaGuardia, "Doctor Rabelais and the Medicine of Scatology" in *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art*, eds. Jeffrey Persels and Russell Ganim (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 24-37.
[49] For an excellent analysis of this scene and its scatological significance, consult Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World,* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1984), 221-225. For a discussion of the excremental imagery behind tripe see Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World,* 163.

is perhaps no less so. Their initial mockup shows a young girl wiping herself, as Jaloux pitches the byline: "'Mousse et Bruyère. Elle trouve ça bon, car la mollice de sa soye lui cause au fondement une volupté bien grande' Peut-on être plus convaincant (147)?" Both the pose of the girl and the accompanying text, lifted directly from Rabelais, comically conjure images which are at once masturbatory and excremental, suggestively positioning the girl's voiding of her bowels as an act of female sexual pleasure.

If the sexual overtones in this ad were not clear enough, Jaloux refines it to make its suggestive imagery even more blatant: "Mais voici celle qui nous paraît la plus vigoureuse et correspond le mieux à notre copie stratégie *(présentant une maquette montrant l'homme et la jeune femme face à face se torchant)* 'Avec Mousse et Bruyère vous sentez au trou de cul une volupté mirifique tant par la douceur d'iccelluy que par sa chaleur tempérée, laquelle est communicquée au boyau culier jusques à venir à la région du cœur et du cerveau(147).'" Similar to the first ad's female masturbatory overtones, the pose of the couple wiping themselves as they face each other coupled with the byline clearly evoke copulation. While the ads are provocative in and of themselves in their resonance with the sexcremental, most telling is the reaction of Jaloux's boss, Panafieu to the maquettes, deftly intercalated with Jiji and Alex's conversation about Oldenburg's interest in the camps:

> JALOUX : Seulement Panafieu nous a foutus à la porte de son bureau en disant qu'on ne pourra jamais dire ça à des conscients coupables
>
> JIJI : Je lui ai parlé du commandant du camp et de ta mère
>
> JALOUX: Et encore moins à des inconscients totaux
>
> JIJI: Il trouve ça prodigieux (147).

The two parallel conversations link Panafieu's uncomfortable reaction to the overtly-excremental *maquettes* to the discussion of deportation, taboo conversations which are best left silenced in the

face of the country's "conscients coupables." Faced with the realization that the country is not ready for such direct confrontation, Jaloux closes in pitching a slew of ironic ads which hide the offensive act from sight.[50] Just as the world was not ready for the staggering genius of Rabelais, whose intricately coded scatology was often misunderstood as mere bawdy repartee before Bakhtin, the characters of *Par-dessus bord* prove unwilling to confront openly their body's natural functions. Panafieu's swift shutdown of the initially overt advertisements suggest a sense of repression and disgust equally present in the excremental and the nation's complicated memory of the war, both being unsavory, difficult processes to confront directly, but ones that are nevertheless fused critically to the wellbeing of a healthy body or body politic.

Vinaver expounds on this exploration of France's collective constipation and the national scars left by the war through characters not overtly related to Alex and his dialogue of deportation. Like the universal act of defecating, the memory of the war proves an equally-pervasive facet of the French national identity, however stifled this consciousness may be. The omnipresence of this deeply-repressed trauma emerges in a series of interviews undertaken by Reszanyi. Through employing a sort of surrealist automated speech activity, the psychologist conducts interviews probing the roots of national attitudes towards excrement, rationalizing that "Ces interviews sont délicats à réaliser dans la mesure où il faut parvenir à relâcher les réflexes sociaux et même les réflexes psychiques de défense à différents niveaux de profondeur… on n'arrive au résultat qu'après au moins une heure et demie deux heures de mise en condition (124-

[50] Some of these new ads still resonate with Alex's past as a survivor, notably one which states: "LES APPARTEMENTS MODERNES SONT FROIDS mais maintenant dans le nôtre il y a un petit coin de mousse et de bruyère.'… Un couple se tient là heureux il y a comme un petit jardin sauvage dans l'angle de l'image et ici nous positionnons le produit en majesté (148)." Although stripped of its direct scatological imagery, the image of the "petit jardin sauvage" subtly evokes Alex's description of Auschwitz as his "jardin d'enfant."

125).” In one of his most captivating interviews, a young girl makes a telling Freudian slip in discussing a strange pastoral scene:

- Un jour en bordure d’un sentier mouillé un lièvre venait de passer juste devant mes yeux
- Vous étiez accroupie
- Une poignée de pissenlits tout verts
- Mademoiselle vous suivez encore le lièvre des yeux
- Je n’avais pas encore tout à fait fini
- Cette chose consistante qui sortait de vous
- Tiède
- Ferme
- Coulante
- Cette légère résistance
- La poignée de pissenlits d’arrière en avant
- Mon oncle mort en déportation
- Il a été jusqu’au bout de son idée
- Au bout de la souffrance
  …
- Vous poussiez avec peine
- J’étais heureuse
- Vous aviez un désir
- Avez-vous jamais fait de la peine à quelqu’un ?
- Il faut forcer parfois les gens à faire ce qu’ils n’osent pas faire à dire ce qu’ils n’osent pas
- Oui *(silence)* j’avais un désir de douceur
- Rien que ça
- Ne me tourmentez plus (125-126)

While it would be a mistake to overlook the relentlessly satiric tone in the girl’s description of her encounter with the hare, it is in the context of this scatological scene comically overwrought with emotion that the memory of her uncle, ‘mort en déporation,’ comes tumbling out. This *lapsus’s* relevance to the play’s central commentary on the war makes it difficult to ignore, similarly coloring with new meaning Reszanyi’s claim that “Il faut forcer parfois les gens à faire ce qu’ils n’osent pas faire à dire ce qu’ils n’osent pas.” The girl’s claim of torment in being forced to confront directly her traumatic constipation functions thus as an ironic tie-in to *Par-dessus bord’s* overarching narrative binding the postwar French psyche to physical constipation, an issue that like Reszanyi, Vinaver probes through a chaotic expulsion of speech.

Several threads of dialogue thus diagnose France with dually physical and psychic constipation, and in discussing this blockage, American consultant Jack deems a hyperawareness of the past as a leading cause of the nation's being "constipated with the past." He asserts, "Promettre c'est perdre la joyeuse faculté naturelle d'oublier le passé qui est la condition nécessaire et suffisante pour bien vivre dans le présent promettre c'est être constipé avec le passé ne pouvoir de rien se débarrasser en apprenant à promettre l'homme a lié le futur au passé il a constitué l'avenir je te dois et tu me dois parce qu'il a cherché à fuir l'éternité de l'instant présent il fuit le présent parce qu'il a honte il se sent coupable (137)." While this pitch overtly addresses the company's drive to rebrand excretion, Jack's statements create unsettling resonances with postwar French attitudes towards the collective past. Given the links previously discussed here between successful engagement with the past and healthy excretion, the sense of constipation with the past driven by sentiments of shame and guilt refer back handily to the national guilt and humiliation engendered by France's collaboration before the *miroir brisé.* Jack concludes that the company must therefore extricate shame from the excremental, and by extension, from the past.

While the push to alleviate this constipation may initially seem healthy, Jack's proposed modus for achieving this goal demonstrates his ignorance to the memory of the past, raising troubling questions if considered through the prism of the war. In order to de-constipate the nation, Jack argues that the collective conscious must learn to forget: "Promettre c'est perdre la joyeuse faculté naturelle d'oublier le passé qui est la condition nécessaire et suffisante pour bien vivre dans le présent." The marketing agent's proposed fix, forgetting the past, proves antithetical to the solution truly necessary to heal from the war, speaking openly of the trauma. Instead, it echoes the deleterious refrain fed to many survivors upon their return: forget the past

and move on with your life. It is perhaps telling that an American issues this invitation to national forgetting, as Lynn Rapaport describes the struggles many Jewish Holocaust survivors faced in their efforts to settle into life in the United States:

> As Jewish Holocaust survivors tried to assimilate into American and American Jewish life, they faced a postwar nation recovering from war. Some Americans were unable to listen to the tales of woe recounted by survivors. The postwar victory spirit pervading America discouraged confronting wartime atrocities. Moreover, the impact of new Cold War alliances between West Germany and the United States limited public discussion of the Holocaust. For example, Moritz Feldman, a survivor, was told by his aunt: "If you want to have friends here in America, don't keep talking about your experiences. Nobody's interested and if you tell them, they're going to hear it once and then the next time they'll be afraid to come see you. Don't ever speak about it." After immigrating to the United States, Benjamin Meed, president of the American Gathering/Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Warsaw Ghetto Resistance, recalls being told, "Forget the past; it can only hurt you."[51]

Jack's ideology is further bound to the experience of deportation through repetition of the verb "promettre": "*Promettre* c'est perdre la joyeuse faculté naturelle d'oublier le passé… *promettre* c'est être constipé avec le passé ne pouvoir de rien se débarrasser en apprenant à *promettre* l'homme a lié le futur au passé (my emphasis)." Through emphasis on the idea of this societal promise, Jack evokes the profound sense of duty survivors felt towards their departed friends in transmitting their collective trauma, the solemn pact to "never forget" evidenced notably in works such as Charlotte Delbo's *Qui Rapportera ces paroles?* Thus while in principle, Jack's idea of freeing excrement from guilt seems a move to be lauded, like the insincere financial motivations driving the campaign to de-constipate France, his true aims prove egotistical, as he strives to bury the collective past even deeper all in the name of money and self-interest.

Through a multifaceted examination of France's silent, inhibited remembrance of the war, Michel Vinaver's work lays bare the present misguided state of affairs and its worrisome implications for survivors and the nation alike. While this portrayal of postwar France's rampant

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[51] Lynn Rapaport, "The Holocaust in American Jewish Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 189.

repression paints an overwhelmingly pessimistic image of the status of war memory, there is perhaps some hope for survivors like Alex yet. Although one might initially mistake the young man's impulsive decision to marry a stranger as the byproduct of an oedipal complex, this action is perhaps rooted in a more solid line of reasoning (however vehemently the character would deny his choice as propelled by any sort of meaning). For throughout the course of *Par-dessus bord,* Jiji proves to be the sole individual capable of receiving Alex's testimony successfully. Vinaver demonstrates the rarity of this quality, the ability to listen, through the passive disinterest of wedding guests to Alex's wedding speech testimony. This rationale for marrying Jiji quietly emerges in Alex's terse conversation with Cohen:

> ALEX: Un jour elle est venue elle s'est présentée elle a dit qu'on va se marier
>
> COHEN: C'est une petite qui a toujours aimé s'amuser et plaisanter
>
> ALEX: Je lui ai parlé
>
> COHEN: De quoi ?
>
> ALEX: De moi et d'Auschwitz et de Lvov elle a été très attentive elle n'a pas posé beaucoup de questions (120).

While Cohen sees the union as a byproduct of Jiji's caprice, Alex defends his decision, observing his fiancée's ability to open him to the past constructively. Alex's appreciation of Jiji as a receiver of testimony crystallizes further through the two qualifiers he uses to characterize Jiji as a listener, describing her as both attentive and as not too inquisitive. Alex's appreciation of these qualities is evident, for they sharply invert other characters' responses to his testimony: they are not attentive, or they interrogate him with nonstop questions. Alex's initial conversation with Cohen is marked by a barrage of questions: although they have just meet, the old man indifferently bombards Alex with a slew of impertinent inquisitions, demonstrating a perverse interest in the suffering of a complete stranger. Secondly, at the wedding, when Alex tries to discuss his past in his speech, the guests relentlessly interrupt him and pay no attention to his

discourse. While Alex's morbid wedding speech to an indifferent audience may evoke an ominous future, Jiji's place in this uncertain future is nevertheless cemented firmly, as Alex exits the play with the final line, "tiens Jiji faisons le premier pas ensemble tiens-moi la main c'est glissant (180)." Although the older generation – Jiji's parents, Ravoire employees such as Cohen, and the wedding guests— may seem hopelessly closed to Alex's testimony and the collective past it evokes, it is perhaps the task of the younger generation – Alex and Jiji's generation – to open itself to the custodianship of a nationally-shared trauma.

Movement V: In guise of a conclusion… an invitation to further questioning

In *Par-dessus bord,* Michel Vinaver does not attempt to answer conclusively the issue of confronting the past, but rather strives to exhume kicking and screaming this traumatic memory buried alive in the French subconscious. The play ends on an unresolved note, with an uncertain future looming on the horizon for Alex. Just as Alex's continued existence as a survivor in this excremental environment is left open-ended, one of the most puzzling questions left unanswered by his testimony is paradoxically one which is never posed. Alex's description of his mother's prostitution in Auschwitz evidences the unfathomable complexities inherent to traumatic testimony for a somewhat surprising reason: there is an almost zero percent chance that his mother's experience could have happened as Alex describes. The astonishingly-complete personnel records of concentration camp sex workers indicate an unusually-high rate of survival to Liberation among women forced to prostitute themselves in Nazi camps; as Robert Sommer's research concludes, prostitution in the various camp brothels was universally an extremely effective survival strategy, with no records existing of any inmates dying in a *Sonderbau kommando.* The chance of Rosa Klein *not* surviving the war from inside a brothel would therefore have been extremely small. However, of even greater consequence for the fictitious

Rosa Klein, these records reiterate a logical fact: due to the Nazi regime's strict racial laws, Jewish women such as Alex's mother were specifically not employed as prostitutes in concentration camp brothels. [52]

Even without knowing the full history of the camp brothels, simple logic coupled with a basic understanding of Nazi racial policy could lead one to this conclusion when one remembers that the Third Reich criminalized sexual activity between Jews and non-Jews. States Sommer,

> [C]oncentration camp brothels were strictly regulated and supervised. They even were organized according to valid prostitution laws in Nazi Germany… Furthermore, Germans were strictly prohibited from visiting foreign prostitutes, who in turn were prohibited from servicing Germans. Even Nazi race laws applied. It became illegal for Jewish women to work as prostitutes, as well as for Jewish men to visit "Aryan" prostitutes. Those rules also applied in the camp brothels. Only "Aryan" prisoners were allowed to visit a Sonderbau. Jews and Soviet POWs were at all times excluded… Those prisoners were very often Germans, and in the case of Auschwitz, often Polish.[53]

If only "Aryan" prisoners were allowed to visit the brothels, it follows logically that the Nazis would have imposed the same practices of sexual segregation they strove to enact outside the camps, and that a prisoner such as Rosa Klein would have been barred from working in the brothel based solely on her Jewishness.

Despite the improbability of Rosa Klein's situation, it would be a mistake to view this puzzling occurrence as an error in the text. Although by no means a historian himself, Vinaver spurs conversation not only on deportation, his era's elephant in the room, but additionally fosters dialogue and asserts the existence of the elephant in the room in that elephant in the room, one of the most taboo aspects of an already painful subject: the camp brothels.[54] Instead, the true

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[52] Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women," 54. Racial policy was so significant in the creation of the brothels that Ukrainian SS guards had their own separate brothels and sex workers – even though they worked for the Nazis, as racially-inferior Slavs they were nevertheless forbidden from having sex with German women.

[53] Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women," 53-54.

[54] Although not a commonly evoked element of 1970s Holocaust fiction, the brothels' existence was a recurring trope in the perverse contemporary cinematic movement known as "Nazi exploitation," films which sexualized Nazi horrors by aligning power with sexual dominance, playing on the prisoner/guard power trope. A classic example of

worth of debating such a discrepancy lies not so much in elucidating the fate of a fictitious woman but in its ability to encourage discussion of the issues at the heart of truth value in testimony. [55] Rosa Klein's uncertain fate should not lead readers to question the accuracy of Vinaver's text, but should instead prompt questioning on the accuracy of Alex's testimony and an evaluation on to what extent testimony can even be considered as "accurate' or 'true.'

If fictional Alex's recollection of his past presents puzzles and incongruities, it is perhaps for this simple reason: with his testimony, Alex attempts to translate as an adult events experienced through the eyes of a terrified five-year old two decades beforehand. While childhood memories are more prone to errors and lacunas, even studies of adult Holocaust survivors demonstrate the occasional incongruity.[56] Although Rosa Klein proves an unlikely candidate for the *Sonderbau*, Alex's placing of his mother in the Auschwitz brothel is on one hand heavily rooted in truth, resulting from an associative constellation of imagery linking female sexuality, excrement, and degradation. Alex's fabricated memory of his mother in the brothel stems from this series of associations in the same way that seeing Jiji's shaved head

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this sort of cinema can be seen for example in 1975's *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS.* See: Lynn Rapaport, "Holocaust Pornography: Profaning the Sacred in Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS" in *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 22.1 (2003) 53-79, and Daniel H. Magilow, Kirstin T. Vander Lugt, and Elizabeth Bridges, eds., *Nazisploitation! The Nazi Image in Low-Brow Cinema and Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

[55] The truth value of Holocaust in its myriad forms remains a topic generating many viewpoints. Historian Lawrence Langer debates a valorization of oral over written testimony, asserting that, "Beyond dispute in oral testimony is that every word spoken falls directly from the lips of the witness. Not as much can be said for written survivor testimony that is openly or silently edited. Whether this seriously limits the value of some written memoirs is a question that still needs to be investigated." Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 210. Langer's statement does not take into account that oral testimony may perhaps similarly be "edited" in various situations. In a conversation with Claude-Alice Peyrottes on her documentary *L'histoire du convoi du 24 janvier 1943*, the filmmaker spoke to me of her time interviewing the elderly women in Charlotte Delbo's convoy to Auschwitz, how occasionally the women would make slight errors that Peyrottes could recognize as a historian of the convoy, and how when their memories occasionally failed them in small details, the women would even rely on Peyrottes as an authoritative source to double-check information. After all, as Delbo herself asserts, "Aujourd'hui, je ne suis pas sûre si ce que j'ai écrit soit vrai. Je suis sûre que c'est véridique." Charlotte Delbo, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1970), 7.

[56] See Mark Roseman "Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in Holocaust Testimony," *Journal of Holocaust Education* 8 (1999): 1-20, or the oft-cited 1990 study by psychologists Willem Wagenaar and Jop Groeneweg, "The Memory of Concentration Camp Survivors,"*Applied Cognitive Psychology* 4.2 (1990): 77–87.

evokes a memory he is conscious that he does not have, and an aspect of his mother's past which he himself knows simply never happened: "Quand tu es entrée chauve pendant l'éclair d'un instant j'ai vu maman comme je ne l'avais pas vue depuis comme je ne l'avais jamais vue (76)." The past proves to be vaguely synchronous, and while the images are blurred, the sentiments remain the same, of a young boy as the silent witness to his mother's humiliation and degradation in the camps, deemed to be excrement and stripped of her femininity through the unrelenting cruelty of the Nazi terror apparatus.

In *Par-dessus bord,* Michel Vinaver's eschewal of all punctuation except question marks proves a fitting choice. For not only does Vinaver's play valorize the act of questioning, whose marked absence contributed to the rise of the Third Reich, but the piece also poses far more questions than it answers. The play introduces Holocaust survivor Alex, and follows his transposition from one scatological setting to another, surviving Auschwitz only to be faced with a new ordeal: subsisting in a milieu where he is simultaneously exploited and ignored for his past as a camp survivor. As Alex relives this excremental environment, his deported parents spring eerily to life as he projects their memory onto himself and his fiancée, encouraging those both on and offstage to grapple with the traumatic past which continues to constipate postwar France. Through renewed interest in the play, including recent scholarly articles and a complete staging in 2008, it seems that Alex Klein and his memories of the war are finally starting to be heard. When Jiji and Alex first meet, as Alex recounts his father's death, Jiji asks him "Pourquoi tu es Juif?" Alex's reaction is telling:

> ALEX: C'est une vieille histoire par où commencer?
> JIJI : Accouche
> ALEX : Oui tu es une splendide sage-femme je te remercie tire encore un peu (67).

So it is that in *Par-dessus bord*, assisted by midwife Jiji, Alex's testimony is born "inter urinas et faeces," a past incubated, nurtured and come alive between urine, feces, and the unapologetic humor of Michel Vinaver.

Chapter IV: "L'excrétion et la recherche de la vérité": *"L'ère du bourreau"* and the "Scabrous" Scatology of Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes*

"No man calleth good or evil but that which is so in his own eyes."
—Thomas Hobbes[1]

In her seminal 1998 study, historian Annette Wieviorka christened the present as an *ère du témoin,* tracing its culmination through decades of testimonial evolution. An epoch whose seed was planted with the urgent diaries, letters, and photos of the deceased, witnesses of a "monde englouti" felt burdened by the responsibility to chronicle a war whose end they would not live to see. Those who would survive began to contribute testimony in an "avènement du témoin," born out of a sense of sociopolitical responsibility and propelled by events such as the 1961 trial of Adolph Eichmann. Increasingly aware of a more personal duty to transmit the past as their numbers dwindle, survivors have most recently begun to benefit from the explosion of modern technologies in order to have their voices heard, launching us into an "ère du témoin" whose proliferation of testimonies is so vast that to catalog them all would not be possible and to study them all methodically even less so.[2]

In addition to the bounty of firsthand accounts contributing to the *ère du temoin,* fictional films and novels have similarly come to serve as sights informing collective memory. Despite Elie Wiesel's famous sentiment that a novel about the Holocaust is either not a novel or not about the Holocaust,[3] reactions to fictitious portrayals of Nazi genocide are as diverse as the individuals who survived it, with many former deportees finding solace in both creating and

[1] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Reprinted From the Ed. of 1651* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), 531.
[2] I summarize the three main phases outlined by Annette Wieviorka in *L'ère du témoin* (Paris: Hachette, 1998).
[3] David Patterson, Alan L Berger, and Sarita Carga, eds., *Encyclopedia of Holocaust Literature* (Westport, Conn.: Oryx Press, 2002), xiii.

discussing imagined portrayals of the concentrationary universe.[4] However, less than ten years after the release of *L'Ere du témoin*, a novel written by an unknown American author not only catapulted the long, fierce dialogue concerning fiction's role in the memory of the Shoah into the spotlight, but did so through interrogating longstanding beliefs on the morality and validity of alternate perspectives of the war period. One of the most polarizing works in recent French literary memory, Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* has garnered as much praise as it has criticism, winning everything from the 2006 prix Goncourt and the prix de l'Académie Française to *Literary Review*'s dubious Bad Sex in Fiction prize.[5] Almost universally loathed in Germany and largely praised in Poland, reactions to the book in France have proven to be far more complicated.[6] However, the staggering, nearly nine hundred-page account of fictitious Nazi Maximilien Aue and his incestuous, same-sex, scatological and genocidal exploits has seemed to shock readers not so much for what is said, but for who is saying it and for how it is said. The chorus of voices which immediately emerged[7] castigating the reckless indecency of the novel, perceived as drawing focus away from survivors and thus perpetrating a sort of second genocide

[4] Notable semiautobiographical works include Roman Polanksi's *The Pianist*, based on his childhood in the Krakow ghetto and Imre Kertesz's *Fateless*, a novel inspired by his childhood in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Furthermore, many survivors looked favorably on Spielberg's *Schindler's List* as an expression of their story despite criticism of the film, while panning almost universally 1978's overly melodramatic *Holocaust.* See Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin,* 127-180.

[5] The Bad Sex in Fiction prize was awarded in 2009, coinciding with the novel's English translation. Judges called the novel "in part, a work of genius," and hoped that Littell would take the award in good humor. Richard Lea, "Bad sex award goes to Jonathan Littell's The Kindly Ones," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2009, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/nov/30/bad-sex-award-jonathan-littell-kindly-ones.

[6] For discussion of the novel's reception in Germany and Poland, respectively, see "A German Reading of the German Reception of *The Kindly Ones"* by Wolfgang Asholt and Helena Duffy, "La bienveillance de la critique polonaise. An Analysis of the Polish Reception of *The Kindly Ones,"* both in Aurélie Barjonet and Liran Razinsky, eds., *Writing the Holocaust Today: Critical Perspectives on Jonathan Littell's The Kindly Ones* (New York: Rodopi, 2012).

[7] I think here most notably of Paul-Éric Blanrue, *Les Malveillantes: Enquête sur le cas Jonathan Littell* (Paris: Scali, 2006); Édouard Husson and Michael Terestchenko, *Les Complaisantes: Jonathan Littell et l'écriture du mal* (Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert, 2007) and more recently, of Charlotte Lacoste, *Séductions du bourreau: Négation des victimes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010). In addition to these works which denounce *Les Bienveillantes* as a literary endeavor, consult the largely less-venomous interrogations of this question in Luc Rasson, ed., *Paroles de salauds: Max Aue et cie* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013).

against their memory, converge around a central question: is Littell's tome a portent of our passing from an *ère du témoin* to an *ère du bourreau*?

Historian Denis Peschanski was perhaps one of the first and most noticeable voices to articulate both the problematic nature and saliency of the era of the executioner. In his immediate reaction to Littell's Goncourt win, he debated the implications of such a controversial shift:

> Comme lecteur, je trouve que c'est un bon livre, bien écrit. Comme historien, ce qui me semble étonnant, c'est de voir des collègues s'exprimer sur le rapport à la vérité, alors qu'il s'agit d'abord de littérature, et on ne fait pas de littérature avec les bons sentiments. Comme historien toujours, deux choses m'intéressent. D'abord, je m'interroge sur la signification de ce succès, qui a commencé bien avant l'attribution du prix de l'Académie française et du Goncourt. S'agit-il du temps long d'une fascination récurrente pour la barbarie? S'agit-il du temps long d'une passion française pour la Seconde Guerre mondiale? Ou bien ce livre et son succès sont-ils révélateurs d'un changement de registre mémoriel? Pour aller au plus simple, au lendemain de la guerre, c'était le moment du résistant; dans les années 80, on est passé dans l'ère de la victime. Et depuis deux ou trois ans on voit d'un côté une concurrence des victimes, avec une multiplication des porteurs de mémoire au nom de la victimisation, et, de l'autre, une certaine saturation de l'opinion. *Ce qui fait qu'on peut se demander si le succès de cet ouvrage, au-delà de tout jugement sur sa qualité littéraire, n'ouvre pas un autre registre mémoriel. Entre-t-on dans l'ère du bourreau?*[8]

The existence of an *ère du bourreau* raises a gamut of unsettling questions: does such an era unjustly shift focus away from deportees and defame their memory? Is it glamorizing or seeking to excuse the perpetrators of the Final Solution (*Endlösung)* by putting into question their culpability? Or on the other hand, does an *ère du bourreau* focus attention back on deportees through an unconventional avenue, depoliticizing and interrogating taboos long kept in place surrounding what is perhaps recent memory's most horrific series of events?

The sharp criticism surrounding Littell's Nazi narrator is in some ways surprising. Despite the powerful backlash, *Les Bienveillantes* is not the first work to present issues from a fictional Nazi perspective—or from a nonfictional perspective, for that matter. Several high-

[8] Claire Devarrieux and Natalie Levisalles, "'Les Bienveillantes', roman à controverse," *Libération,* November 7, 2006, accessed October 29, 2015. http://www.liberation.fr/evenement/2006/11/07/les-bienveillantes-roman-a-controverse_56610. My emphasis.

profile Nazis wrote memoirs or autobiographies in prison after the war, although their motivations to recount the past were far different than their victims. States historian Christopher Browning, "Unlike the survivors, of course, perpetrators did not rush to write their memoirs after the war. They felt no mission to 'never forget.' On the contrary, they hoped to forget and be forgotten as quickly and totally as possible."[9] The rationale behind postwar Nazi accounts ranges from attempts at self-defense, seen in the autobiography of Auschwitz commandant Rudolph Höss (*Commandant of Auschwitz),* to the effort at atonement seen in the memoirs of Albert Speer (*Inside the Third Reich),* who would subsequently be seen as some as a "good Nazi" or "the Nazi who said sorry,"[10] to the memoirs of Hans Frank, former head of the General Government in Poland, who perhaps sought to provide for his wife and family after his death by making juicy claims about his former boss as he sat awaiting his execution in Nuremburg prison.[11] Fictitious works such as the novel-turned film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and Edgar Hilsenrath's novel *The Nazi and the Barber* also focused on a Nazi perspective without inciting a similar level of controversy.[12] Michel Tournier's Nazi-narrated *Le Roi des aulnes* even won the Goncourt 36

[9] Christopher Browning, "German Memory, Judicial Interrogation, and Historical Reconstruction: Writing Perpetrator History from Post-War Testimony," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,*" ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 28.

[10] Dan Van der Vat debunks this claim in his biography *The Good Nazi: The Life and Lies of Albert Speer* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1997).

[11] The claim that Frank published his memoirs to provide for his family after his death appears in *Les Bienveillantes,* which as I discuss, has been almost universally-lauded for the high caliber of research which went into its writing. However, the validity of this claim is not immediately evident in the scant scholarship surrounding Frank's works. Frank's memoirs are less visible in the Anglophone world— it is not clear whether his posthumously-published 1953 memoirs have been published in English (*Im Angesicht des Galgens. Deutung Hitlers und seiner Zeit aufgrund eigener Erlebnisse und Erkenntnisse),* although Stanislaw Piotrowsi, Polish delegate at Nuremberg, went on to publish excerpts of Frank's diary in English (*Hans Frank's Diary,* 1961, originally published in Polish in 1957 as *Dziennik Hansa Franka*).

[12] *The Nazi and the Barber* shares several interesting parallels with *Les Bienveillantes,* including the tropes of assumed identity, stressed commonalities between Jews and Nazis, and both protagonists being named Max.

years before *Les Bienveillantes* in 1970, all the while possessing a similar attention to the scatological.[13] So what makes Littell's novel so different?

Les Bienveillantes does not shock readers through its sexuality or its scatology alone, two facets frequently mentioned but rarely the focal point of the novel's criticism. Nor does it seek to make its readers empathize with its protagonist, which is the case for the Nazi family in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, a work whose emotionally-manipulative denouement often has the opposite effect intended on viewers.[14] Max Aue could not care less whether readers commiserate with his life story, frequently reiterating that he writes for himself alone. Instead, the brash, sexualized, scatological descriptions of events in *Les Bienveillantes* prove different due to their astounding scope and detail, providing an intricate, sweeping, and largely accurate tableau of the Final Solution from its beginning to end, all through the viewpoint of a fictitious perpetrator.

Despite his heavy criticism of the book's irresponsibility, *Shoah* filmmaker Claude Lanzmann conceded with no small amount of hubris that "Certes, la documentation de Littell est formidable, pas une erreur, une erudition sans faille… Je plaisante à peine si je vous dis que ce livre ne peut être compris de part en part que par deux personnes: Raul Hilberg et moi."[15] Although able to acknowledge the great depth and precision which went into the novel's research, Lanzmann's assessment of the book is negative overall, propelled by a fear that its

[13] Tournier's novel follows protagonist Abel Tiffauges, a Frenchman who goes on to recruit children for the SS. For more on the excremental in Tournier see Franck Dalmas, "L'alchimie de l'excrément comme alchimie de l'Homme dans *Le Roi des Aulnes* de Michel Tournier," *French Forum* 30.3 (2005): 91-109

[14] The lonely young son of a camp commandant is accidentally gassed to death with a group of deportees when he hops under the barbed wire to help his playmate, a young Jewish boy, locate his missing father. Instead of its intended idealistic message of the beauty of children's unprejudiced gaze and totalitarianism's indiscriminate ruthlessness towards goodness and innocence, many have criticized the film as a vision which dangerously approaches Nazi victimhood. See Debbie Pinfold, "The Sins of the Fathers: Mark Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008) and Cate Shortland's *Lore* (2012)," *Oxford German Studies* 44.3 (2015): 254-270.

[15] Claude Lanzmann, "Lanzmann juge 'les Bienveillantes,'" *Le Nouvel Observateur* 2185 (2006): 14. Lanzmann made this statement before the death of Raul Hilberg in 2007.

broad scope may lead it to become a replacement for historical texts in one of memory's most crucial periods: "On est en droit de s'interroger: Aue est-il incarné? Aue est-il un homme? Aue existe-il? … A l'heure où les derniers témoins de la Shoah disparaissent et où les juifs s'inquiètent parce que la mémoire va devenir Histoire, Jonathan Littell renverse les termes de l'alternance et dote son SS, 'héros' sans mémoire, de l'Histoire comme mémoire. Autre renversement des termes : peut-être à présent va-t-on se mettre à lire 'les Bienveillantes' plutôt que 'la Destruction des juifs d'Europe' de l'historien Raul Hilberg, peut-être le roman va-t-il se substituer à l'Histoire ?"[16] Though Lanzmann's fear of fiction replacing monographs like Hilberg's seems unlikely on the whole,[17] his line of questioning 'Aue est-il incarné? Aue est-il un homme? Aue existe-il?' merits closer examination.

While Littell's detail is breathtaking in its accuracy, *Les Bienveillantes* is paradoxically both believable and not, due the improbable, sprawling trajectory taken by its protagonist throughout the implementation of Nazi genocide. The novel follows the winding path of Aue, an Alsatian-born Nazi whose murderous, incestuous exploits and same-sex trysts[18] become intercalated with one of fiction's most sprawling accounts of the Final Solution, from its origin to its horrific realization and eventual collapse. Branded by critics as everything from a "Nazi

[16] Lanzmann, "Lanzmann juge 'les Bienveillantes,'" 14.
[17] Buchenwald survivor and celebrated author's Jorge Semprun's praise of *Les Bienveillantes* leads the reader to wonder whether Claude Lanzamnn was perhaps right to be wary of novels such as Littell's replacing historical monographs such as Hilberg's. Stated Semprun, "C'est une démarche assez courageuse et tellement réussie qu'on est admiratif et béat d'admiration devant ce livre. Pour les générations des deux siècles à venir, la référence pour l'extermination des Juifs en Europe ce sera le livre de Littell et ça ne sera pas les autres livres." In Murielle Lucie Clément, Introduction to *Les Bienveillantes de Jonathan Littell* ed. Murielle Lucie Clément (Cambridge, U.K.: Open Book Publishers, 2009), 2.
[18] For the purposes of this study, I use the phrase "same sex" to describe Aue's sexual exploits with other men. While critics tend to employ with impunity the phrases "gay" and "homosexual" when discussing Aue, I believe that these qualifiers merit closer reflection. Aue has multiple sexual encounters with men throughout the course of the novel. His rationale for doing so, however, stems largely from his obsessive love for one woman—his sister—and his belief that having sex with any other woman would be the ultimate betrayal of this love. Although it's hard to imagine that the protagonist could have repeated same-sex encounters if he were not sexually attracted to other men on some level, I believe that this reason Aue presents for his relations with other men puts his sexuality in flux, and complicates our ability to brand it as purely homo/heterosexual.

Zelig" to a "Forrest Gump of the Final Solution,"[19] Aue outlines his wartime odyssey from the Einsatzgruppen mobile killing squads in Ukraine to visits to extermination camps to meetings with historical characters spanning from Céline and Brasillach to Eichmann and Himmler and even to a shocking encounter with Hitler himself during the final days of the bunker. Max and his ubiquitous figuring in the events leading up to the extermination of six million Jews has led some to bemoan the implausibility of his story – while the facts may be correct, how could one man have possibly undertaken all that Aue does?

However, it is this very sprawling implausibility of one man's journey that makes *Les Bienveillantes* so horrifying and forceful. The breadth of Littell's novel propels it into a collective consideration, encouraging readers to ruminate on all of the constituent phases of the Final Solution side by side. Perhaps one of the best responses for this particular criticism of Max Aue can be borrowed from director Christian Petzold who defended his newest film, *Phoenix,* set in postwar Berlin.[20] Asked by an interviewer to address audience criticism of the film's seemingly unlikely central plot point, Petzold responded: "People who ask these questions don't like movies. It's what Hitchcock called 'the plausibles,'" referencing the great filmmaker's disdain for those whose dogged nitpicking of every small detail often causes them to miss out on the larger picture of excellent films.[21] By extension, those who would treat Littell's novel as a

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[19] While the Zelig/Forrest Gump comparisons are bountiful across literary criticism of *Les Bienveillantes,* I think notably of Samuel Moyn's article and of comments of Amazon reviewer R. W. Rasband. See Samuel Moyne, "A Nazi Zelig: Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones," The Nation,* March 5, 2009, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.thenation.com/article/nazi-zelig-jonathan-littells-kindly-ones. and R.W. Rasband, "Into the Nazi Mind," Amazon.com product review, August 8, 2009, accessed March 20, 2016, http://www.amazon.com/The-Kindly-Ones-A-Novel/product-reviews/0061353469.

[20] The film is a very loose German adaptation of Hubert Monteilhet's 1961 crime novel *Le Retour des cendres.*

[21] Adam Nayman, "The Face of Another: Christian Petzold's Phoenix" *Cinema Scope* 61 (2014), accessed December 16, 2015, http://cinema-scope.com/features/face-another-christian-petzolds-phoenix/. *Phoenix*'s plot centers on concentration camp survivor Nelly Lenz. Her face reconstructed after horrible disfigurement in deportation, Nelly seeks out her husband Johnny in the remains of postwar Berlin in an attempt to suss out whether he sold her out to the Nazis. Before Nelly can reveal her identity to him, Johnny asks his wife, who he knows under the pseudonym Esther, to use her "passable" resemblance to the wife he believes dead to impersonate Nelly and

purely historical exercise, eager to criticize its more fanciful aspects, are perhaps the kind of people who don't like literature, if they will allow themselves to be deterred by the improbability of an inherently creative endeavor. Despite being written in such depth and precision in a way which sets it well apart from other Nazi-centric fictions, *Les Bienveillantes* remains a work of fiction and it behooves readers to remember that. However, this criticism poses larger questions surrounding Holocaust fiction: just because certain aspects of the novel are highly accurate, does it stand to reason that Littell has a moral obligation to be plausible from start to end? Furthermore, does writing about the Holocaust inherently entail a series of restraints for authors on what may and may not be considered a valid point of departure for the past?

It was perhaps in anticipation of this litany of criticisms that Littell chose to write a novel which is unrelentingly scatological: many of the criticisms applying to an *ère du bourreau* create meaningful parallels with the constant bashing and discrediting which has plagued attitudes towards the scatological's ability to drive meaningful literature. Max opens his memoir by situating his narrative in an *ère de constipation*, forging a parallel between a desire to write profusely and his inability to evacuate his own bowels. Contrasting himself against what he views to be the pathetic money ploy of Hans Frank, writing a tell-all autobiography to provide for his family, Max explains the motivations which propel his own decision to pen a memoir:

> Je n'écris pas pour nourrir ma veuve et mes enfants, moi, je suis tout à fait capable de subvenir à leurs besoins. Non, si j'ai enfin décidé d'écrire, c'est sans doute pour passer le temps, et aussi, c'est possible, pour éclaircir un ou deux points obscurs, pour vous peut-être et pour moi-même. C'est vrai que mon humeur est plutôt terne. La constipation, sans doute. Problème navrant et douloureux, d'ailleurs nouveau pour moi; autrefois, c'était bien le contraire. Longtemps, j'ai dû passer aux cabinets trois, quatre fois par jour; maintenant, une fois par semaine serait un bonheur. J'en suis réduit à des lavements, procédure désagréable au possible, mais efficace. *Pardonnez-moi*

scam an insurance company for her inheritance. Some critics and viewers have unjustly griped that Johnny's inability to recognize Nelly/Esther at once is impossible, even though the joint (un)recognizability of his wife after the experience of deportation is the point of the entire film.

> *de vous entretenir de détails aussi scabreux: j'ai bien le droit de me plaindre un peu. Et puis, si vous ne supportez pas ça vous feriez mieux de vous arrêter ici*.[22]

The inverse quantity of Aue's scatological and literary output are thus highlighted by the protagonist, for whom writing serves as an alternative venue of purgation.

Aue further fuses his Nazi past and the scatological through the warning he provides to his readers: "Pardonnez-moi de vous entretenir de détails aussi scabreux: j'ai bien le droit de me plaindre un peu. Et puis, si vous ne supportez pas ça vous feriez mieux de vous arrêter ici (13)." Informed in part by the saliency of the adjective "scabreux," Aue's admonition proves to have implications far further-reaching than his penchant for scatological writing. This particular term "scabrous" further enriches Aue's testimony when read beside Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's approbative pronouncement of the almost-total lack of meaningful scatological narratives in Holocaust literature: "For the sake of the outsider and out of respect for the continuity of the boundaries of art, much of the fiction of the Holocaust has been sanitized of the filthy, *scabrous* quality that life acquired in the camps; Borowski and Hilsenrath are among the few who, without courting sensationalism or scatology for its own sake, present the internal landscape of the concentrationary world—that is, the conjunction of a brutal reality and the degrees of accommodation that the imprisoned soul makes to that reality."[23] While Aue's warning proves logical in light of his present discussion of enemas and excrement, scatological motifs which go on to blanket the entire work, and thus give rise for his just cautioning of the more prudish reader, there is perhaps a deeper, more unsettling message contained within his caution. Readers come to understand that this same admonition applies equally to Aue's description of the horrific

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[22] Jonathan Littell, *Les Bienveillantes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 13. My italics. All further citations of Littell's book will be indicated parenthetically.

[23] Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: the Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 65. My italics.

acts that he and his colleagues perpetrate, revolting, gut-churning events which he goes on to describe in chilling, meticulous detail. The narrator thus forges a parallel between the readers' disgust of his actions and his own physical form, alerting all those who would be scandalized by the scabrous acts of his hand and body alike that they have been duly warned.

In addition to the apt metaphor between the "scabrous" body and testimony of Aue, the scatological in *Les Bienveillantes* does more than to suggest this joint disgust of war crimes and excrement alike. If the scatological informs our external perceptions of the work as readers, it also serves to elucidate Aue's growing unease with his complicity in the war's atrocities, and the great lengths he goes to in order to keep this unease suppressed, noticeable both in examining Aue-Narrator, who pens the memoir, and Aue-Narration, the self who participates in the war's carnage. Contrasted against the largely unemotional narrations of the crimes he commits, it is Max's body which betrays a deeper consciousness and psychological queasiness at these reprehensible acts through an excremental outlet. It is perhaps due to this subconscious equation that Aue concludes, "Malgré mes travers, et ils ont été nombreux, je suis resté de ceux qui pensent que les seules choses indispensables à la vie humaine sont l'air, le manger, le boire et l'excrétion, et la recherche de la vérité. Le reste est facultatif (13)." While the initial jar of seeing excrement and the search for truth side by side is slightly tempered by the Oxford comma, even more shocking is when the reader realizes that this punctuation is superfluous. For over the course of the book, Littell proves that excretion and the search for the truth are inextricable. In this quest for an alternative "truth," Aue invites the bravest among us to look without flinching as he pulls back the curtain on his sickening deeds, wartime exploits which like the scatological, are not for the faint of heart.

In Aue's universe, the scatological is bound tightly to fluctuating sentiments of power and helplessness, eventually harnessed consciously by Aue as a modicum of control over a life in which he feels increasingly stripped of control. From his initiation to the SD, to his brief stint as an active Einsatzgruppen participant, to his privileged position working under Himmler in the bureaucratic realization of the Final Solution, Max's growing sense of excremental urgency follows him around doggedly, much like the mythical Furies he evokes in the novel's title and final sentence. While Max's scatological unease begins to manifest itself through dream and memory space, it is in the work's penultimate section, Air, that the excremental comes to a head; the novel's most explicit, scatological section coincides with the protagonist's breakthrough moment of consciousness, an epiphany from which Aue will ultimately regress. For as the narrator asserts from his memoir's opening pages, "Je ne regrette rien: j'ai fait mon travail, voilà tout (12)." So what good is this latent unease, if it is not indicative of a conscious moral culpability?

Max Aue's body ultimately betrays a disquietude that his waking, conscious self is not capable of displaying: the scatological scenes he narrates frequently give way to short evaluations of his own conflicted mental state. Through examining his efforts to both control and repress his own body's excremental functions, readers gain a clearer understanding of the psyche of one imagined Nazi during his journey through the Final Solution. As burgeoning sentiments of unease and horror give way to a crystallizing anguish at the events around him, Aue regresses to a full denial of his own wrongdoing: constipated in his old age, the protagonist disavows any regret or responsibility, rebuking his readers, his "frères humains" [24] as he asserts that nothing

[24] Aue's perhaps-subconscious desire for absolution and his assertion that readers who have not been in his situation are in no situation to judge him is reinforced by the incipit's allusion to Villon's "Ballade des pendus": "Frères humains qui après nous vivez, N'ayez les cuers contre nous endurcis, Car se pitié de nous povres avez, Dieu en aura plus tost de vos mercis." François Villon, *The Poems of François Villon,* ed. Gallway Kinnell (Hanover, N.H:

but fate and circumstance have led him to this place in their stead. However, *Les Bienveillantes* functions jointly as a site of contemporary relevance and wisdom extending far past the ramifications of the guilt that Aue does or does not feel. In discussing the phases of testimony, Wieviorka makes the following assessment: "Le témoignage, surtout quand il se trouve intégré à un mouvement de masse, exprime, autant que l'expérience individuelle, le ou les discours que la société tient, au moment où le témoin conte son histoire, sur les événements que le témoin a traversés. Il dit, en principe, ce que chaque individu, chaque vie, chaque expérience de la Shoah a d'irréductiblement unique. Mais il le dit avec les mots qui sont ceux de l'époque où il témoigne, à partir d'un questionnement et d'une attente implicites qui sont eux aussi contemporains de son témoignage…"[25] Accounts of the past are thus fused to the era in which they are given: although Littell's novel may be fictitious, it poses compelling, unanswered questions on the way we perceive testimony, and the boundaries which have been set in place in order to govern its transmission. Through its transgression of multiple taboos and heavy emphasis on the scatological, *Les Bienveillantes* highlights the presence of an unwritten code which would deem certain perspectives more valid than others, and which aligns interest in perspectives not conforming to this set of standards with perversity. In providing unfettered access to the mind of a perpetrator, Littell harnesses a "scabrous scatology" which creates larger, more meaningful parallels with the even more scabrous testimony of a controversial voice, implicitly questioning whether an imposed morality governing Holocaust studies is ultimately helping or hurting our attempts to digest the past.

University Press of New England, 1965), 208. While discussed in detail in no shortage of scholarly works, see for example Julie Delorme "*Les Bienveillantes:* une parole qui donne la voix au bourreau*"* in Murielle Lucie Clément, ed., *Les bienveillantes de Jonathan Littell* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 31-46.

[25] Wieviorka, *Ere du témoin*, 13.

From introduction to initiation: Exploring the genesis of genocide

Max Aue's scatological body is linked to his involvement in mass terror from the moment he transitions from low-ranking informant to fledgling member of the RHSA, umbrella organization responsible for police and intelligence bodies in Nazi Germany. Joining the NSDAP largely in order to have his university inscription fees waived, Max avoids party politics, studying law in Berlin full time until an indiscrete tryst in the Tiergarten propels him into an active role in the Sicherheitsdienst (SD), the intelligence branch of the SS. Max's initiation to the organization is marked by his own bodily functions, a pairing which will continue throughout his complicity in genocide and which will become cemented as a link to his growing unease with the events around him, occurrences which foster feelings of extreme helplessness. After (correctly) falling under suspicion of a clandestine same-sex romp in the park, Max finds himself facing an uncertain future. As the Nazis detain him to interrogate his presence in this notorious gay hookup spot, Max's unease with the situation is mirrored by a growing sense of urgency to use the bathroom. He states, "Je commençais à être incommodé par une forte envie et enfin je demandai à aller aux W-.C. [Mon interrogateur] ricana 'Non. Après' et continua (72)." In a move that will eerily foreshadow the Nazi's policies towards deportees in concentration camps, Max finds party interrogators exerting prohibitive control over his bodily functions as he answers their questions.

It's during this moment of extreme vulnerability that Max first meets Thomas, the Pylades to his Orestes,[26] his friend and double who will follow him to the novel's shocking final page. As the interrogation quickly shifts into a SD recruitment effort, Thomas denies Max's

[26] This observation comparing Max and Thomas to the thicker-than-thieves friends of ancient Greece is vocalized by a fictionalized Robert Brasillach, fitting into *Les Bienveillantes'* larger dialogue with Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. For more on the intersection between Littell's novel and Greek tragedy, see Philip Watts, "Remnants of Tragedy," in *Literature and History: Around Suite Française and Les Bienveillantes*, eds. Richard J. Golsan and Philip Watts (New Haven, Ct.: Yale French Studies, 2012), 155-168.

insinuation that he is being blackmailed, responding aghast, "Mais pour qui donc nous prenez-vous? Pensez-vous réellement que le SD ait besoin de recourir au *chantage* pour son recrutement... je suis simplement venu vous aider dans un esprit de camaraderie, comme un national-socialiste envers un autre (75)." However, Max listens only half-heartedly to the propositions made by Thomas as the physical and metaphorical pressure around him continue to escalate: "Je ne l'écoutais qu'à moitié car mon envie me reprenait, plus violemment que jamais (75)." Max is finally offered a moment to relieve himself, an act which coincides with his ultimate decision to join the SD: "Je ne pouvais pas m'empêcher de songer aux cabinets: l'entretien achevé, Thomas patienta dans le couloir tandis que je me soulageais enfin. J'eus ainsi le loisir de réfléchir un peu : lorsque je sortais, je devais déjà avoir pris ma décision. Dehors, il faisait jour…. Et c'est ainsi, le cul encore plein de sperme, que je me résolus à entrer au *Sicherheitsdienst* (75)." Max's political involvement and bodily functions are thus fused from the moment triggering his direct participation in the war.

It is fitting that Max's entry to the SD should be undercut by this scatological urgency, for the excremental will follow him through his career in the SD. Sent to the Eastern Front in Ukraine to write reports in largely non-combat-related duties, the scatological becomes increasingly dominant in Max's subconscious as he attempts to process the events in which he is becoming increasingly complicit. While the excremental initially plants its seeds in the realm of dream and memory, as Max's direct participation in Nazi genocide grows, it spills out into the physical landscape around him when, as a bureaucrat subordinated to Himmler, he becomes fully aware of the enormity of the Final Solution. After his first encounter with excrement and the bodies of Nazi victims in the courtyard of the Lutsk chateau, where jointly inhabited by fascination and disgust, he qualifies "l'odeur immonde" as "le début et la fin de tout, la

signification même de notre existence," dreams with scatological motifs begin to invade his nights (39).[27]

Max's dreams become permeated with an increasing excremental helplessness as he witnesses the escalation of violence against Jews while stationed in Zhytomyr. After first dreaming of taking refuge from a strange house full of strangers by escaping to the bathroom,[28] the substance of excrement snowballs into a tangible force of crisis in his dreams. This escalating sense of scatological urgency in Max's dreams becomes directly correlated to the increasing difficulty in denying the vast number of men, women, and children being indiscriminately executed at the hands of the Nazis. As the troops begin the liquidation of the Kiev ghetto, Max's dreams become colored in parallel by liquid excrement:

> La nuit, l'inquiétude déteignait sur mon sommeil et infectait mes rêves: j'étais saisi d'une intense envie de déféquer et je courais aux cabinets, la merde jaillissait liquide et épaisse, un flot continu qui remplissait rapidement la cuvette, cela montait, je chiais toujours, la merde atteignait le dessous de mes cuisses, recouvrait mes fesses et mes bourses, mon anus continuait à dégorger. Je me demandais frénétiquement comment nettoyer toute cette merde, mais je ne pouvais pas l'arrêter, son goût âcre, vil, nauséabond emplissait ma bouche, me révulsant. Je m'éveillai en suffoquant, la bouche assoiffée, pâteuse et amère (112).

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[27]Like many of the readers who thumb through his memoirs, Max is jointly fascinated and revolted by the scene he witnesses, utterly disgusted yet unable to avert his gaze. His equation of the mixed odor of excrement and decay as "la signification même de notre existence" resonates with a later conversation with Viennese military doctor Hohenegg: "'L'avantage de l'anatomo-pathologie,' m'expliquait-il, 'c'est qu'à force d'ouvrir des cadavres de tous les âges et de tous les sexes, on a l'impression que la mort perd de son épouvante, se réduit à un phénomène physique aussi ordinaire et banale que les fonctions naturelles du corps (177).'" Perhaps, as Hohenegg suggests, death itself maybe envisioned in as a bodily function, repugnant yet natural and universal.

[28] This dream occurs after SD Colonel Paul Blobel explains to the troops that the *aktions* of the Einsatzgruppen mobile killing squads will now begin to include women and children, a controversial directive which upsets many of the soldiers with families of their own in Germany. Aue dreams that strange individuals occupy every room of his house, including a woman who orders him to sit down and write, a mandate which alludes to the protagonist's task of drafting reports from the war front, where he is similarly obligated to write despite a looming sentiment of unease. In the confining maze of the house, the toilet is the only unoccupied site left for reflection, the only empty place of refuge. The site evokes the space where Max's own decision to join the SD crystallizes: "J'envisageai de me jeter par la fenêtre; elle restait bloquée, prise dans la peinture. Les W-C, heureusement, étaient libres, et je m'y enfermai hâtivement (109)." This codification of the toilet space as a place of escape eerily evokes Robert Antelme's discussion of latrine spaces as a site of refuge for deportees against the quotidian horrors of the camp. See Chapter I.

Max underlines the strong link and fluctuating boundary between sleep and reality through his assertion that his waking anxiety has come to "infect" his dreams. In a frantic reverie which will foreshadow his own uncontrollable diarrhea en route to the Stalingrad *kessel*,[29] Max's panicked reaction to his own dream-body is so visceral that he even claims to dream the excrement's foul taste.

The links between dream-Max's disgust at his own body and feelings of helplessness resonate with the discussion of brutal, escalating Einsatzgruppen activity, as the narrator segues into a discussion of genocide. Colonel Paul Blobel congratulates the men on their continued efforts to round up Jews in Kiev as he plans to return to Zhytomyr, which has recently been declared *Judenrein.* Max reflects, "le Kommando avait vidé le ghetto le jour de notre arrivé à Kiev et liquidé les trois mille cent quarante-cinq Juifs restants. Un chiffre de plus pour nos rapports, il y en aurait bientôt d'autres (112)." The emptying of the ghetto and the use of the verb "liquider" used in a context of ethnic cleansing resonate sharply with Max's dream, where his bowel's escalating evacuation of liquid excrement creates an environment that is inherently filthy, and which he feels a panicked, unsuccessful compulsion to clean.

While the nightmare of uncontrollable diarrhea here is suggestively counterpointed against Max's unease with the liquidation of the Kiev ghetto, a parallel excremental nightmare serves to interrogate his relationship to theoretical Nazism and the quack pseudo-science propelling Nazi ideology. Eerily reminiscent of Aue's dream of his own ailment, in a subsequent dream, uncontrollable runs incapacitate his friend, the linguist and ethnographer Voss. Catalyzed

[29] In late 1942, Soviet forces managed to corral the German 6th Army in a *kessel*, a "pocket" or more literally a "cauldron," through a series of counterattacks. Disease, starvation, and Hitler's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to refortify the *kessel* via Luftwaffe airlifts led to a surrender and a major defeat for the Nazis. See Phillips Payson O'Brien, *How the War Was Won: Air-sea Power and Allied Victory in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

by Voss's official task to determine whether one group from the Caucasus (*Bergjude)* have any Jewish origin, the two men have a heated debate over the Nazi concept of racial anthropology, a rare argument in their otherwise-burgeoning friendship. While Aue regurgitates the official party line largely out of pure ignorance, the two men clash over Voss's vehement belief that such racial classifications are bogus. Once conscious of how heated their argument has become, the friends apologize to one another and agree to resume their conversation once Aue can have a few days to reflect on Voss's impassioned speech. Aue continues to digest this thought-provoking exchange nocturnally as a sense of disquiet over this conversation is soon cast over his dreams:

> Voss, dans une pièce sombre et vide, se tenait à quatre pattes, le derrière dénudé ; et de la merde liquide coulait de l'anus. Inquiet, je saisissais du papier, des pages des *Izvestia,* et tentais d'éponger ce liquide brun qui devenait de plus en plus foncé et de plus en plus épais. J'essayais de garder les mains propres, mais c'était impossible, la poisse presque noir recouvrait les feuilles et mes doigts, puis ma main entière. Malade de dégoût, je courais me rincer les mains dans une baignoire proche ; mais pendant ce temps cela coulait toujours (285).

Although Aue is no longer personally afflicted in this dream, it is strikingly similar to the nightmarish vision of his own diarrhea he cannot clean, as he remains the person tasked with the excrement's cleanup. Furthermore, Voss's lack of dialogue, thought, or emotion place both the task and associated panic of cleaning up the filth squarely on the protagonist, who pointedly attempts to mop up the mess with the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia,* a symbol of information and its ability to be warped by a government.

Despite Max's unsuccessful efforts to analyze the dream himself, unconvincingly linking the imagery to his father, further reflection binds the dream more concretely to his discussion of ethno-science with Voss. Both the conversation and dream weigh on Aue: "Je tenais moi aussi beaucoup à revoir Voss, mais en tête à tête… je voulais poursuivre l'entretien de l'autre jour; et puis mon rêve, je devais le reconnaître, m'avait troublé, et je pensais qu'une discussion avec Voss, sans mention de ces images affreuses bien sûr, m'aiderait à clarifier certaines choses

(290).” The ambiguity of these “certaines choses” along with the cause and effect phrasing of this final sentence—“Mon rêve… m’avait troublé, et je pensais qu’une discussion avec Voss… m’aiderait à clarifier certaines choses” – emphasize the unsettling relationship between the dream and the conversation in the protagonist’s subconscious. Though Aue does not want to discuss his dream with Voss, the syntax of his thoughts suggest a belief that further conversation with Voss will serve jointly to illuminate both his scatological dream and conflicted understanding of Nazi racial ideology, two facets of his psyche in a current state of unease.

While the excremental initially probes Aue’s subconscious anxieties, as his direct involvement in Nazi terror deepens, it spills over into the realm of his waking, conscious self as evidence of a burgeoning unease. The scatological informs Max’s shift from complicit observer of genocide to an actual killer through his participation in the Babi Yar massacre, the notorious *aktion* in which Einsatzgruppen forces murdered over 33,000 Kiev Jews in the span of a week. As Max enters the ravine, chaos and an excremental environment reign supreme: “Autour des corps, la terre sablonneuse s’imprégnait d’un sang noirâtre, le ruisseau aussi était noir de sang. Une odeur épouvantable d’excréments dominait celle du sang, beaucoup de gens déféquaient au moment de mourir (124).” The overwhelming sight of this excrement begins to make psychic imprints on Max and those around him. As the executioners cycle through the makeshift canteen for lunch, they experience visceral reactions of disgust to the food laid before them:

> Comme les exécutions devaient continuer sans pause on installa la cantine plus bas, dans une dépression d’où l’on ne voyait pas le ravin. Le groupe était responsable du ravitaillement ; quand on déballait les conserves, les hommes apercevant des rations de boudin noir, se mirent à tempêter et à crier violemment. Häfner, qui venait de passer une heure à administrer des coups de grâce, hurlait en jetant les boîtes ouvertes à terre : ‘Mais qu’est-ce que c’est que ce bordel ?’ ; derrière moi, un Waffen-SS vomissait bruyamment. Moi-même j’étais livide, la vue du boudin me renversait le cœur. Je me tournai vers Hartl, le Verwaltungsführer, et lui demandai comment il avait pu faire cela… je lui criai que c’était une disgrâce : ‘Dans cette situation, on peut se passer d’une telle nourriture (124)!’

While the dark, curled shape of the *boudin* and its constitution of blood evoke intestines, a comparison to excrement is made even more evident in the English translation, which as Sue Vice observes, pointedly translates Häfner's outburst of disgust, 'Mas qu'est-ce c'est que ce bordel?' into 'What the hell is this shit?' Working from this translation, Vice argues, "[The] 'blood pudding' makes the bloodshed in the ravine perceptible again [and prompts] a bodily acknowledgement of murder… Häfner's execration of the rations as excrement, and Aue's description of their emetic function, reveals an unconscious fear of the introjection of human blood through its association with the body's waste products. The danger of transgressing a taboo, that of cannibalism, is a sign of another taboo, that of murder, which has been disavowed."[30] A product evocative of both the blood and excrement which impregnate the earth around them, the *boudin* elicits outbursts and vomiting among the Einsatzgruppen members, some of whom react more strongly to the sight of this food product than to the sight of the executions themselves.

The excremental intensity at the ravine becomes magnified when Max starts killing. Given the order to administer *coups de grace* to survivors of the *aktion*, the blood on Max's hands is no longer metaphorical, and as such, a provocative reflection ensues. Max situates his disgust of the day's events in a personal scatological matrix:

> Pour atteindre certaines blessés, il fallait marcher sur les corps, cela glissait affreusement, les chairs blanches et molles roulaient sous mes bottes, les os se brisaient traîtreusement et me faisait trébucher, je m'enfonçais jusqu'aux chevilles dans la boue et le sang. *C'était horrible et cela m'emplissait d'un sentiment grinçant de dégout, comme ce soir en Espagne, dans la latrine avec les cafards*… une nuit j'étais pris de coliques, je courus à la latrine au fond du jardin… et le trou, propre la journée, grouillait d'énormes cafards bruns, cela m'épouvanta, je tentai de me retenir et revins me coucher, mais les crampes étaient trop fortes, il n'y avait pas de pot de chambre, je chaussai mes grosses bottes de pluie et retournai à la latrine, me disant que je pourrai chasser les cafards à coups de pied et faire vite … puis je remarquai un reflet sur le mur… le mur aussi

[30] Sue Vice, "Representing the Einsatzgruppen: The Outtakes of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah"* in *Representing Auschwitz: At the Margins of Testimony,* ed. Nicholas Chare et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 145.

> grouillait de cafards, tous les murs, le plafond aussi… ils étaient [au-dessus de la porte] aussi, une masse noire, grouillante, et alors je retirai lentement ma tête, très lentement, et je rentrai à ma chambre et me retins jusqu'au matin. *Marcher sur les corps des Juifs me donnait le même sentiment*, je tirais presque au hasard… puis je me ressaisis et essayai de faire attention, il fallait quand même que les gens souffrent le moins possible (125, my italics).

In a moment indicative of the scatological's placement throughout the memoir, Aue's confrontation with excrement and its memory provokes him to assess his mental state for the reader: "cela m'emplissait d'un sentiment rinçant de dégout." The nighttime setting of this childhood memory as well as the wildly grotesque, almost unimaginable description of the sea of cockroaches situate it in a nightmarish realm. Aue presents his recollections through the prism of his childhood self's perception, whose sheer terror at the cockroaches significantly colors his vision of the past, as his strong emotions create an exaggerated, larger-than-life tableau of cockroaches covering every inch of the latrine walls.

Aue relives this sense of childhood helplessness in the scene at the ravine. The parallel imagery between the two sites of disgust is striking: in many ways the scene at Babi Yar is directly transcribed from the young Aue's memory. Boot-clad in both visions, the adult Aue trades in his galoshes for combat boots, walking not on a squirming infestation of cockroaches, but on a throng of dying human beings, both of whom are enumerated in horrifying quantities. Both sites are similarly characterized by excrement, whether it be the garden latrine or the excrement of the deceased. However, the scenes diverge sharply in their notion of control. The young Aue's ability to control his own body in the past and steer his own fate, however uncomfortable it may be, rests the one point of divergence between the two episodes. The child Max's defiance of nature's call, in choosing not to use the filthy latrine and to hold in his colic, stands stark against adult Aue's decision to obey orders, a reminder that while war may make one feel forced to complete disgusting acts, the individual is nevertheless endowed with the free will to comply or resist.

Littell makes it clear that Aue takes no pleasure in killing, unlike many of the sadistic characters he will go on to encounter. Due in part to his identification with the feminine and his love of his twin sister, his female half, over the course of *Les Bienveillantes* Max's consciousness of his horrific actions is exacerbated in large part through periodic non-verbal encounters with the Shoah's young female victims. This phenomenon emerges noticeably for the first time in the ravine, where Aue crosses eyes with a young woman and is struck by her beauty and sad, expressive eyes. He retreats into the scene's carnage, and when he returns, the young woman lies dying, gasping for breath after a bullet emerges from under her breast. Aue's reaction is telling:

> Elle me fixait avec ses grands yeux surprises, incrédules, … et ce regard se planta en moi, me fendit le ventre et laisse s'écouler un flot de sciure de bois, j'étais une vulgaire poupée et ne ressentais rien, et en même temps je voulais de tout mon cœur me pencher et lui essuyer la terre et la sueur mêlées sur son front, lui caresser la joue et lui dire que ça allait, que tout irait pour le mieux, mais à la place je lui tirai convulsivement une balle dans la tête, ce qui après tout revenait au même, pour elle en tout cas si ce n'était pas pour moi, car moi à la pensée de ce gâchis humain insensé j'étais envahi d'une rage immense, démesurée, je continuais à lui tirer dessous et sa tête avait éclaté comme un fruit, alors mon bras se détacha de moi et partit tout seul dans le ravin, tirant de part et de l'autre, je lui courais après, lui faisant signale de m'attendre de mon autre bras, mais il ne voulait pas, il me narguait et tirait sur les blessés tout seul, sans moi, enfin, à bout de souffle, je m'arrêtai et me mis à pleurer (126).

Horrified by his environment, Aue annihilates this scene of compassion and beauty with a vengeance. His psychic pain over murdering this young woman with whom he sympathizes becomes clearer in his attempt to distance himself from his own nascent culpability, envisioning his arm detach itself from his body and run through a ravine with a life of its own. Erupting in tears, Max mourns the loss of control of his body while refusing to extricate himself from the mire around him.

Readers may initially view this scene as a sympathetic representation of a sentient human being, one forced to destroy beauty in the world around him and kill against his will by a regime whose nefarious clutches begin to tighten on his person ever more ominously. Yet Littell leaves

subtle signs of caution for those readers inclined to pity Aue's predicament. Ensconced within the mirror-like symmetry of the latrine and Babi Yar—the boots, the excrement, the staggering quantity of squirming beings on the ground— the particular resonance of the cockroach metaphor, given its *clin d'œil* to Nazi propaganda's equation between Jews and cockroaches, has not gone unnoticed by critics.[31] The use of the cockroach imagery in this scene left Édouard Husson and Michel Terestchenko particularly livid. In their *Les Complaisantes: Jonathan Littell et l'écriture du mal,* the authors rage against Littell's irresponsibility in his failure to situate the cockroach metaphor in the matrix of Nazi propaganda:

> Nous rejetons d'avance l'objection selon laquelle nous pratiquerons une lecture littérale d'un texte qui doit être lu en comprenant que Littell se met dans la tête du bourreau pour mieux en retracer le cheminement de pensée. Si c'était le cas, il aurait chargé un personnage d'indiquer, régulièrement, au lecteur, que les points de vue scandaleux ne devaient pas être lus au premier degré. Or il n'y a jamais rien de tel … A partir du moment où le prologue réclame de la compréhension et de l'indulgence pour les bourreaux, on prend le risque, alors, de réhabiliter jusqu'à la langue des bourreaux. Et c'est bien ce qui se passe dans la comparaison entre 'Juifs' et 'cafards', un passage qui rendait l'ouvrage d'emblée impubliable…[32]

However, a closer examination of this imagery suggests that it is precisely for this Jew/cockroach binary at Babi Yar that Max Aue tells another story despite himself, one which provides readers with a modus to judge his actions.

Even though Aue showcases an obvious aversion to the bloodshed, his unvoiced association between Jews and cockroaches situates him firmly in Nazism. Littell thus highlights

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[31] In addition to the frequent comparisons in Nazi propaganda as Jews as actual cockroaches (or vermin or fleas), cockroaches figure in propaganda films such as 1940's *The Eternal Jew (Der Ewige Jude).* Additionally, Zyklon-B, the gas used to exterminate deportees, was originally a poison for rats and cockroaches. The confluence of Jews, excrement, cockroaches, and the coprophagic undertones of the boudin episode are also highly evocative of the rabidly anti-Semitic pamphlets of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, notably 1937's *Bagatelles pour un massacre,* in which the author publishes a scathing critique of his work by "Salvador, Juif," who colorfully tells the pamphleteer to eat shit in referencing the coprophagic *chanson paillarde* "Le Hussard de la Garde."

[32] Husson and Terestchenko, *Les Complaisantes,* 44-45. Liran Razinsky offers an excellent rebuff to the excessive moral outrage of Husson and Terestchenko: "Well, is Jonathan Littell really to be reproached for not having supplied a reading manual for his book, "How One Should Read *Les Bienveillantes?"* Or is it perhaps up to readers to be critical when encountering such a passage?" Liran Razinsky, "We Are All the Same: Max Aue, Interpreter of Evil," in *Literature and History: Around Suite Française and Les Bienveillantes,* eds. Richard J. Golsan and Philip Watts (New Haven, Ct.: Yale French Studies, 2012), 145.

the paradox of his protagonist: while Aue may be an atypical Nazi who pushes back against our image of Nazis in some senses— in his distaste for killing, his identification with some female victims, his incestuous relationship, his same-sex exploits—he is nonetheless thoroughly Nazi, and the play between these two sides of him will characterize him throughout his experience in the war. Liran Razinsky saliently notes the dually a/typical nature of the protagonist's Nazism in discussing a sleazy, scheming, and ultimately successful effort of Aue to seduce Partenau, a young male officer, while convalescing at a sanatorium:[33]

> [Aue's] rhetoric, much more than his content, is often Nazi. There is in fact one important indication in the text of his slippery use of language: when he attempts to persuade his friend that homosexuality does not contravene the values of National Socialism but rather is well within its worldview, he provides an important clue as to how one should read him. For while his position there is actually the opposite of official Nazi policy, his rhetoric is thoroughly Nazi: devious, making only partial use of the truth, tying together half-truths and complete lies, using racial thinking based on arbitrary distinctions.[34]

Razinsky's dissection of the seemingly paradoxical interior and exterior of Aue's argument applies equally to his subconscious appropriation of the Jew/cockroach propaganda image, and as we shall see, to much of Aue's outwardly conflicted behavior throughout the course of the novel. For while Aue's appearance in Babi Yar may seem to contravene Nazism—identifying strongly with the young woman, he weeps in the ravine over his sense of helplessness at his detached phantom arm—the methods auxiliary in processing these scenes rest inherently ideologically Nazi, whether it be the slick, contorted argumentation he uses with Partenau or the implicit association his brain continues to make between victims of genocide and insect infestations. Although Aue is in many ways not a typical Nazi, the cockroach metaphor

[33] Like many of the scenes depicting both Aue's same-sex and incestuous encounters, Partenau's ultimate yielding to Aue's sleazy advances is itself not free from scatological undertones: "Le corps solide de Partenau recelait peu de surprises; il jouissait la bouche ouverte en rond, un trou noir (189)."
[34] Liran Razinsky, "We Are All the Same," 147.

reinforces his subconscious, deep-rooted ideological Nazi-ness at a key moment in which readers might otherwise feel tempted to pity the situation in which he finds himself.

Babi Yar is not the only place where Littell suggestively employs the cockroach/Jew metaphor, and it's through the joint examination of these cockroach scenes that readers should feel even less inclined to exculpate Aue for committing heinous crimes, however much his actions may seem to disturb him. Littell meaningfully resurrects the comparison between murdering Jews and cockroaches later in the book in Max's dialogue with a Sobibor guard named Döll, who tells Aue: "'Sobibor? C'est comme tout, on s'y habitue.' Il eut un geste étrange, qui m'impressionna fortement: du bout de sa botte, il frotta le plancher, comme s'il écrasait quelque chose. 'Des petits hommes et des petites femmes, c'est tout pareil. C'est comme marcher sur un cafard (542).'" Aue suggests to readers how they should judge Döll:

> Si Döll s'est retrouvé à Sobibor et son voisin non, c'est un hasard, et Döll n'est pas plus responsable de Sobibor que son voisin plus chanceux; en même temps, son voisin est aussi responsable que lui de Sobibor car tous deux servent avec intégrité et dévotion le même pays, ce pays qui a créé Sobibor… les Grecs, eux, faisaient une place au hasard dans les affaires des hommes (un hasard, il faut le dire, souvent déguisé en intervention des dieux), mais ils ne considéraient en aucune façon que ce hasard diminuait leur responsabilité. Le crime se réfère à l'acte, non pas à la volonté. Œdipe, lorsqu'il tue son père, ne sait pas qu'il commet un parricide… [mais] l'ignorance ne change rien au crime ; et cela, Œdipe le reconnaît, et lorsqu'enfin il apprend la vérité, il choisit lui-même sa punition, et se l'inflige. Le lien entre volonté et crime est une notion chrétienne… Pour les Grecs, peu importe si Héraclès abat ses enfants dans un accès de folie, ou si Œdipe tue son père par accident : cela ne change rien, c'est un crime, ils sont coupables : on peut les plaindre, mais on ne peut pas les absoudre… (545-546).

Through the cockroach metaphor, Döll's callousness is implicitly linked in the reader's mind to the narrator himself and the carnage of Babi Yar. The modus of judgment Aue proposes for Döll thus implicitly resonates as a method for readers to assess the narrator's own discomfort at Babi Yar. While both individuals may feel in some way uncomfortable over the actions they commit, their crimes must not be judged by their will, but by their actions alone.

Before his shift from actor to director of the Final Solution, Max's scatological sense of dread and unease emerge from dreams and memory, culminating in personal, physical malady. The excremental episodes which haunt the protagonist's movements around the Eastern Front become incarnate, underlining his bowels' metonymic representation of his inner feelings of helplessness. Advancing east with the troops in the disastrous winter siege of 1942, Aue's account of Stalingrad appears aptly in a section entitled "Courante," a double entendre fitting squarely into both the Baroque dance theme which structures each part of the novel and the work's massively scatological overtones.[35] Aue's diarrheic dreams in Ukraine come to foreshadow his experience in Stalingrad, his last experience in an active combat zone before an injury will catapult him into a position of bureaucratic power in the Final Solution. Like his excremental memories at Babi Yar, the excremental emerges at Stalingrad as a substance which provokes him to turn his gaze onto himself and his own mental state.

As the situation in the east spirals more and more out of control, Max becomes stricken with both fleas and a very real diarrhea, stemming from the execrable conditions of the front: "… [j'étais] déjà couvert [de poux], mes chasses attentives dans les coutures, le soir, n'y faisait rien : mon ventre, mes aisselles, l'intérieur de mes jambes étaient rouges de piqûres, que je ne pouvais m'empêcher de gratter jusqu'au sang. Je souffrais en outre des diarrhées, sans doute à cause de la mauvaise eau et de l'alimentation irrégulière (349)." Aue weeps at his helplessness, seeing in the total chaos of Stalingrad a perverted version of his youth: "Les larmes givraient sur mon visage, je pleurais pour mon enfance, pour ce temps où la neige était un plaisir qui ne connaissait

[35] When asked by Richard Millet whether this word play was explicit, Littell's response was simply, "Disons que ça tombait bien (9)." For more on this and on Littell's decision to use Baroque dance movements to name each section, see Richard Millet and Jonathan Littell, "Conversation à Beyrouth," *Le Débat* 144 (2007): 4-24, and Susan Rubin Suleiman, "When the perpetrator becomes a reliable witness of the Holocaust: On Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes*," *New German Critique* 36 (2009): 1-19, where she notably underscores the parallel with Céline's *Rigodon,* "which similarly uses a dance metaphor to describe the madness of World War II (6)."

pas de fin, où une ville était un espace merveilleux pour vivre et où une forêt n'était pas encore un endroit commode pour tuer les gens (350)." In the same way that the physical environment around him spins vertiginously out of control, bending from Aue's preconceived civilian codifications of these spaces, his own body begins to disobey him. As he displaces himself by car with other soldiers, his dreams of uncontrollable, un-cleanable diarrhea spill out horrifically into reality: "… tous les quarts d'heure je devais courir aux latrines laisser échapper un mince filet de merde liquide; dix minutes après le départ de la voiture, je dus la faire arrêter pour me précipiter derrière une congère ; ma pelisse m'encombrait et je la souillai. Je tachai de la nettoyer avec de la neige, mais ne réussis qu'à me geler les doigts ; de retour dans la voiture, je me blottis contre la portière et fermai les yeux pour tenter d'effacer tout (351)." Both his scatological dreams of Voss and himself foreshadow Aue's dually-physical and emotional senses of helplessness at Stalingrad and his inability to manage these situations through cleaning.

It is fitting that Max should experience an acute sense of powerlessness at Stalingrad, for it is a situation in which not only his disobedient body refuses to work effectively, but it is one of the key moments in which Nazi forces are similarly beginning to lose control in the war. As illness runs rampant, temperatures fall to -25ºC, and rumors spread of cannibalism among Soviet prisoners, it becomes evident that the Nazis are losing their footing in a key offensive. Even more telling, the Nazi's increasing powerlessness in the situation becomes discernable through a series of comparisons between ground troops and the prisoners of the concentration camps, as the troops of Stalingrad begin to suffer the same horrors their compatriots will inflict on interned populations of the camps. In addition to the scourge of fleas and meager rations, the onsite doctor provides a description of the men he sees as:

> …des hommes avec des diarrhées si sévères que le peu qu'ils absorbent ne reste pas assez longtemps dans leur estomac et ressort quasiment tel quel… la viande en conserve comme la vôtre, très graisse, tue parfois des hommes qui n'ont mangé que du pain et de la soupe depuis des semaines; leur organisme ne supporte pas le choc, le cœur pompe trop vite et lâche d'un coup. Il y aussi le beurre, qui arrive encore: il est livré en blocs gelés… alors [les soldats] le cassent à coups de hache et sucent les morceaux. Ça provoque des diarrhées épouvantables qui les achèvent rapidement. Si vous voulez tout savoir, une bonne partie des corps que je reçois ont le pantalon encore plein de merde, heureusement congelée : à la fin, ils sont trop faibles pour baisser culotte (354).

Were it not made explicit that the doctor is discussing German troops, these tableaus could easily be mistaken for descriptions of the camps and their liberations, of prisoners stricken with dysentery from poor water and nutrition, too weak to defecate in a latrine, of inmates accidentally killed from rapidly ingesting the food provided by the well-intentioned liberating army, a drastic shock to their emaciated systems. Aue compares the 6th Army's shame at their powerlessness to his own shame at his uncontrollable body: "…ce n'est que lorsque la violence aveugle et irrésistible frappe à son tour les plus forts que le mur de leur certitude se lézarde… maintenant, autant que l'artillerie et les snipers soviétiques, le froid, les maladies, et la faim, c'était la lente montée de la marée intérieure qui les tuaient. En moi aussi elle montait, âcre et puante comme la merde à l'odeur douce qui coulait à flots de mes boyaux (361-362)." The scatological at Stalingrad thus not only highlights Aue's personal vulnerability, but extends to the entire regime, as the excremental elucidates the humiliation of the troops as the army corps spins out of control in the chaos of the Eastern Front.

In addition to highlighting both Max's personal feelings of powerlessness and the Nazis' increasing difficulty to retain their hold in the East, Max's excremental body catalyzes reflection on the victims of the war, with its horrific tableaus triggering diarrhea and with that diarrhea in turn provoking more contemplation of the war's far-reaching, catastrophic consequences:

> Un jour, je me trouvais au second étage d'un immeuble, un petit obus de mortier éclata dans la rue; quelques instants après, j'entendis un véritable fou rire. Je regardai par la fenêtre et vis comme un torse humain posé au milieu des gravats : un soldat allemand, les deux jambes

> arrachées par l'explosion, riait à gorge déployée. Je regardais et il n'arrêtait pas de rire au milieu d'une flaque de sang qui allait s'élargissant parmi les débris. Ce spectacle me hérissa, me noua les entrailles ; je fis sortir Ivan [chauffeur/guide] et baissai mon pantalon au milieu du salon. En expédition, lorsque les coliques me prenaient, je chiais n'importe où, dans des couloirs, des cuisines, des chambres à coucher, voire, au hasard des ruines, accroupi sur une cuvette de W-C, pas toujours raccordée à un tuyau, il est vrai. Ces grands immeubles détruits, où l'été dernier encore des milliers de familles vivaient la vie ordinaire, banale de toutes les familles, sans se douter que bientôt des hommes dormiraient à six dans leur lit conjugal, se torcheraient avec leurs rideaux ou leurs draps, se massacreraient à coups de pelle dans leurs cuisines, et entasseraient les cadavres des tués dans leurs baignoires, *ces immeubles m'emplissaient d'une angoisse vaine et amère* (360).

This scene in Stalingrad follows the paradigm under which, confronted directly with the scatological, Aue is provoked to comment on his own mental state. Aue highlights the direct connection between his horror at this laughing human torso and his abrupt need to excrete through the semicolon's suggestion of cause and effect: "Ce spectacle me hérissa, me noua les entrailles; je fis sortir Ivan et baissai mon pantalon au milieu du salon." Not only is his need to excrete linked to the atrocities of war, voiding his bowels almost immediately at the sight of this grotesque scene, but the act of excreting itself brings him to ponder his own emotions towards civilian suffering of the war. Like the space of Stalingrad, whose components of city, snow, and forest have become perverted through war, bringing Max to tears, the stark recodification of these once-homey indoor spaces as dens of violence and filth fills the protagonist with an "angoisse vaine" as he becomes conscious of the war's devastating consequences for the innocent people whose lives are being uprooted by Nazism.[36]

From the moment of his initiation in the SD, the scatological follows Max Aue in his dreams, memory, and waking moments, problematizing the protagonist's growing sense of discomfort at his deepening complicity in mass murder. In situations of extreme violence and

[36] German occupying troops similarly exacted a sort of excremental vandalism on the streets and homes of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War. See Olivier Berger, "Les Excréments de l'occupant allemand en 1870–71: un tabou du scandale, de la dérive et de la profanation," *Dix-Neuf* 17 (2013): 197–209. My thanks to Janet Horne for sharing this article with me.

personal powerlessness, the scatological provokes Aue to assess his own mental state for the reader, providing brief commentaries of a disgust and unease he is unwilling to act upon. Aue's nascent sense of helplessness culminates in his experiences on the ground in Stalingrad, where the excrement of his nightmares and troubled memories tumbles into the physical environment around him, highlighting Stalingrad's role as an acme of both personal and political powerlessness. However, after a serious injury on the Eastern Front steers his course away from active duty, Aue undertakes a grisly career as a bureaucrat directly subordinated to Himmler; no longer a peon enacting the *Endlösung* on the ground, Aue finds himself in a position where he is not only conscious of the project's horrific scope, but is able himself to implement changes in the Nazi realization of mass murder. Yet with this increase in power comes an increasing sense of unease at the gruesome policies the narrator helps to create. Largely conscious of the tug-of-war uniting the scatological with control, it is thus in the final phase of the novel where Aue lashes out, attempting to exact authority over the vertiginous situation around him in the only way he knows how: through harnessing the power of excrement in bizarre, lurid, yet potent protestations of his own agency.

All roads lead to Auschwitz: Max Aue, bureaucrat of the Final Solution

Although conscious of the atrocities he personally witnesses while deployed in the East, Max's bureaucratic ascension following an injury at Stalingrad endows him with a larger knowledge of the Nazi genocide project's full, horrifying scope. After being shot catalyzes hallucinations of his sister, farting dwarves, and evacuating his bowels of live insects, Max fittingly conceives of his injury as a "trou dans le front," an all-seeing third eye turned towards

the darkness (410).[37] Aue aligns this scatological "trou" with his clairvoyance regarding the Final Solution in all its magnitude, once again joining notions of excrement, war, and testimony. Max's sense of scatological urgency thus intensifies in the final act of the Nazi's bid for world domination; the protagonist undertakes increasingly bizarre attempts to control his environment through the excremental, a substance coloring both the administrative realization of the Final Solution and his denial of his own complicity in the genocide of European Jews.

As Himmler's Specialist of Jewish Affairs, Max's research into effective mass extermination leads him from the death camps to mass deportations in Hungary to moments of hobnobbing among the Nazi elite, sighing to himself while grouse hunting with Albert Speer, "voilà ce qu'ils ont fait de moi… un homme qui ne peut voir une forêt sans songer à une fosse commune (645)." During this period of bureaucratic involvement in the Final Solution, Aue is suddenly stricken with a serious fever and diarrhea in Menuet. Throughout his feverish, hallucinogenic ailment, Aue's subjection to his own sick body becomes projected onto a crystallizing awareness that Germany is losing the war, as he begins to reflect on the price of his complicity. The resultant sentiment of powerlessness causes him to lash out at those around him. Max fitfully awakes from strange reveries due to an overwhelming need to vacate his bowels:

> Je ne sais pas trop comment, je réussis à me traîner jusqu'à la salle de bains, à me poser sur la cuvette pour me vider, une longue diarrhée qui semblait ne plus finir. … Je savais que si je ne faisais rien, si personne ne venait, j'allais mourir ici, sur ce lit, au milieu des flaques d'excréments et d'urine, car, incapable de me relever, j'allais bientôt faire sous moi. Mais cette idée ne m'affligeait pas, ne m'inspirait aucune pitié ou peur, *je n'éprouvais que du mépris envers ce que j'étais devenu et ne souhaitais ni que cela cesse, ni que cela continue* (743, my emphasis).

[37] He claims, "J'avais le sentiment que le trou dans mon front s'était ouvert sur un troisième œil, un œil pinéal, non tourné vers le soleil, capable de contempler la lumière aveuglante du soleil, mais dirigé vers les ténèbres, doué de pouvoir de regarder le visage nu de la mort, et de le saisir, ce visage, derrière chaque visage de chair, sous les sourires, à travers les peaux les plus blanches et les plus saines, les yeux les plus rieurs (410)."

Like the "angoisse vaine" which fills him as he defecates in the Stalingrad apartment, the protagonist's reactions to his bodily functions catalyze self-reflection, as he vocalizes feelings of disdain for his excreting body and embroilment in Nazism alike. Through impassioned, feverish tirades, Aue's feelings of helplessness prove to extend past his own befouled body and allude to the larger powerlessness he has internalized as complicit in a regime facing a looming defeat. Echoing the dually scabrous nature of the novel, a conversation with his caretaker underlines the link between the contempt or *mépris* he feels towards his own body's weakness and his disgust at all he and the regime have undertaken in the name of the war as emotional accusations spew uncontrollably out of him like the diarrhea from his ailing body.

Max's feverish anger causes him to strike out at his caretaker, a young war widow named Hélène who he has begun to see socially. Although he cares for her in a certain sense, numerous mental blocks prevent Aue from initiating the sort of romantic, sexual relationship that she desires. As Hélène cares for the delirious Aue, the goodness and patience of his friend disgust him. While her attentions initially exacerbate Aue's revulsion at his excreting body, they go on to provoke his disgust at the regime and his complicity in it:

> 'J'ai besoin de chier,' dis-je brutalement… Je me dis amèrement que c'était la première fois qu'elle me voyait nu, je n'avais pas de pyjama, et qu'elle n'avait jamais dû imaginer qu'elle me verrait nu dans ces conditions. Je n'en avais pas honte, mais j'étais dégoûté de moi-même et ce dégoût s'étendait à elle, à sa patience et à sa douceur… Quand sa main approchait de ma bouche je ne savais si je devais la mordre ou l'embrasser… De images me venait… je me voyais vivant avec cette femme, réglant ainsi ma vie, je quittais la SS et toutes les horreurs qui m'environnaient depuis tant d'années, mes propres travers tombaient de moi comme la peau d'un serpent lors de la mue, mes hantises se dissolvaient comme un nuage d'été, je rejoignais le fleuve commun. Mais ces pensées, loin de m'apaiser, me révoltaient : Et quoi ! égorger mes rêves pour enfoncer ma verge dans son vagin blond, embrasser son ventre qui gonflerait en portant de beaux enfants sains ? Je revoyais les jeunes femmes enceintes, assises sur leurs valises dans la gadoue de Kachau … ces sexes et ces ventres de femmes qu'elles porteraient au gaz comme une médaille d'honneur (747).

Hélène's kindness triggers an inner self-loathing, for her very presence highlights Aue's jointly physical and psychic helplessness: incapable of caring for his own befouled body, Aue

recognizes that he is equally unable to abandon the horrors which surround him daily. The protagonist thus sees himself as so inextricably bound to the regime that everything he has seen and done mars his ability even to fantasize about one day leading a normal life. Instead, Aue sees his possible future as irrevocably tainted by the images of the victims he has helped to murder systematically as a participant in the Nazi regime.

Despite feeling drained and empty, Max's recognition of his own weakness causes him to explode at Hélène. In a brutal, impassioned sea of unprecedented informal speech, he directly implicates her in the crimes of their nation:

> Tu n'as aucune idée, tu ne sais rien de la fatigue, tu vis ta gentille vie de fille allemande, les yeux fermés, tu ne vois rien, tu vas au boulot, tu cherches un nouveau mari, tu ne vois rien de ce qui se passe autour de toi… Tu ne sais rien de moi, rien de ce que je fais, rien de ma fatigue, depuis trois ans qu'on tue les gens, oui, voilà ce qu'on fait, on tue, on tue les Juifs, on tue les Tsiganes, les Russes, les Ukrainiens, les Polonais, les malades, les vieux, les femmes, les jeunes femmes comme toi, les enfants !... Et ceux qu'on ne tue pas, on les envoie travailler dans nos usines, comme des esclaves… Ne fais pas l'innocent ! Tes vêtements, d'où crois-tu qu'ils viennent ?...Et les obus de la Flak qui te protège des avions ennemis, d'où viennent-ils… Tu ne t'es jamais posé ce genre de question ? .. Ou bien tu ne savais pas ? C'est ça ? … Tu viens me soigner, tu crois que je suis un homme aimable, un docteur en droit, un parfait gentleman, un bon parti ? On tue des gens, tu comprends, c'est ce qu'on fait, tous, ton mari était un assassin, je suis un assassin, et toi, tu es la complice d'assassins, tu portes et tu manges le fruit de notre labeur (748-749).

Max's revulsion at abandoning Nazism to start a life with Hélène crystallizes through the continuation of the pregnancy motif. Like the future "beaux enfants sains" whose existence would be colored by the gassed Jewish women of Kachau, Hélène's wartime existence becomes aligned with grotesque birth through the notion that she, too, carries the poisoned fruit of the regime: "tu portes et tu manges le fruit de notre labeur." Hélène cannot be the escape from Nazism that Aue half-fantasizes, because she is equally embroiled in the problem, a "complice d'assasins." Through his tirades against Hélène, who forces him to confront nascent feelings of

physical and psychic infirmary, Aue vents his rage over the body and body politic which disgust him and subjugate his agency.[38]

Max's sentiments of ire and powerlessness over the turning of the war's tide become even clearer after his convalescence. His feverish tirades seem long forgotten, relegated to memory as he resumes his duties as Specialist of Jewish Affairs. While overseeing the evacuation of Auschwitz, Aue's conduct once again serves to highlight the massive divide between the un-Naziness of his actions and their Nazi rationale, similar to his seduction of Partenau and equation of Jews with cockroaches. Battling resistance from staff on the ground, Aue works tirelessly to keep prisoners alive during the death march. Arguing constantly with personnel over the lack of food and clothing for prisoners, he takes it upon himself to redistribute the blankets of the dead and reprimands a guard beating a detainee for stopping to defecate. Yet despite the semblance of goodness and goodwill that these actions might initially suggest, Aue's motivations do not betray a regard for human life. Instead, conscious of Germany's looming defeat, Aue's obsession with keeping the *häftlinge* alive stems solely from the prisoners' vitality as an economic resource for the future of the Reich: "mon rôle consistait à garantir le caractère prioritaire de l'évacuation de la main-d'œuvre utilisable, en bon état, destiné à être réexploitée à l'intérieur du Reich (768)." Aue's earnest undertaking of this aim coupled with his frustration at those who complicate this task demonstrate a sincere desire to restore the Nazi power dynamic

[38] Jointly confronted with the "scabrous" testimony and body of her friend, Hélène may also evoke the gaze of the reader: she is able to gain access to the unfiltered thoughts of Aue thanks to her ability to look calmly, without disgust and unflinchingly at the body and mind of the protagonist. Mirroring his constant accusations of his readership, his "frères humaines" who he asserts would have acted the same in his stead, Aue similarly lashes out at Hélène by deflecting some of the war's blame on her. Hélène ultimately accepts her share of the blame foisted upon her by Max, who continues to confide in her. Recounting to her the crimes he witnesses on a successive trip to Hungary, Hélène responds, "Je sais que leur vengeance sera terrible… Mais nous l'aurons méritée (767)."

by preserving what he deems to be crucial assets, as his almost-sympathetic actions become once again mired by a mind thoroughly inculcated in Nazi ideology.

The situation in Germany becomes even more dire for Aue on both personal and political levels. In an attempt to escape both the escalating bombings in Berlin as well as the dogged detectives pursuing him for the grisly murder of his mother and stepfather, Max takes refuge in his sister's abandoned Pomeranian mansion. The narrative of this stay forms the entirety of the novel's penultimate section, Air. Much in the way that Courante's title functions through joint significations, Air creates rich, nuanced levels of meaning throughout the content of the short section. In addition to its evocation of nothingness, suspension, and the vacuum of reality in which Max processes his thoughts, its musical connotations imbue the section with meaning: in opera, airs and arias typically explore and nuance one or two emotions, versus wordier recitative which advances plot. Airs typically focus on one voice or instrument, and save sparse conversations with the housekeeper and some French STO workers, this section is remarkable in that it takes place almost entirely in Max's head from a point of aloneness. The musical notion of "Air" thus resonates sharply with the heightened emotions and solitude found within this section.

In keeping with the novel's baroque dance theme, Max performs his own sort of increasingly erratic, emotional, excremental dance in Air, embracing both haphazardness and control in a solitary place that is a pause from the oppressive reality around him. The most overtly scatological and sexual of the novel's various sections, it is also the most widely loved or loathed of them all, with critics such as Richard Golsan and Susan Ruban Sulieman on the one hand deeming it as "unnecessary and self-indulgent… a not very persuasive pastiche of Bataille" while others such as the novel's Gallimard editor Richard Millet finding it to be a personal

favorite.[39] Littell viewed Air as the key to his novel, asserting in conversation with Millet that it is "le cœur du livre… la seule chose que je puisse en dire est qu'il a une fonction étrange par rapport au reste, étrange mais vitale. C'est le cœur par absence, d'une certaine manière. Pour moi, le livre est inconcevable sans ce chapitre. Je ne pourrais pas l'expliquer pus précisément."[40] Air's significance is difficult to contest, for it is in this section that Aue pushes back against the forces that seek to control him, enacting increasingly transgressive and erratic behaviors through a unique harnessing of the scatological. It is through this frantic attempt to control his own body that Aue will propel himself to a moment of extreme consciousness, an epiphany from which he will regress, and whose memory he will ultimately bury through a joint physical and psychological constipation.

Air occurs in a sort of vacuum outside of the temporality of the novel, one in which Max directly confronts his worries and is most conscious of the barriers of memory around him. Throughout the book, the reader becomes more and more conscious of lacunas which exist in the events Max narrates. He speaks prolifically about waking up to find his mother and stepfather murdered during a visit to their home in Antibes, and about the mysterious young twins present there. However, Max refuses to acknowledge or even to consider the facts which are immediately apparent to readers: that it was he who killed his mother and stepfather in a delirious rage, and that the twins they had been raising are in fact the product of his and Una's incestuous union. While Max remains obstinate in his deep-rooted denial of these two occurrences, here, the voice of Aue-Narrator emerges over Aue-Narration to acknowledge the gaps in his memory, intricate, yet filled with holes like the lace he has come to manufacture in

[39] Richard J. Golsan and Susan Rubin Suleiman, "*Suite Française* and *Les Bienveillantes*, Two Literary 'Exceptions': A Conversation," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 12.3 (2008): 329.
[40] Littell and Millet, "Conversation à Beyrouth," 24.

his postwar life. He writes of his Pomeranian séjour, "De ce qui se passa dans cette belle maison vide, je ne sais pas si je peux dire grand-chose. J'ai déjà écrit une relation de ces événements, et, lorsque je l'écrivais, elle me paraissait véridique, en adéquation avec la réalité, mais il semblerait qu'en fait elle ne corresponde pas à la vérité. Pourquoi en est-il ainsi ? Difficile à dire. Ce n'est pas que m souvenirs soient confus, au contraire, j'en garde de nombreux et de très précis, mais beaucoup d'entre eux se chevauchent et même se contredisent, et leur statut est incertain (798)." Though the events he will narrate may seem chaotic and frantic, Air constitutes a rare moment where Aue explicitly acknowledges the personal limitations which govern his ability to remember and recount the past.

Although the scatological has long stood for a sense of powerlessness in Max's sub/conscious dealings, his fantasies and behaviors escalate as he begins to exact a deliberate harnessing of the excremental. Max consciously aligns autonomy and excrement through a corprophagic daydream:

> Je dînais pour la troisième fois seul dans cette grande salle éclairée aux chandelles, avec solennité, et en mangeant et en buvant je fus envahi par une fantasmagorie saisissante, la vision démente d'une parfaite autarcie coprophagique. Je me figurais enfermé seul dans ce manoir avec Una, isolé du monde, à tout jamais. Chaque soir, nous mettions nos meilleurs habits… et nous nous asseyions pour un dîner élégant, à cette table couverte d'une nappe en dentelle et dressé avec des gobelets en cristal… dans les verres, nos propres urines, sur les assiettes de beaux étrons pâles et fermes, que nous mangions tranquillement avec une petite cuiller en argent. Nous nous essuyions les lèvres avec des serviettes monogrammées en batiste, nous buvions, et lorsque nous avions fini, nous allions nous-mêmes à la cuisine laver les couverts. Ainsi, nous nous suffisions à nous-mêmes, sans pertes et sans traces, proprement. *Cette vision aberrante m'emplit pour le reste du repas d'une angoisse sordide* (812, my emphasis).

In a continuation of the novel's alignment of excrement with emoting, this scatological fantasy provokes Aue to assess openly his own mental state. Given the motif's recurrent use in underlining Max's hyperconscious helplessness, this scatological vision and his emotional reaction to it are fitting representations of his desire to enact some modicum of control over his own existence, a matter he will grotesquely take into his own hands as the section progresses.

While the scato-sexual fantasies and acts he goes on to undertake refer initially to his unrequited love for Una, Max's sister comes to function as a bridge which permits him to internalize the war through transposing its various elements onto the physical environment around him. Throughout the section, Aue effectively maps Auschwitz onto his sister's house and projects the identities of the Holocaust's female victims onto Una— the only person he claims to love— and thus by extension, onto himself, her twin and mirror image. Alone in the mansion, Max becomes increasingly aware of the presence of Auschwitz, which lurks in the shadows behind all of his fitful exploits, emerging from his dreams into his moments of waking conscious. During his first night in Pomerania, Max dreams of Una: "Dans une chambre sombre, je voyais une grande et belle femme en robe blanche, peut-être une robe de mariée… c'était de toute évidence ma sœur, elle était prostrée au sol, sur la moquette, en proie à des convulsions et des diarrhées incontrôlables. De la merde noire suintait à travers sa robe… [son mari] paraissait indifférent aux odeurs immondes qui émanaient d'elle et me prenait à la gorge, je devais me forcer pour contrôler mon dégoût, la nausée qui montait (mais où donc étais-je, dans ce rêve, moi) (803)?" Max's confusion regarding his own placement in the scene, as well as the white dress evoke an episode where at school, starring as the title role in a school production of Electra, he viscerally reacts to his own reflection in the mirror – "Je portais une long robe blanche, des sandales et une perruque dont les boucles noires dansaient sur mes épaules: losque je me regardai dans le miroir je crus voir Una et fallis m'évanoir (380)." Given his recurrent scatological nightmares and his inability to locate himself within the dream scene, the white robed figure evokes both Max and Una, figuring in a dialogue linking the unity of the twins.

While the dream may seem to have no connection to Auschwitz, the next day Aue forges a parallel between the two as he reflects on the camp's horrific evacuation:

> Je songeais au rêve affreux de la nuit, j'essayais de m'imaginer ma sœur les jambes couvertes d'une diarrhée liquide, collante, à la puanteur abominablement douce. Les évacuées décharnées d'Auschwitz, blotties sous leurs couvertures, avaient elles aussi les jambes couvertes de merde, leurs jambes semblables à des bâtons ; celles qui s'arrêtaient pour déféquer étaient exécutées, elles étaient obligées de chier en marchant, comme les chevaux. Una couverte de merde auraient été encore plus belle solaire et pure sous cette fange qui ne l'auraient pas touchée, qui aurait été incapable de la souiller... *Ces pensées me ravageaient la tête, impossible de les en chasser, je peinais à respirer et ne comprenais pas ce qui m'envahissait si brutalement* (805-806, my emphasis).

Like Stalingrad and the coprophagic reverie, Aue's reflections on his own perturbed mental state formulaically follow his confrontations with the scatological. In a theme extending to the section's end and its jointly psychic and sexual climax, Max begins to map the experience of genocide onto Una, whose image he latches onto in order to chase out that of the emaciated deportees, redirecting a sense of pity away from them and projecting it onto the fantasy of his sister.[41]

If Una grows to resemble a deportee, so, too does her house begin to function as a stand-in for Auschwitz. Aue links the two sites despite himself, stating, "L'idée me venait de me mettre nu, d'aller explorer nu cette grande maison sombre et froide et silencieuse, un espace vaste et libre mais aussi privé et plein de secrets… Et cette pensée en amenait derrière elle une autre, son double obscur, celle de l'espace quadrillé et surveillé des camps : la promiscuité des baraquements, le grouillement des latrines collectives, aucun endroit possible pour avoir, seul ou à deux, un moment humain (809)." It is this codification of Una's house as a site epitomizing oppressive control which will prompt Aue to act out accordingly, lashing out and exacting control in the most fitting way he can conceive of, through flexing his own excremental body.

[41] Max's realization in Air that the twins must be Una's additionally leads him to link the image of her pregnant belly to the women and children he saw in the camps, much like the thought of Hélène as a potential mother to his children unearths the image of the pregnant women at Kachau during his delerium in Menuet: "Je voyais l'image de ces mères qui serraient leurs enfants tandis qu'on les fusillait, je voyais ces Juives hongroises assises sur leurs valises, des femmes enceintes et des filles qui attendaient le train et le gaz au bout du voyage (816-817)."

Max's colorful dreams and fantasies begin to spill out into real life transgressive behavior as his yearning for autonomy, demonstrated in his cophrophagic fantasy, leads him to act out increasingly subversive behavior, creating an environment freed from societal taboo. If the scatological highlights his overwhelming sense of powerlessness, here as Aue spins out of control he harnesses it to perform acts that are both erratic and deliberate, striving to exact control and regain autonomy over his own body, the same one whose detached arm shoots aimlessly through Babi Yar, by yielding to its wildest impulses:

> Je jouais à me cacher, sachant qu'il n'y avait personne pour me trouver, je ne savais plus trop ce que je faisais, je suivais les impulsions de mon corps abasourdi, mon esprit restait clair et transparent mais mon corps, lui, se réfugiait dans son opacité et sa faiblesse…. Je commettais toutes sortes d'obscénités, je me mettais à genoux sur le lit étroit et me fichais une bougie dans l'anus… je chiais accroupi sur les toilettes turques dans l'obscur réduit des domestiques, je ne m'essuyais pas, mais me branlais debout dans l'escalier de service, frottant contre la rambarde mes fesses merdeuses dont l'odeur m'assaillait le nez et me démontait la tête ; et en jouissant je manquais basculer dans les escaliers, je me rattrapai de justesse en riant et regardai les traces de merde sur le bois, que j'essuyai soigneusement avec une petite nappe en dentelle prise dans la chambre d'amis (834).

Max revels in his ability to control and defile his physical environment, relying on the one substance which consistently marks his own helplessness to prove his agency.[42] His erratic rage becomes bound to notions of war memory and testifying through the lace napkin he uses to dry the excrement on the walls. As a manufacturer of lace after the war, Max weaves lace in the same way he does memory, spinning intricate constellations that are both inherently comprised of holes.[43] Max himself is conscious of this parallel, stating, "… des souvenirs, j'en ai, et une quantité considérable même. Je suis une véritable usine à souvenirs. J'aurai passé ma vie à me manufacturer des souvenirs, même si l'on me paye plutôt, maintenant, pour manufacturer de la

[42] The shit-smeared walls of his sister's house eerily evoke the blood on the walls after the murders at his mother's house, another situation where Max lashes out in an effort to control the environment around him. For references to the blood-spattered walls, as observed by inspectors Clemens and Weser, see p. 693.

[43] For deeper analysis of these parallels, see Aurélie Barjonet, "Manufacturing Memories: Textual and Mnemonic Weaving in *The Kindly Ones,"* in *Writing the Holocaust Today*, op. cit.

dentelle (12).” As Helena Duffy notes, this feces-stained napkin therefore evokes Aue’s writing project on the whole: “Tissée de mots appartenant à la langue de sa mère, la dentelle de son écriture ne peut faire autrement que se recouvrir de merde, telle une nappe en tissu ajouré dont Max se sert chez les von Üxküll pour nettoyer les surfaces tachées de ses excrétions.”[44] Rebelling against the divide between his “clear and transparent” mind and his body cloaked in “opacity and weakness,” Max’s spasmic movements through the house prove to be of unique significance, as the napkin unites his scabrous body with his testimony—intricately constructed, filled with holes, and stained with excrement, just like the memoir he pens.

After acting out a litany of obscene behaviors, Aue concludes his stay in a moment of extreme crisis and realization which unites the section’s predominant motifs of genocide, Una, and excrement. Alone in the attic, engrossed in a sexual half-reverie with a spectral female form, Max begins to feel an escalating sense of horror at the acts he has helped to commit. Aue’s psychic awareness of the war’s horrors climaxes in sync with the orgasm of this mystery form:

> … et quand elle jouit, m'enfonçant les ongles dans les poignets, elle se vida sous elle, et je me mis à hurler, à beugler et à frapper ma tête contre le plancher, j'étais au-delà de toute retenue, je frappais ma tête et sanglotais, non par horreur, parce que cette forme femelle qui ne voulait jamais rester celle de ma sœur avait pissé sur moi, ce n'était pas ça, en la voyant jouir et pisser étranglée je voyais les pendues de Kharkov qui en étouffant se vidaient au-dessous des passants, j'avais vu cette fille que nous avons pendue un jour d'hiver...une fille jeune et saine et resplendissante de vie… de quel droit l’avions-nous pendue, comment pouvait-on pendre cette file et je sanglotais sans fin, ravagé par son souvenir, ma Notre-Dame-Des-Neiges, ce n’était pas des remords, je n’avais pas de remords, je ne me sentais pas coupable, je ne pensais pas que les choses auraient pu ou dû être autrement, seulement je comprenais ce que cela veut dire pendre une fille, nous l’avions pendue comme un boucher égorge un bœuf, sans passion, parce qu’il fallait le faire…mais celle que nous avions pendue n’était pas un porc ou un bœuf qu’on tue sans y penser parce qu’on veut manger sa chair, c’était une jeune fille… une fille comme ma sœur en quelque sorte, la sœur de quelqu’un, peut-être, comme moi aussi j’étais le frère de quelqu’un et une telle cruauté n’avait pas de nom… ma sœur pouvait un jour pisser gaiement dans un W-C et le lendemain se vider en étouffant au bout d'une corde, cela ne rimait absolument à rien, et voilà pourquoi je pleurais, je ne comprenais plus rien et je voulais être seul pour ne plus rien comprendre (835-836).

[44] Helena Duffy, “Max Aue: Un nazi peu typique ? L’abjection comme moteur de la Shoah,” in *Les Bienveillantes de Jonathan Littell*, ed. Muriel Lucie Clément (Cambridge, U.K.: Open Book Publishers, 2009), 315-316.

Although Max denies any feelings of remorse, his reflections are the culmination of the scatological's link to his disgusted, conflicted mental state, functioning as an unprecedented moment of lucidity in his efforts to dodge his complicity in mass murder. While not physically present in the scene, Una functions as a conductor of Max's emotions which permits him to identify on some level with the female victims of the genocide he perpetrates. States Aurélie Barjonet, "In 'Air', the narrator's memory troubles are suspended in favor of delirium and the absence of rational reflection. The successive hallucinations are the only instances capable of endowing Max with a certain form of moral conscience… It takes all the power of his erotic delirium for Aue to inverse the functioning of his memories, for intimate recollections to consciously and morally illuminate historical ones."[45] Although his moment of clarity will prove temporary, Max's mapping of his sister onto the female victims of the Shoah provides him a temporary modus to explore his unease and disgust through the only love he possesses, as Una, the young girl at Kharkov, and the debased women on the Auschwitz death marches all become united in the mind of the protagonist through the excremental.

However, this crisic sense of consciousness would be short lived, observable through the stark divide between Aue-Narration and Aue-Narrator. While Aue-Narration is mired in a hallucinogenic delirium which frees both his mind and body, indulging in all sorts of sordid taboos as he jointly processes the unsavory aspects of his complicity, Aue-Narrator is aware in hindsight of the unreliability of his memory of this scene as he backslides into a position of denial. The next day, Thomas comes to collect Max and the two undertake a perilous journey to Berlin, with the advancing Soviet troops nipping at their heels. The novel ends with a fast-paced chase around the bombed-out capital as the Red Army finally overtakes Berlin. As the two

[45] Barjonet, "Manufacturing Memories," 124.

policeman hunting Max for the deaths in Antibes – the metaphorical Furies of the novel's title—pursue him, one is killed by a Soviet bullet and the other, in the nick of time, is killed by Thomas. To thank his best friend for saving his life, Max breaks his neck with a pipe and steals his forged STO papers, in order to shed his Nazi past and start life anew under a fake identity in France. What, then, of Max's momentary lucidity in Pomerania of the concrete horrors of genocide? Viewing this regression, was this clarity all for nothing?

Conclusion: Navigating an *ère du bourreau*

Throughout the entire novel, readers become conscious of the gulf between the actions Max commits and the rationale behind his committing them. The two facets of his personality often exist in competition with one another—while he carries out acts that may seem to fall outside the Nazi world purview, his reasons for doing so remain staunchly situated within the ideology of the Third Reich. Like the twin sister who exists outside of his physical being, the persona of Max Aue is often cleaved in two, at once both stereotypically and atypically Nazi. It is perhaps to reconcile these conflicting sides of his persona that Max attempts to digest his past years later through the purgative quality of writing, employing a tone that must be deliberately and unrelentingly scatological in order to effectuate a physical and psychic catharsis. As Helena Duffy notes, "Plusieurs années après la guerre, Max continue à vomir, bien que des diarrhées se soient arrêtées. Constipé, il se met à écrire, en trouvant un équivalent de l'excrétion dans 'la recherche de la vérité.'"[46] Contrasted against his constipation, Max's recurrent vomiting which follows him through the war further underlies the critical importance of the scatological in his body's parallel functioning to his memory. To vomit regularly is a sign of poor health whereas

[46] Duffy, "Max Aue: Un Nazi peu typique?," 315-316.

excreting regularly is a sign of a body functioning as it should: while vomiting is unhealthy, excrement, on the other hand, is one of the barometers by which doctors evaluate an individual's health through stool samples. Matter which is vomited is matter which the body rejects and has not been fully digested, much like Aue's experience of the war.[47] It is for this reason that the excrement constipated Aue cannot produce stands in for a mode of memory where the past is digested properly instead of being spewed up unnaturally through a body and psyche which reject the processing of this content. Constipated in the constant refutation of his guilt, Aue pens a memoir which ironically provides the catharsis he is convinced he does not need.

Max returns to his rationale for writing which opens the book in Toccata as he begins to wind down his memoir. In one of the key moments where Aue-Narrator emerges over Aue-Narration, the memoirist describes the beginning of the end of the Final Solution. In two sentences of intense logorrhea, clocking in together at over 1000 words, Aue reaches the following conclusion concerning the misdeeds of a Nazi minister, who foisted his responsibility to feed Jewish workers on other departments: "Il n'était pas le seul, cet homme, tout le monde était comme lui, moi aussi j'étais comme lui, et vous aussi, à sa place, vous auriez été comme lui (719)." This tirade opens up a dialogue where Aue-Narrator explains the gulf which separates his experience of writing from the readers' experience of receiving this transmission. Aue explains in a direct appeal the purgative effect of writing: "Si je m'inflige autant de peines, ça n'est pas pour vous faire plaisir, je le reconnais, c'est avant tout pour ma propre hygiène mentale, comme lorsqu'on a trop mangé, à un moment ou à un autre il faut évacuer les déchets, et que

[47] While not always conscious of the excremental's role in physical and spiritual catharsis, Aue aligns memory with bodily purgation in voicing his disgust during the evacuation of Hungary: "je regardais les femmes enceintes et les imaginais dans le chambres à gaz, leurs mains sur leurs ventres arrondis, je me demandais avec horreur ce qui arrivait au fœtus d'une femme gazée, s'il mourait tout de suite ou bien lui survivait un peu, emprisonné dans sa gangue morte… et pour la première fois depuis longtemps j'avais envie de vomir, vomir mon impuissance, ma tristesse, et ma vie inutile (725)."

cela sente bon on non, on n'a pas toujours le choix ; et puis, vous disposez d'un pouvoir sans appel, celui de fermer ce livre et de le jeter à la poubelle, ultime recours contre lequel je ne peux rien, ainsi, je ne vois pas pourquoi je prendrais des gants (720)." Aue returns full circle to his memoir's opening disclaimer warding off those who would be wary of scabrous scatology and testimony alike. While the links between writing and constipation must be inferred in Toccata, Aue's recognition of writing's effect on his "propre hygiène mentale" demonstrates his own consciousness of the links which bind his bowels and brain. The protagonist codifies the act of writing as a figurative permutation of excreting—both are situated in a personal matrix as actions of urgency whose benefits should be reaped primarily by the individual who undertakes them. Excreting is one of the few actions that humans cannot perform on behalf of another, and it is for this same reason that Aue asserts that the relief behind this cathartic writing is inherently his alone. The novel's association between power and the excremental resurfaces as Aue evokes the "pouvoir sans appel" of the reader to distance him or herself from the grotesque actions and tableaus of the novel. While Aue's body and actions may be inescapable for the protagonist, the readers' distance from these actions endows them with the power to keep his book open or shut.

Given the colic bouts of his youth and his wartime diarrhea, the constipation which plagues Aue-Narrator may initially surprise readers as he seeks to alleviate his blockage through writing. However, his intestinal blockage does more than to provide sharp contrast to his prolific writing, for the bowels prove to be an organ endowed with memory. In her monograph dedicated to the glory of the human gut, Giulia Enders describes in layman terms the science of constipation. Her explanation further illuminates the blocked bowels of Max Aue:

> The vast majority of people are familiar only with the outer sphincter: the muscle we can consciously control, opening and closing it at will. There is another, very similar muscle close by—but this is the one we can't control consciously. Each of these two sphincters looks after the interests of a different nervous system. The outer muscle is a faithful servant of our consciousness… *The inner sphincter*

> *represents our unconscious inner world…* These two sphincters must work together as a team. When what's left of our food reaches the internal sphincter, that muscle's reflex response is to open. But it does not just open the floodgates and let everything out, leaving the outer sphincter to deal with the deluge. First, it allows a small 'taster' through. The space between the internal and external sphincter muscles is home to a large number of sensor cells. They analyze the product delivered to them [and] make an initial assessment of the situation and send a message back to the [external] sphincter [which then complies]… *If we suppress our need to go to the toilet too often or for too long, our internal sphincter begins to feel browbeaten. In fact, we are able to reeducate it completely. That means the sphincter and the surrounding muscles have been disciplined so often by the external sphincter that they become cowed. If communication between the two sphincters breaks down completely, constipation can result.*[48]

The breakdown of communication of the conscious and subconscious external and internal sphincters can be read similarly as an allegory for Max Aue: his constipated bowels function mimetically, mirroring his continually-warring conscious and subconscious. Aue's efforts to suppress his own involvement in the war's atrocities evokes the Spanish latrine episode of his childhood, except instead of physically suppressing his bowels over his disgust at the cockroaches, he suppresses conscious reckoning of his complicity in Nazi genocide due to the psychic disgust it engenders. Echoing the breakdown in communication between inner/outer sphincter after repeated suppression and denial, Max's rigid boundaries between his conscious and subconscious prevents any healthy communication between the two as he spends years repressing his past living under a false identity in France. Living heavily in denial, conditioned to refuse all of the signals frantically sent between conscious and subconscious, neither memory nor bowels are able to function as they should.

In the title to her abject reading of *Les Bienveillantes,* Helena Duffy wonders aloud if Aue constitutes "Un Nazi peu typique?." While Duffy discusses many of the obvious reasons for Aue's alterity—his same-sex exploits, his incestuous rapport with Una, his matricide—the observation proves astute for less evident reasons as well. Aue certainly constitutes an atypical

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[48] Giulia Enders, *Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Underrated Organ,* trans. David Shaw (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2015), 12-14. My italics.

Nazi for these causes, yet even more compelling is the otherness which springs from the conflict between his Nazi mentality and non-Nazi actions: Aue's seduction of Partenau, the subconscious association with cockroaches at Babi Yar, and his concern for the wellbeing of deportees in Auschwitz's evacuation all indicate an individual whose actions diverge from commonly-held perceptions of Nazis (vehemently against homosexuality and indifferent to the plight of the Jews). However, his rationale for these actions remains rooted in Nazi ideology (the manipulative rhetoric of the Partenau argument, the equation of Jews and cockroaches, the conceptualization of deported Jews as physical capital). Were it Littell's goal to foster sympathy for the protagonist, it would seem more logical to create a character whose actions were Nazi, but whose thoughts rebelled. Instead, the protagonist of *Les Bienveillantes* does the inverse, often seeming to do the right thing but for the entirely wrong reasons, resulting in a repugnant persona who is distant and difficult to like. Max Aue is no typical Nazi, and it is precisely for this reason that his heralding of the *ère du bourreau* has solicited such forceful disdain. The presence of a slimy, dislikeable (fictional!) individual serving as spokesman for an already controversial mode of memory has led to considerable backlash against both Littell and Aue. Yet the novel is not without value: while it remains doubtful that fictional works such as *Les Bienveillantes* will ever replace testimony and documentary footage, the astonishing depth, accuracy, and untraditional perspective of Littell's work offers a compelling other option in modern efforts to digest and engage with history. However, the true merit in Littell's novel extends past this portrayal of the war, but takes root in its mirror-like ability to illuminate and interrogate present modes of memory.

70 years after the end of the war, as we stand on the brink of a world in which the last of its survivors have died, the way that we present and preserve the memory of deportation has

become an issue of escalating and crisic importance. Yet times are changing. While some might find a literary *ère du bourreau* unsavory, it has been quietly moving forward in sites of institutionalized memory. Like Charlotte Delbo's *Qui Rapportera Ces Paroles?*, where the author symbolically stripped Nazis of their power onstage by indicating their presence solely through light and noise, institutions such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum have long eschewed the inclusion of perpetrators in their exhibits in order to focus solely on victims of their crimes. For 70 years, the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum has been a shrine to the Jewish, Polish, Roma, and Soviet POW victims of the war, with their images and personal effects displayed ubiquitously, but with very few traces left of the crimes' actual perpetrators. With the exception of a replica of the gallows used to execute commandant Rudolph Höss next to the site of the main camp's gas chamber and several enlarged photographs in Birkenau,[49] hardly any images, personal effects, or artifacts linked to the SS remain at the camp. However, as we move farther away from the events of the past, as the museum's growing throngs prove increasingly ignorant about the history of the war, and as more and more visitors make the day pilgrimage from Krakow considering the museum merely as a sightseeing must to check off while visiting Lesser Poland, museum staff have felt it necessary to redesign the main exhibition in a way that not only focuses on the greater brushstrokes of the war which led up to the Final Solution, but which begins to confront directly the men and women who worked at this horrific site.[50] Shifting our

[49] The photographs are enlargements from the Auschwitz Album and show SS members on the arrival platform during an August 1944 selection of Hungarian Jews, mostly in profile or rear shots.

[50] Some basic information on the redesigned permanent exhibit at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum may be consulted online through the Museum's website. However, I learned about these plans in greater depth during a lecture entitled "Anthropology of Memory—Problems of Representation in the Museum Narrative," given by Alicja Białecka, representative for the Museum's new main exhibition, given at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim, Poland on August 21, 2015. See "Long-term ministerial program for financing creation of the new main exhibition," Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, last modified March 6, 2015, accessed March 21, 2016, http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/long-term-minsterial-program-for-financing-creation-of-the-new-main-exhibition,1140.html.

gaze towards perpetrators is therefore a phenomenon of increasing importance which spans well outside the realm of the literary.

If *Les Bienveillantes* is notable for in some ways paralleling the real-life trend towards a more inclusive memory model of the Holocaust, it has also proven a fascinating litmus test of our modern perception of events past. Reactions to the issues of perspective and Littell's perceived lack of decorum in writing such a "scabrous" novel serve to highlight the biases that may inform modern understandings of the Holocaust as a singular event of incomparable evil. Even educated individuals have shown themselves prone to be swept up in self-righteous anger over the idea of an *ère du bourreau*: in some ways, postwar teaching of the Holocaust has taught students and scholars that the only way to respect the past is to suspend partially our objectivity, yet in trying to synthesize the past, in what other situation could any legitimate historian or academic actually advocate the suppression of an entire side of a history for the sake of decorum? How else can one rationalize deeming interest in a crucial half of the camp experience to be invalid and perverse? The Shoah's place in our collective psyche as the epitome of modern evil has made it a powerful propaganda tool, and the fiercely negative reactions to the quagmire posed by Littell's novel highlight to what extent well-intentioned reverence can morph into a censorship of knowledge and ideas. Far too often, innocent efforts to preserve the memory of the millions who died and suffered have become warped into a sick propagandistic tool by those who would manipulate our good intentions. Under Communist Poland, who aligned the camp with West Germany, authorities underplayed the camp's predominately-Jewish victims as Auschwitz became twisted into a symbol of the evil and unchecked excess of the fascist West

and a shrine to socialism and Polish martyrdom.[51] Politicians and public figures such as Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and survivor Elie Wiesel have also made headlines for resurrecting the memory of the Holocaust in ways that make some Jews, Israelis, and survivors increasingly uncomfortable.[52] Embracing exclusive rather than inclusive models of remembering may therefore trigger troubling consequences for the modern synthesis of deportation.

Les Bienveillantes not only raises the question of which aspects of deportation may be considered valid, but of who is even in a position to tell other educated individuals what they as conscientious thinkers should deem valid or not. Not all survivors believe that their voices are the only ones which should be considered in a postwar world. In 1985, Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi wrote a smart, forceful, and compelling introduction to the autobiography of camp commandant Rudolf Höss. Through his short, yet eloquent forward, Levi argues precisely why voices such as Höss's are of paramount importance:

> Usually when you agree to write a forward, you do so because you truly care about the book; it's readable, the literary quality is high, you like or at least admire the author. This book, however, is the extreme opposite. It's filled with evil, and this evil is narrated with a disturbing bureaucratic obtuseness; it has no literary quality, and reading it is agony. Furthermore, despite his efforts at defending himself, the author comes across as what he is: a coarse, stupid, arrogant, long-winded scoundrel, who sometimes blatantly lies. *Yet this autobiography of the Kommandant of Auschwitz is one of the most instructive books ever published because it very accurately describes the course of a human life that was exemplary in its way.*[53]

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[51] See "Chapter III: 'Oświęcim/Auschwitz': Archaeology of a Contested Site and Symbol" in Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-communist Poland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[52] See Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflection On the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso, 2000). Also, in August 2014, both survivors and descendants of survivors took out a half page ad in the New York Times "unequivocally [condemning] the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza and the ongoing occupation and colonization of historic Palestine…. Furthermore, we are disgusted and outraged by Elie Wiesel's abuse of our history … to justify the unjustifiable: Israel's wholesale effort to destroy Gaza and the murder of more than 2,000 Palestinians, including many hundreds of children…. Never Again must mean NEVER AGAIN for anyone!" See Deborah Lipstadt, "Netanyahu's Revision of the Holocaust for Political Gain Is Inexcusable," *Haaretz*, October 22, 2015, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.681950., and Haaretz, "Holocaust Survivors Condemn Israel for 'Gaza Massacre,' Call for Boycott," *Haaretz*, August 23, 2014, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www. haaretz.com/israel-news/1.612072.

[53] Primo Levi, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, forward to *Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz*, by Rudolph Höss, trans. Andrew Pollinger (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1996), 3.

Levi concludes that Höss's memoir proves valuable firstly in an era of burgeoning Holocaust denial as a meticulous corroboration of the facts of the Final Solution— namely the use of poison gas and an affirmation of the number of victims. However, the true merit of publishing Höss's recollections, states Levi, "is an essential one with permanent validity… it strikes me that this text reveals in an exemplary fashion how far an ideology can go when it is accepted as radically as by Hitler's Germans, indeed by extremists in general. Ideologies can be good or bad; it is good to know them, confront them, and attempt to evaluate them, but it is always bad to espouse them, even if they are cloaked with respectable words such as 'Country' and 'Duty'. The ultimate consequences of blindly accepted Duty…. are demonstrated by the story of Rudolph Höss."[54] Similarly to the fictitious memoir of Max Aue, Höss's memoirs must be read horizontally, provocative not only for what is said, but how it is said.

In his initial ruminations on Littell and the *ère du boureau*, Denis Peschanski concluded "Quoi qu'il en soit, je ne suis pas convaincu qu'on ait beaucoup à gagner en sacralisant certains événements et en interdisant certaines formes d'expression sur ces événements, en l'occurrence la Shoah."[55] Not only is Peschanski correct to assert that we gain nothing by sanctifying certain forms of expression, but *Les Bienveillantes* goes further to illustrate how forbidding certain others may actually prove detrimental in our ability to digest the past. Ironically, if Nazism has taught the modern era anything, it is the dangers of accepting an official ideology or narrative as gospel without rigorously questioning the tenets which drive it. It is in this way that the often well-intentioned disgust at the *ère du bourreau* – rooted in victim reverence and a perception of interest in perpetrators as amoral— uncomfortably edges on some of the same tenets of

[54] Levi, "Foreward," 9.
[55] Devarrieux and Levisalles, "'Les Bienveillantes', roman à controverse," op. cit.

totalitarianism: that literature can be dangerous, degenerate, "scabrous" filth, and that a certain few chosen individuals – be they public figures or academics— know better than the rest of the population, and thus have the right or duty to dictate what individuals should or should not read. While our current mode of commemorating often seems to defer to individuals Norman Finkelstein refers to as "self-proclaimed guardians of Holocaust memory" who must translate the Shoah for non-survivors, their missives on what does and does not constitute worthwhile reading belie the reader's ability to think freely and reach his or her independent conclusions without being told what to think or feel.

In *Becoming Evil,* his monograph on understanding perpetrator psychology, James Waller forcibly argues why we should not be wary of studying perpetrators, or equate understanding with forgiving:

> We must continually remind ourselves that a psychological explanation of extraordinary human evil is not exculpatory… Perpetrators are not just the hapless victims of human nature or their social context. In willfully failing to exercise their moral judgment, they retain full moral and legal accountability for the atrocities they committed. To understand all is not to forgive all. "Explaining is not excusing; understanding is not forgiving," writes Christopher Browning, a professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "Not trying to understand the perpetrators in human terms," he continues, "would make impossible not only this study but any history of Holocaust perpetrators that sought to go beyond one-dimensional caricature."… No one would deny that we have learned a tremendous amount about who we are, and of what the human spirit can endure, by exploring the multidimensional complexity of the victims of extraordinary human evil. It is equally appropriate to believe that there may be just as much to learn by ripping off the masks that disguise perpetrators of extraordinary evil as monsters.[56]

Studies and interest in perpetrators not only prove valid points of inquiry, but prove crucial in our understanding of the war and the circumstances that allow genocide's continued existence in our world today. Littell's novel encourages us to rip off this stereotypical mask that Waller argues we construct to explain away perpetrators' complicated attitudes towards the crimes they

[56] James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16-17.

commit as pure evil. It urges us instead to peek under this monstrous disguise in order to understand better what darkness lurks within the human psyche, how individuals like Aue, who displays a relentless unease with the acts he commits, not only chooses to commit these crimes nevertheless, but argues vehemently until the bitter end of his correctness in doing so.

From beginning to end, the scatological uniquely propels *Les Bienveillantes* both and off its pages. Starting from the moment he joins the SD, Max Aue's bodily functions mimetically parallel a growing sense of discomfort with his deepening complicity in genocide. Aue becomes increasingly aware of his own body as the excremental comes to stand both for his helplessness and his efforts to exert control over some aspect of his life. Seizing the opportunity to start a fresh life in France, Aue suppresses his past, engendering a dually physical and emotional constipation which he ultimately seeks to relieve through the cathartic act of writing. While the excremental elucidates one fictitious individual's reactions to the war, Aue's association between his "scabrous" body and testimony provide a thought-provoking metaphor for readers grappling with a disgust of both the scatological and the war.

Littell's masterful appropriation of the scatological both in and outside of his novel comes full circle through the notion of guilt. In the same way that bodily functions are often associated with shame, so, too, have fierce critics of *Les Bienveillantes* tried to shame readers away from the novel by lampooning the resultant *ère du bourreau* as perverse and disrespectful. In his foreword to Höss's memoirs, Primo Levi states that, "We survivors of the Nazi concentration camps are often asked a symptomatic question, especially by young people: who were the people 'on the other side' and what were they like? Is it possible that all of them were

wicked, that no glint of humanity ever shone in their eyes?"[57] However outside forces may endeavor to foist guilt and shame on both bodily functions and interest in perpetrators, Levi reminds us that this curiosity is natural and common. Even if one rests fundamentally opposed to an *ère du bourreau* or *Les Bienveillantes*, Littell's novel proves to be a crucial product of its time in catalyzing discussion on the widespread taboos in place which govern our treatment of deportation. While opinions may differ on whether these restrictions do harm or good, in either situation it remains essential to be reminded periodically of these very real boundaries, and to continue to assess what role they should or should not play in our understanding of the past. Critics may worry that the testimony of the executioner will come to bury the testimony of their victims as we pass into an *ère du bourreau,* or that it will encourage us to exculpate the perpetrators of these heinous acts. It is clear that we are coming upon a new era, yet perhaps it is not fundamentally the executioner at the center of this mode of transmission. Instead of the era of the executioner, one can only hope that we are entering into an era of objectivity, one in which we remain conscious of the limitations imposed on memory in the name of decorum, carefully stripping them away to confront painful, unsettling, and even disgusting aspects of our collective past, all in the name of "l'excrétion et la recherche de la vérité."

[57] Levi, "Foreword," 3.

Conclusion: "MERDE," 'mot d'Auschwitz?'

"... et sous l'accablement du nombre, de la force et de la matière, il trouve à l'âme une expression, l'excrément. Nous le répétons. Dire cela, faire cela, trouver cela, c'est être le vainqueur." - Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*[1]

It is said that in 1815, when called on to surrender at the Battle of Waterloo, Napoleonic general Pierre Cambronne retorted a one-word response to the British: "Merde!" An anecdote immortalized by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables* "le mot de Cambronne" remains a euphemism for "shit" in France over 200 years later.[2] Hugo ascribes to the word a mythic sublimity which reinvents the basest of words as the most potent of weapons: "Le lecteur français voulant être respecté, le plus beau mot peut-être qu'un Français ait jamais dit ne peut lui être répété. Défense de déposer du sublime dans l'histoire… [Cambronne] cherche un mot comme on cherche une épée. Il lui vient de l'écume, et l'écume, c'est le mot. Cambronne trouve le mot de Waterloo… par visitation du souffle d'un haut."[3] In the face of his imminent defeat, by defiantly harnessing "merde," a democratizing word of the people, the "misérable des mots… le misérable du langage," Cambronne becomes the true victor of Waterloo: "foudroyer d'un tel mot le tonnere qui vous tue," states Hugo, "c'est vaincre."[4]

In French accounts of deportation, Cambronne's defiant utterance comes to embody a new battle cry. The narratives discussed in this dissertation re-baptize the "mot de Cambronne" as the "mot d'Auschwitz," a rallying cry of intellectual and emotional lucidity both inside of the

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[1] Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables,* ed. Maurice Allem (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 357.
[2] An avid reader of Rabelais, Hugo further nuances his description of Cambronne at Waterloo by evoking both Rabelais and Mardi Gras, ie. carnival, foreshadowing the Bakhtinian trifecta of Rabelais, excrement, and the carnivalesque.
[3] Hugo, *Les Misérables,* 356-357.
[4] Hugo, *Les Misérables,* 356. See discussion of this scene and of this "misérable des mots" in Victor Brombert, *Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 110.

Nazi death camps and in the terse postwar societies they subsequently birthed. While "merde" forced deportees to confront their own besieged humanity in the camps, incarnating conscious thinking and emoting in an environment meant to stifle the two, it similarly acts as a call of action against all those who would forget or distort the camps' memories in the years following the war. Like the seemingly paradoxical dualisms which comprise it, excrement proves as complex as the motivations propelling the individuals who describe it. Through their multifaceted exploration of bodily functions' awesome power, these narratives unearth the acuity of the human body's most raw, primal, and misunderstood region in transmitting and reflecting upon a globally-traumatic memory.

While speaking of Robert Antelme, Bruno Chaouat posed the question "La merde peut-elle témoigner?"[5] The case studies presented in this dissertation not only suggest that shit is indeed capable of testifying, but that it is capable of testifying deeply and meaningfully, catalyzing penetrating, unique narratives which complicate our understanding of the Holocaust and its memory. In nonfiction testimony works, a rigorously-theorized scatology sheds new light on deportees' efforts to cope with the daily horrors of the death camps. After Liberation, these same references pointedly document the postwar challenges of survivors as they strive to liberate themselves from the weight of this trauma. Much like Robert Antelme saw real and feigned episodes of urination as proof of his own agency in Buchenwald, his wife Marguerite Duras would conceptualize the excrement voided from his dysenteric form as proof of his body's tenacity in effecting a psycho-physical catharsis of the camps. In the works of Charlotte Delbo, the excremental and its odors create a similar joint testimony: while stench and bodily filth

[5] Bruno Chaouat, "Ce que chier veut dire (Les *ultima excreta* de Robert Antelme)," *Revue des sciences humaines* 261 (2001): 148.

threaten to undermine the author's strongly ingrained identity as a secular martyr, a web of odors wafts to the forefront of Delbo's mental space to elucidate her struggles with psychic healing in her efforts to adjust to post-Auschwitz life. As both cause and cure of extreme suffering in the camps, the excremental thus presents itself as a poignant prism through which to explore the experience of deportation.

While lacking in firsthand knowledge of the camps, heavily scatological works of fiction prove equally significant to our synthesis of deportation, encouraging subsequent generations to interrogate our memory of the war and the detrimental practices which have come to hinder the synthesis of this traumatic event. In brushstrokes of ruthless sarcasm, Michel Vinaver brings to light 1970s France's extreme constipation in coming to terms with its past, charting its deleterious effects over the mind and memory of one hopelessly pessimistic young survivor whose suffering is callously cast aside in a greedy, repressed postwar society. Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* similarly interrogates the status quo of memory by presenting the 'scabrous' recollections of a fictitious Nazi: while Max Aue's reactions to the scatological betray an unease at his complicity in the genocide of European Jews, *Les Bienveillantes'* larger questions spill off its pages through a careful equation of excremental disgust with the revulsion of inhabiting a perpetrator's perspective. While the larger results achieved by scatological testimony and fiction may differ, they ultimately unite through linking us to our humanity, our bodies, and our most human of emotions.

After witnessing the excremental's uncanny ability to express complex thoughts and sentiments, it leads us to wonder how evil of a substance it could truly be. While reflecting on Paul Ricœur's *The Symbolism of Evil*, Terrence Des Pres debates whether excrement's perceived evil is something which lies in the substance itself, or is one which we ourselves have created:

> Why do we use images associated with excrement—imagery of corruption and decay, of dirt and contagion, of things contaminated, rotting or spoiled—to embody our perceptions of evil? Ricœur concludes that all such imagery is symbolic only, that it represents inner states of being—and for us no doubt he is right. But in the concentration camps, defilement was a condition known by actual sight and touch and smell, and hence this question: when survivors react so violently to contact with excrement, are they responding to what it symbolizes, or is their ordeal the concrete instance from which our symbolism of evil derives?[6]

It is evident that excrement is imbued with a powerful, yet rigid symbolic charge, creating a chicken-and-egg tension between the conceptualization of excrement as evil and its own role in facilitating this evil. But what is it that makes shit at base so inherently disgusting and alarming? Is it based merely on its foul odor or conventions of privacy? Is it perhaps linked, as Des Pres suggests, to our memory of the war? Or are our visceral reactions to excrement propelled by something else entirely?

In her *Essai sur l'abjection,* Julia Kristeva classifies excrement as a substance of abjection, one which immediately highlights the porous boundaries between our inner and outer being, and thus evokes our own mortality and put into question the limits of our selfhood. She hypothesizes,

> Une plaie de sang et de pus, ou l'odeur doucereuse et âcre d'une sueur, d'une putréfaction, ne *signifient* pas la mort. Devant la mort signifiée – par exemple un encéphalogramme plat – je comprendrais, je réagirais ou j'accepterais. Non, tel un théâtre vrai, sans fard et sans masque, le déchet comme le cadavre m'*indiquent* ce que j'écarte en permanence pour vivre. Ces humeurs, cette souillure, cette merde sont ce que la vie supporte à peine et avec peine de la mort. J'y suis aux limites de ma condition de vivant. De ces limites se dégage mon corps comme vivant. Ces déchets chutent pour que je vive, jusqu'à ce que, de perte en perte, il ne m'en reste rien, et que mon corps tombe tout entière au-delà de la limite, *cadere,* cadavre. Si l'ordure signifie l'autre côté de la limite, où je ne suis pas et qui me permet d'être, le cadavre, le plus écœurant des déchets, est un limite qui a tout envahi. Ce n'est plus moi qui expulse, 'je' est expulsé. La limite est devenue un objet. Comment puis-je être sans limite?[7]

According to Kristeva, excrement and other bodily castoffs catalyze our anxieties by shattering our status quo, forcing us to confront our own liminality faced with all that is exterior to our

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[6] Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 68.
[7] Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980), 11.

beings. However, instead of displaying the weakness of our mortal bodies, instead of making us feel abject, I believe there is a different reason for our unease towards the scatological. It is not this porous boundary between our being and the outside world which elicits shock and trauma, but rather boundaries which exist within our own being which motivate our awe and horror of excrement.[8] In short, it is not a fear of what is foreign outside of our beings, but of the foreignness which lurks within them.

Just as contradictory emotions dichotomize our perception of excrement, so, too, does the matter prove embroiled in a tug of war between poles of power and weakness. While excremental assault caused prisoners of Nazi camps to feel defenseless, scatological functions equally constitute physical proof of our own body's terrifying raw, autonomous power and our own feeble attempts to understand it wholly. Every day we ingest things, aesthetically-appealing things, tasty things, *recognizable* things. Yet somewhere between the mouth and the anus, our bodies take each identifiable entity and completely mangle it, pulverizing it until it is stripped of its defining characteristics. Our bodies erase difference, razing and amalgamating the unique into uniform structures. We breathe, we blink, we bleed, but what other bodily mechanism is capable of effecting such drastic and tangible change, to render unrecognizable the familiar through a complete erasure of uniqueness? What sort of grotesque mechanism lurks below the very surface of our being?

The substance of excrement forces us to confront the monstrosity of our own bodies in a way that our other processes do not and cannot. It testifies daily to the strangeness of our own physical form, which despite being all that in life which we can truly claim as our own, still

[8] It was likely due in part to this fascination that Belgian conceptual artist Wim Delvoye created *Cloaca* (2002), a machine which must be fed, and then subsequently showcases the digestive cycle by defecating.

proves to be foreign to us and teeming with mysteries beyond our comprehension. Although we can endlessly study the theoretical and medical inner-workings of the excretory system, the physical barriers of our unique bodies hinder us from watching our own systems at work, barring any empiric understanding of this process in our own being. Our excrement knows parts of ourselves that we will never see, and is at once testimony to our body's transformative power and to our own helplessness in grasping it fully. We witness the moment of eating; we witness the moment of defecation, yet what goes on in between those two events in our own body will always be veiled, leaving us outsiders to our own selves, bystanders to our own physical forms and their terrifying, unknowable power.

We similarly find ourselves apprehensive of shit as a contaminant. But is it truly the case? Given all that excrement can do, in *History of Shit*, Dominique Laporte questions whether it is shit which makes us dirty, or whether perhaps it is us who make shit dirty. He hypothesizes, "[The] body's legacy of original sin contaminates even its waste. It would seem that human excrement, like the soul, carries the "noxious" trace of the body it departs. There is a wickedness in shit that must be given time to dissipate, or it will turn on man, burn his field, and nourish the malevolent snake… But if waste is decanted or purified with water, its noxious properties evaporate, leaving behind only beneficial effects. Shit is not pernicious in and of itself—only through its recent association with the flesh."[9] Perhaps we have had it wrong all along, and it is our own fear of our "noxious" bodies which leads us to look straight past the myriad 'beneficial effects' that this substance is capable of bringing about.

[9] Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*, trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 35-36

As anxieties about excrement ebb slowly into an earnest fascination, these "beneficial effects" of shit are starting to be explored in greater detail both on and off the page. Both scholars and scientists in recent years have come to see in excrement a power for wonderful good rather than as a tired stand-in for evil. Several contemporary authors have begun the rehabilitation of this prominent region to popular audiences, notably Giulia Enders' 2014 bestselling *éloge* to the bowels, *Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Underrated Organ* and Jonathan Allan's forthcoming *Reading from Behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus* (2016). Enders' earnest praising of the gut has sold over a million copies in her native Germany, and has been translated into English, French, and Italian, whereas Allan's university-published work has managed to grab the attention of nonacademic readers as noticed through an enthusiastic piece on Vice News.[10]

Excrement is becoming rehabilitated off the page as well. Although humans have been exploring urine and excrement's healing powers since the Roman Empire, the past few years have seen a spike in science embracing excrement as a matter capable of positively molding the lives of individuals and communities. Fecal microbiota transplantations (FMT), a relatively new procedure in which bacteria is taken from the gut of a healthy person and transplanted into the gut of a person whose bacteria has become skewed, are becoming more and more common as a way to cure intestinal infections and help suffers of Crohn's and other autoimmune diseases.[11] Additionally, with waste control and facilities a severe problem in parts of the developing world,

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[10] Jonathan Allan, *Reading from Behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2016) and Giulia Enders, *Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Underrated Organ*, trans. David Shaw (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2015). Devin Pacholik, "Meet the Professor Who Wrote an Entire Book About Buttholes' Place in Culture," *Vice*, February 4, 2016, accessed March 3, 2016 http://www.vice.com/read/this-professor-spent-the-last-three-years-researching-butthole-culture.

[11] Emily Eakin, "The Excremental Experiment," *The New Yorker*, December 1, 2014, accessed February 23, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/01/excrement-experiment.

it is this same problematic matter which proves capable of offering solutions. In January 2015, the Gates Foundation triumphantly unveiled the Janicki Omniprocessor, a self-powered machine which transforms human waste into clean drinking water for up to 100,000 people, and which simultaneously addresses issues of both sanitation and inadequate drinking water in countries where these structures are lacking.[12] Excrement thus becomes harnessed as a resource, a physical source of energy which may self-sufficiently power the very machine filtering it. Much like the conflicting images of excrement seen in these narratives of deportation, the Janicki Omniprocessor represents a real world application of excrement emerging to cure the very problems it may cause.

If fecal transplants and the Janicki Omniprocesor can harness excrement's potential for good in our physical environment, how can we effect a similar change on the page? How can we condition ourselves to accept our appreciation for a substance we have been taught continually to revile? The works analyzed in this dissertation not only challenge preconceptions of the excremental by turning it into a rallying point, but they manage to create beauty in doing so. Is it unethical to feel a sense of enjoyment in reading these polished, intricately-crafted narratives? Are we wrong to savor the complexity of this prose if its beauty lies in the description of horrific tableaus? In *Unwanted Beauty*, Brett Ashley Kaplan advocates for our appreciation of beauty in Holocaust narratives despite the unease that this aesthetic often elicits. She argues, "[M]any readers and viewers of Holocaust literature, art, and memorials confess that where the historical documentary might not affect them deeply, the aesthetic power of art encourages them to remember the Holocaust rather than shunt it aside. I therefore argue that the distinction between

[12] Linda Poon, "Bill Gates Raises A Glass To (And Of) Water Made From Poop," *NPR*, January 13, 2015. Accessed February 23, 2016, http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/01/10/376182321/bill-gates-raises-a-glass-to-and-of-water-made-from-poop.

history and aesthetics is fluid and that beautiful representations can enhance Holocaust remembrance… the unwanted beauty of such depictions encourages us to see the complexity of the Shoah in ways that conventional works fail to achieve."[13] The beauty which unfolds in reading these accounts creates visions of deportation which are rememberable and which endure. By encouraging reflection, these works nurture seeds of memory in those who come in contact with them. In this way, the excremental becomes textual fertilizer, initially disgusting, yet more importantly a source of rich fecundity and growth from which both beauty and memory spring.

Through examining excrement in times of trial, these French accounts of deportation tap into something old and ancient rooted deep within our bodies. They examine a force which extends past the time and space of the concentration camp and sets these narratives in dialogue with humans anytime and anywhere. The consciousness of body portrayed in these accounts evokes the eastern tradition of yoga, an activity based on the harmonization of the physical form and spirit, and one which similarly valorizes the primacy of the lower body. In this ancient, eastern-originating practice, the body is divided into seven chakras, or power centers. The first and foremost of these centers is known as the root chakra, or Muladhara. Located at the base of the spine at the perineum, between the anus and vagina or scrotum, for practitioners of yoga this region is the foundation of the entire being. The conceptualization of this region creates meaningful parallels with these scatologically-infused texts. According to yogi doctor and author Brenda Davies, the root chakra governs our basic, primal survival needs and instincts. She asserts, "[The root chakra] gives us a firm foundation, enabling us to withstand the impact of life and have a sense of belonging and identity… [it] supports our self-confidence, self-esteem and

[13] Brett Ashley Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 1-2.

self-worth."[14] For this reason, although yogis consider a balance of all seven chakras to be crucial to one's wellbeing, the root chakra's centrality to our basic needs makes it so that harmony may not be achieved if this first chakra is left neglected.

While the power and centrality of the root chakra evokes Bakhtin's conceptualization of Rabelaisian excrement as "something intermediate between earth and body, as something relating the one to the other," it also resonates with the scatological narratives which arose from deportation.[15] Yogi Bee Bosnak emphasizes the links between this bodily region, the physical environment, and the memory of war:

> [Muladhara] is the root of your being and establishes the deepest connections with your physical body, your environment and the Earth. Muladhara is the most instinctual of all chakras — it is your survival center. Your fight-or-flight response is initiated from this chakra. This is your primal, animal nature. *The energy of Muladhara allows us to harness courage, resourcefulness and the will to live during trying times.* It connects us with the spiritual energies of our ancestors, their challenges and their triumphs. Since the base chakra carries our ancestral memories, most of us experience challenges or blockages within Muladhara. *War, famine, natural disasters and any events that threaten our basic survival are all recorded within the energies of the first chakra. These memories are imprinted in the subtle body and are passed down from generation to generation, creating unconscious generational patterns. It is our work to take responsibility for our own lives and bring to light that which is unconscious by working to open up our first chakra*.[16]

In addition to the root chakra's relationship to immediate trauma and the fight for survival, yoga conceptualizes the first chakra and the region it represents as a tool of intergenerational memory, the body's link to war, the past, and its memory. This region's perceived ability to carry trauma between generations thus morphs the human form into a conduit of memory, one whose carrying of this trauma endows it with the ability to bear witness and transmit the past.[17] Across time and

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[14] Brenda Davies, *The Seven Healing Chakras Workbook: Exercises and Meditations for Unlocking Your Body's Energy Center*s (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2004), 6.
[15] Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 175.
[16] Bee Bosnak, "The Chakhra Guide: Open your Root Chakra" *Gaiam* http://life.gaiam.com/article/chakra-guide-root-chakra, accessed February 24, 2016. My emphasis.
[17] My sincere thanks to Molly Hilgenberg for first describing the chakras and sharing her knowledge of yoga with me.

belief systems, our bodies and their complex relationships to suffering thus prove to be rooted in our deepest, most primal region.

The concept of muscle memory states that as we repeat a motor task over and over— be it typing on a keyboard, playing a musical instrument, or riding a bicycle—that our muscles store the memory of these kinesthetic movements within, allowing subsequent repetitions of a task to build upon each previously intuned experience. Yet this phrase is more than a modus explaining acquisition of specialized motor skills: "muscle memory" creates a vision of our physical bodies as channels imbued with a memory both independent of our brains and unique unto them. In particular, the sphincter muscle proves conducive of a memory all its own. Through their exploration of excrement, these French narratives create a new sort of muscle memory, one which does not store motion but instead emotion, and the thoughts, sentiments, and movements of the spirit during and in the wake of extreme trauma. In examining the prismic significances grafted onto the body's relationship with the excremental, we not only witness the body's capacity to shape testimony, but to serve itself as a vessel of memory, endowed with the agency to testify in its own right.

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