

The Ethics of Metawitnessing in Yannick Haenel's *Jan Karski*¹

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... We move now to outside a German wood.
Three men are there commanded to dig a hole
In which the two Jews are ordered to lie down
And be buried alive by the third who is a Pole.
Not light from the shrine at Weimar beyond the hill
Nor light from heaven appeared. But he did refuse.
A Lüger settled back deeply in its glove.
He was ordered to change places with the Jews.
Much causal death had drained away their souls.
The thick dirt mounted towards the quivering chin.
When only the head was exposed the order came
To dig him out again and to get back in.
No light, no light in the blue Polish eye.
When he finished a riding boot packed down the earth.
The Lüger hovered lightly in its glove.
He was shot in the belly and in three hours bled to death. ...
Anthony Hecht, "More Light! More Light!"

A "false novel" or a "false testimony"?

A popular interpretative approach to the final stanzas of Anthony Hecht's much-commented-upon poem has been to focus on the destruction of humanity by the Nazis' lawless, barbarous, and gratuitously violent regime. This regime is incarnated by a German, who, only metonymically referred to as "Lüger" and "riding boot," is himself dehumanized and who in turn dehumanizes his helpless Jewish and Polish victims by sadistically playing them off

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against each other.² Already accomplished in the case of the “soulless” Jews, the dehumanization now touches the Pole, whom we watch move from rejection of complicity to consent to act as the two Jews’ executioner. In order to better foreground the depravation of the victims, who, before being annihilated, are, as Primo Levi observed in his meditation on the “gray zone,”³ dragged into the defiling collusion with their oppressors, Hecht casts the Pole as a heroic figure whose action Edward Hirsch has aptly qualified as “impossibly pure.”⁴ Naturally, considering the Polish people’s wide-ranging responses to the tragedy that unraveled on their soil, but that, crippled by the Germans’ draconian measures against those assisting Jews, they could do very little to stop, the Pole’s nobility cannot be fully representative. However, his initial refusal to heed the German’s order makes the second half of Hecht’s poem a fitting epigraph for my study of a novel about a Pole who during World War II took it upon himself to save Europe’s Jews by alerting the so-called free world to the extermination the Germans were carrying out in his homeland.

The work of fiction in question is Yannick Haenel’s *Jan Karski* (2009), which, having first met with quasi-unanimous acclaim, some three months after its publication gave rise to a polemic whose ferocity could only be matched by that provoked by another French-language Holocaust novel, Jonathan Littell’s *Les Bienveillantes* (2006).⁵ Unlike Littell’s text, which violates many written and unwritten rules regarding the representation of the Shoah, including having a Nazi as its protagonist–narrator, *Jan Karski* stages an indisputably positive character and, additionally, displays a reverential attitude toward its righteous and courageous hero, while doing absolutely nothing to offend the memory of the Jews whose cause its protagonist tirelessly championed. Why is it therefore that eminent figures such as Holocaust historian Annette Wieviorka and filmmaker Claude Lanzmann suddenly unleashed their venom against Haenel’s take on Karski’s desperate efforts to stop the Final Solution in its tracks? Before

² For an analysis of Hecht’s poem, see, for example, Ellen Miller Casey, “Hecht’s ‘More Light! More Light!’,” *The Explicator*, vol. 54 (1996): pp. 113–115; Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 3–8; Edward Hirsch, “Comedy and Hardship,” in Sydney Lea, (ed.), *The Burdens of Formality: Essays on the Poetry of Anthony Hecht* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1989), pp. 53–61; Alicia Ostriker, “Millions of Strange Shadows: Anthony Hecht as Gentile and Jew,” in Lea, (ed.), *The Burdens of Formality*, pp. 97–105.

³ For Levi, the gray zone is a realm with “ill–defined outlines which both separate and join the two camps of masters and servants”; Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), p. 27.

⁴ Hirsch, “Comedy and Hardship,” pp. 58. Conversely, Daniel Hoffman has made a preposterous suggestion that the Pole “is too scornful of the Jews to kill them himself”; Daniel Hoffman, “Our Common Lot,” in Lea, (ed.), *The Burdens of Formality*, p. 44.

⁵ See, for example, Richard J. Golsan, “*Les Bienveillantes* et sa réception critique: Littérature, morale, histoire,” in Marc Dambre, (ed.), *L’Exception et la France contemporaine: Histoire, imaginaire, littérature* (Paris: Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), pp. 45–56.

trying to answer this question and then discussing the complex ethical and philosophical questions raised by the novel yet entirely overlooked by Haenel's critics, I will summarize *Jan Karski* and briefly examine the unusual structure of this self-conscious meditation upon the act of secondary witnessing.

Haenel's greatest fault allegedly consists in casting a historical figure in a book whose labeling as "*roman*" (novel) inscribes it into the category of literary invention, although its title strongly suggests that we are about to read a biography and therefore a work adhering to the principle of veracity.⁶ Announced as early as the book's cover, this glaring incongruity is then reasserted by the author's note,⁷ which classifies Parts I and II of the text as documentary and Part III as fictional or, rather, as Haenel later refined his definition, "intuitively fictional."⁸ And so Part I offers an ekphrastic description of Karski's appearance in Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah* (1985), where the Pole, evidently overwhelmed by his wartime memories, talks about his 1942 meeting with the leaders of Jewish underground organizations in occupied Poland and his consequent infiltration of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Izbica Lubelska concentration camp.⁹ Adopting a similar approach, Part II summarizes Karski's memoirs *Story of the Secret State* (1944). Here the extradiegetic third-person narrator, who can be easily identified with the author himself, relates the Pole's involvement in the defense of his homeland in September 1939, his internment by the Soviets and escape from their captivity later that same year, and his subsequent work for the Polish resistance. Once part of the "Secret State," thanks to his diplomatic background, multilingualism, and photographic memory, Karski became entrusted with the role of courier, ensuring communication between the Polish underground and the government in exile, which resided first in Paris and then, after the Germans' invasion of France, in London. We thus learn of the

⁶ Ann Jefferson, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 21–22. Jefferson adds that the "supposedly unadorned nature of the truth offered by biography has regularly been contrasted with the embroidered truths of poetry." p. 22.

⁷ Yannick Haenel, *Jan Karski* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 9.

⁸ "Entretien avec Yannick Haenel: Précisions sur *Jan Karski*," in Marc Dambre, (ed.), *Mémoires occupées: Fictions françaises et Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2013), p. 235. In interviews, Haenel has also commented upon the inevitable fictionality of Parts I and II, which offer a subjective representation of two documentary texts that in themselves are partial in both senses of the term; "Entretien avec Yannick Haenel," p. 237.

⁹ The two men were Leon Feiner of the General Jewish Labor Bund in Poland and, probably, Menachem Kirschenbaum, the leader of the General Zionist in the Warsaw Ghetto. The meeting resulted from the cooperation between Armia Krajowa (Home Army) and Żydowski Związek Wojskowy (Jewish Military Union). The camp, which Karski mistook for Bełżec and only in 1991 identified as Izbica Lubelska, was set up after the extermination of the town's Jewish population. It accommodated deportees from many European countries, including Poland itself. From there, Jews were sent to die in Bełżec and Sobibór. The camp was finally liquidated in the spring of 1943.

emissary's perilous journeys across Europe, one of which ended in his capture by the Gestapo, and of his final trip to Washington, where, on July 28, 1943, he met Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Significantly longer than Parts I and II, and also strikingly different in tone, the book's conclusive part is narrated by an imaginary Karski, who reminisces about his fruitless efforts to stop the Germans' annihilation of Europe's Jews and about his lackluster postwar life in America. Speaking from beyond the grave, the "man who tried to stop the Holocaust"¹⁰ makes us privy to his enduring sense of failure caused by his inability to get the Allies to act upon the Holocaust, or indeed to prevent Poland's postwar transfer to the Soviet zone of influence. The fictional Karski also rails against those who whitewash themselves of Judeophobia by casting the Poles as virulent antisemites and settles scores with Lanzmann, who had lead him to believe his project was to be about rescue efforts before including his testimony in a profoundly anti-Polish film. Finally, Haenel's hero adopts a revisionist view of the Shoah, in which—without ever questioning the Germans' responsibility—he implicates the Allies, especially the Americans.

Considering the novel's original critical and commercial success,¹¹ many were taken aback by the attack that Lanzmann launched upon *Jan Karski* early in 2010, despite having been briefed on the content of the book and having received an advance copy from Gallimard. In a six-page article that first appeared in news magazine *Marianne*, Lanzmann reproached Haenel with having written "un faux roman" ("a false novel") and falsified history. Additionally, Haenel purportedly wronged Karski himself by simplifying his complex character and portraying him as "un pleurnichard et véhément procureur qui met le monde entier en accusation pour n'avoir pas sauvé les Juifs" ("a whiner and heated complainant who blames the entire world for having failed to save the Jews").¹² Finally, Lanzmann condemned Haenel for having plagiarized his documentary, and stated that the novelist lacked intelligence, imagination, and talent.

In his accusations, the filmmaker was largely echoing Wieviorka, who, in the January issue of the mainstream magazine *L'Histoire*, had called Haenel's book "un faux témoignage"

¹⁰ This is an allusion to the title of E. Thomas Wood and Stanisław M. Jankowski's biography, *Karski: How One Man Who Tried to Stop the Holocaust* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994).

¹¹ The novel won the Prix Interallié and the Prix du roman FNAC, while Haenel himself, who up until then had been relatively unknown, was made Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and received the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

¹² Claude Lanzmann, "Jan Karski de Yannick Haenel: Un faux roman," *Les Temps modernes*, no. 657 (January–March 2010): p. 4, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-les-temps-modernes-2010-1-page-1.htm>. All the translations from the French are my own unless otherwise stated.

(“a false testimony”), thus implicitly equating it with Jerzy Kosiński or Benjamin Wilkomirski’s falsified accounts of their childhood survival of the Holocaust.¹³ The historian then condemned the “anachronism” of Haenel’s conception of World War II, whereby she meant that his book was projecting the current anti-Americanism on to the historical reality of the 1940s. Invoking the 1946 Kielce pogrom,¹⁴ Wieviorka also took exception to Haenel’s alleged relativization of Polish antisemitism and, anticipating Lanzmann’s comments, denounced him for having taken inadmissible liberties with historical “truth,” which, in complete disregard for history, the novelist reportedly replaced with “un certain nombre de ‘vérités’ qui sont les siennes” (“with a certain number of his own ‘truths’”).¹⁵ It is noteworthy that the afore-cited accusations were then repeated in Karski’s homeland, a fact that, given Haenel’s adulatory attitude toward his hero and romanticized image of Poland itself,¹⁶ may

¹³ Published in 1965 as an autobiographical novel, Kosiński’s *The Painted Bird* was later denounced as fiction. Eliot Weinberger, *Karmic Traces 1993–1995* (New York: New Directions, 2000), p. 56. Likewise, Wilkomirski’s *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* was exposed as a fake and its author as an impostor. Andrea Reiter, “Memory and Authenticity: The Case of Benjamin Wilkomirski,” in Peter Grey and Kendrick Oliver, (eds.), *The Memory of Catastrophe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 132–145; or Sue Vice, “Benjamin Wilkomirski’s *Fragments* and Holocaust Envy: ‘Why Wasn’t I There Too?’,” in Sue Vice, (ed.), *Representing the Holocaust* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), pp. 249–268.

¹⁴ The pogrom, in which both Polish police and civilians took part, claimed the lives of 42 Jews, leaving another 40 injured.

¹⁵ Annette Wieviorka, “Faux témoignage,” *L’Histoire*, vol. 349 (January 2010), <http://www.lhistoire.fr/faux-témoignage>. Wieviorka had voiced her negative opinion of *Jan Karski* when she was Alain Finkielkraut’s guest on the radio program *Républiques* (October 31, 2009) and Emmanuel Laurentin’s guest on *Fabrique de l’histoire* (December 9, 2009). Among Haenel’s critics is also the historian Jean-Louis Panné, who reproached the novelist for using the encroaching absence of Holocaust eyewitnesses to distort history, as exemplified by Haenel’s negligence of the Soviets’ repeated refusal to help first the German and then the Polish Jews. Jean-Louis Panné, *Jan Karski, le “roman” et l’histoire* (Saint-Malo: Pascal Galodé, 2014), pp. 31–33. Panné also dubs Haenel’s novel “la littérature ventriloque” (“ventriloquist literature”) (p. 172), criticizes its “approximations...et manipulations” (“approximations...and manipulations”) (p. 183), and accuses it of “une profonde malhonnêteté” (“a profound dishonesty”) (p. 184). He calls Haenel himself an impostor who treats Karski with “incroyable légèreté” (“incredible lightness”) (p. 185). For more details on the acrimonious exchanges between Haenel and his critics, see Richard J. Golsan, “L’Affaire Jan Karski: Réflexions sur un scandale littéraire et historique,” in Dambre, (ed.), *Mémoires occupées*, pp. 183–190.

¹⁶ Among the Polish critics of *Jan Karski* is the president of the Jan Karski Society Kazimierz Pawełek. See Kazimierz Pawełek, “Karski n’a jamais soupçonné les Etats-Unis de trahison,” *Le Point*, February 2, 2010, <http://www.lepoint.fr/actualites-monde/2010-02-11/karski-n-a-jamais-soupconne-les-etats-unis-de-trahison/924/0/422942>. See also Leopold Unger, “On ne touche pas à Jan Karski,” *Courrier international*, February 2, 2010, <http://www.courrierinternational.com/article/2010/02/12/on-ne-touche-pas-a-jan-karski>; Aleksandra Klich, “Ksero z życia Karskiego,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, September 9, 2010, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,8433134,Ksero_z_zycia_Karskiego.html; Jarosław Kurski, “Karykatury Jana Karskiego,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 3, 2010, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7682256,Karykatury_Jana_Karskiego.html. Both French and Polish critics have pointed out the factual errors committed by Haenel, as exemplified by his having located

seem puzzling. Ultimately, the debate moved from the press to scholarly journals, where, for a change, Haenel found more supporters and detractors.¹⁷

Although in the present article I will unavoidably contest Lanzmann's and Wieviorka's vitriolic arguments, my intention is neither to reevaluate the historical veracity of *Jan Karski* nor to pursue the discussion of its controversial mix of fact and literary invention. Rather, my ambition is to consider Haenel's text as an act of metawitnessing, a term used by Jacques Derrida in reference to Paul Celan's poetry and easily applied to the philosopher's own readings of the Judeo-Romanian poet's work.¹⁸ By metawitnessing—as opposed to secondary witnessing—I understand the act of testifying on behalf of a witness, which, analogically to metafiction, is underpinned by a self-reflective meditation upon the mutually contradictory necessity and impossibility of bearing witness (for a witness). However, before framing Haenel's novel as a meditation upon the act of testifying to the Holocaust in the absence of direct witnesses, I will consider it in the light of the development of Holocaust memory with the advent of the second and, more recently, third generation of survivors, as well as of the so-called nonwitnesses, who, though lacking personal links to the Shoah, feel compelled to memorialize it. Using, among others, Marianne Hirsch's taxonomy of postmemory, which I will exemplify with Art Spiegelman's and Marguerite Duras's works, I will define the position of *Jan Karski* in relation to existing Holocaust testimony. I will then discuss Haenel's both intense awareness of his project's morally risky nature and ambition to offer a broader reflection upon the figure of the witness and the act of (secondary) witnessing. Guided by *Jan*

Auschwitz 60 miles from Warsaw and Radom in western Poland, or by his claim that in 1942 Poland found itself devastated by both the Germans and the Soviets (pp. 124–125).

¹⁷ Among Haenel's most severe critics is Richard Golsan, who has endorsed Lanzmann's and Wieviorka's judgments of the novel, adding further arguments against Haenel's writing. He has described *Jan Karski* as a novel in which "distortion bleeds into scandalous revisionism" and its protagonist as "a problematic and dubious witness" as well as "a falsifier of history." See Richard J. Golsan, "The Poetics and Perils of Faction: Contemporary French Fiction and the Memory of World War II," *The Romanic Review*, vol. 105 (2014): pp. 63, 65. Philippe Carrard, Manuel Bragança, Pawel Hladki, and Evelyne Ledoux-Beaugrand have been more positive: Philippe Carrard, "Historiographic Metafiction, French Style," *Style*, vol. 48 (Summer 2014): pp. 181–202; Manuel Bragança, "Faire parler les morts: Sur *Jan Karski* et la controverse Lanzmann-Haenel," *Modern and Contemporary France*, vol. 23 (2015): pp. 35–46; Pawel Hladki, "'Qui témoigne pour le témoin?' Question de la liberté littéraire à l'exemple de *Jan Karski* de Yannick Haenel," *Études romanes de Brno*, vol. 33 (2012), pp. 57–67; Evelyne Ledoux-Beaugrand, "Les Restes d'Auschwitz: Intertextualité et postmémorie dans *Jan Karski* de Yannick Haenel et *C'est maintenant du passé* de Marianne Rubinstein," *Études françaises*, vol. 49 (2013), pp. 145–162, and "Emprunt et bricolage: Traces mémorielles de la Shoah dans *Drancy Avenir* et *Jan Karski*," *French Forum*, vol. 39 (Winter 2014), pp. 143–157.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," in Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen, (eds.), *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 70.

Karski's epigraph—"Qui témoigne pour le témoin?" ("Who bears witness for the witness?")—which paraphrases the closing stanza of Celan's poem "Aschenglorie," my analysis will then turn to Haenel's handling of the aporia voiced by the poem and materialized as the psychological urge to testify to what is often felt to be unrepresentable for the absence of the absolute, and thus necessarily silent, witnesses.

Finally, illuminating my discussion with Dan Stone's considerations upon the tension between Holocaust testimony and historiography, I will read *Jan Karski* not only as a speculation about future commemorations of the Nazi genocide in the post-witness era, but also as an apology of testimony, even if testimony should be, oxymoronicly, a work of imagination. This is because, unlike history proper, eyewitness accounts are capable of voicing feelings and especially trauma, and can therefore testify to a differend, as Jean-François Lyotard has termed a situation in which victims have no way of expressing the injustice they have suffered. According to Lyotard, it is precisely the duty of postmodern writers to seek new artistic means to articulate the wrongs experienced by victims, without, however, trying to resolve the differend or substitute for those they are representing.¹⁹ I will conclude therefore with an attempt to assess whether, as many believe, Haenel's portrayal of Karski has done further violence to the memory of the Polish hero and the cause he supported, or, conversely, thanks to its unconventional presentation, is an ethically sound testimony to the wrongs inflicted upon the Jews and their advocate.

Speak, postmemory

Since the emergence of second-generation writers, as the children of Holocaust survivors narrating their parents' wartime ordeal are known, we have become well accustomed to the idea of indirect witnessing that is often accompanied by a metatextual reflection upon the mechanics and ethics of testifying on behalf of a witness. Such writing can be exemplified by Spiegelman's autobiographical and flagrantly postmodern novel whose narrator comments upon the gathering, processing, and transmitting of his father's memories of persecution,

¹⁹ Writing from a historian's standpoint, Raul Hilberg states that the unprecedentedness and unexpectedness of the Holocaust "necessitates the use of words or materials that were never designed for depiction of what happened here." Raul Hilberg, "I Was Not There," in Berel Lang, (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), p. 21. This position is close to that of Lang himself, who notes that writers fail to represent the Holocaust precisely because of their use of the very literary conventions and techniques from before the war. Following Roland Barthes, he calls for "intransitive," that is "nonreferential, nonrepresentational" writing. Berel Lang, "Writing-the-Holocaust: Jabès and the Measure of History," in Lang, (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust*, pp. 248–249.

including his imprisonment in Auschwitz.²⁰ *Maus* also explores the second generation's inheritance of the so-called Survivor Syndrome²¹ and probes the disturbance in the parent-child relationship, which has also been noted by psychologists working with the descendants of Holocaust victims.²² Coincidentally, Hirsch herself has identified Spiegelman's graphic novel as the "paradigmatic and generative text" for her discussion of "postmemory,"²³ a neologism she uses to describe the second generation's profound internalization of, not to say identification with, their parents' wartime ordeal. If in Hirsch's terms, Spiegelman's metawitnessing is "vertical," which means that memories are passed down from parent to child, "horizontal" transmission of Holocaust experience consists of the child's position becoming more broadly available to her/his contemporaries.²⁴ A special example of this type of postmemory is Marguerite Duras's autobiographical collection of texts *La Douleur* (1985), whose female narrator bears witness to her husband's testimony of the *l'univers concentrationnaire*.²⁵ While telling the story of someone waiting for and then nursing a survivor of Nazi violence, she meditates upon the process of vicarious witnessing and the mediated nature of any historical evocation,²⁶ and makes intertextual references to her husband's own published record of his deportation.²⁷

Although some of the narratives by second-generation writers have sparked polemics, usually concerning the violation of Holocaust memory through inappropriate form or content, or, as exemplified by the Wilkomirski or the Kosiński affairs,²⁸ through lack of authenticity,

²⁰ Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1991]).

²¹ Ruth Franklin, *A Thousand Darkneses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 219.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Marianne Hirsch, "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory," *Discourse*, vol. 15 (Winter 1992–1993): pp. 3–29. See also Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 12, 25–31.

²⁴ Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today*, vol. 29 (Spring 2008): pp. 114–115. In her typology, Hirsch is indebted to Edward Saïd's distinction between vertical "filiation" and horizontal "affiliation." See p. 114, note 9.

²⁵ Marguerite Duras, *La Douleur* (Paris: P.O.L., 1985).

²⁶ For an analysis of *La Douleur*, see Camila Loew, *The Memory of Pain: Women's Testimonies of the Holocaust* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 145–184; Colin Davis, "Duras, Antelme and the Ethics of Writing," *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 34 (1997): pp. 170–183.

²⁷ Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957 [1947]). In *La Douleur*, Robert Antelme is referred to as Robert L. Arrested for his resistance work; Antelme was sent to Dachau and then Buchenwald.

²⁸ Another example of a partially false testimony is Martin Gray's *For Those I Loved* (1972). The story takes the reader from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka, which the author did not experience, but which he—or rather his ghostwriter, Max Gallo—described to tell the "whole" story of the Holocaust. More recently Deli Strummer, a former inmate of several concentration camps, was exposed for killing off her survivor husband in her testimony *A Personal Reflection on the Holocaust* (1988). See

their reception has overwhelmingly reflected Georges Perec's words that "[o]n n'attaque pas la littérature concentrationnaire" ("one does not attack concentration camp literature").²⁹ Moreover, as Ruth Franklin notes, the writings by the second generation have gradually displaced survivors' own testimonies; in other words, the children have appropriated their parents' memory,³⁰ becoming, in Helen Epstein's words, "possessed by a history they never lived."³¹ What will happen, however, when not only the witnesses themselves, but also their offspring are no longer in our midst? Of course, Holocaust memories can be passed on to the third generation, and recent years have indeed seen a proliferation of such narratives.³² Yet, works on the Nazi genocide have also been published by those whose familial connection to the Holocaust is tenuous or nonexistent and who could be therefore classified as "nonwitnesses," "nonsurvivors,"³³ or "witnesses by adoption."³⁴

Among the French-language authors who cannot claim a "familial" connection to the Holocaust, but who have nevertheless been classified as third generation, are, apart from Haenel, Jonathan Littell, Laurent Binet, Philippe Claudel or Soazig Aaron.³⁵ The link of these often non-Jewish writers to *les années noires* is therefore, to borrow Hirsch's term, "affiliative," that is resulting from, on the one hand, the empathy with the actual survivors and their descendants and, on the other, "mediation that would be broadly appropriate, available, and indeed compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission."³⁶ Otherwise, their knowledge of the Holocaust can be defined as based on "national postmemory," as Frédérique Leichter-Flack calls the official commemorations of

Tony Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," *Poetics Today*, vol. 27 (Summer 2006): pp. 283–284.

²⁹ Georges Perec, "Robert Antelme ou la vérité de la littérature," in *L. G. Une aventure des années soixante* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 87.

³⁰ Franklin, *A Thousand Darkesses*, p. 221.

³¹ Cited by Franklin, *A Thousand Darkesses*, p. 223.

³² In the French-language context, see, for example, Ivan Jablonka's *Histoire des grands-parents que je n'ai jamais eus: Une enquête* (Paris: Seuil, 2012); Marianne Rubinstein, *C'est maintenant du passé* (Paris: Verticales-Phase deux, 2009); Arnaud Rykner, *Le Wagon* (Paris: Le Rouergue, 2010). For a discussion of the ownership of Holocaust memory, see Imre Kertész, "Who Owns Auschwitz?," trans. John MacKay, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 14 (Spring 2001): pp. 267–272.

³³ Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 20.

³⁴ Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 6.

³⁵ For an analysis of the third generation, see Aurélie Barjonet, "La Troisième Génération devant la Seconde Guerre mondiale: Une situation inédite," *Études romanes de Brno*, vol. 33 (2012): pp. 39–55.

³⁶ Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," p. 115.

the Shoah that have intensified in France since the 1970s.³⁷ Indeed, although Haenel may be haunted by his grandfathers' contrasting wartime choices,³⁸ his relationship with the massacre of European Jews remains purely textual. Consequently, for Evelyne Ledoux-Beaugrand, Haenel is a consumer and producer of "Holocaust culture" (but not a contributor to the Holocaust industry!), as Imre Kertész has designated the moral values that have arisen from the extermination of the Jews and that have fostered a literature that perpetuates these values, but also "give[s] rise to redemption: the spirit, the catharsis."³⁹ For Ledoux-Beaugrand, who unfortunately somewhat simplifies the Hungarian writer's thought, Haenel's work feeds off the cultural representations of the Shoah that have proliferated since the end of the war, particularly since the 1980s, and that, as exemplified by *Maus*, have also inflected the portrayals of the Holocaust created by the survivors' children.⁴⁰

The flesh became word and made its dwelling among us

Yet rather than being an unsympathetic usurper of Karski's story, as Lanzmann, Wieviorka, and others see him, Haenel is manifestly sensitive about his position as a "nonwitness." His sensitivity informs, firstly, the book's very structure, which, in the absence of more personal sources of information about Karski and the Holocaust, lays bare Haenel's reliance on documentary evidence and his own imagination. Additionally, when summarizing *Shoah* or *Story of the Secret State*, Haenel puts himself in the position of a candid viewer/reader whose reception is subjective and may jar with the authors' intentions. For instance, he wonders with faked naivety whether, when relaying the two Jewish leaders' message before Lanzmann's camera, Karski identifies with their pleas or deplores the fact that these pleas were ignored.⁴¹ Similarly, he facetiously speculates about Lanzmann's motives for superposing Karski's monologue over the image of the Statue of Liberty:

³⁷ Frédérique Leichter-Flack, "Second Generation, Third Generation, and State Political Postmemory: The Holocaust and Its Literary Effects in Contemporary France," *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*, vol. 4 (Spring–Autumn 2015): p. 68.

³⁸ The writer's paternal grandfather was sent to Germany as an S.T.O. and then found himself drafted into the Wehrmacht and fighting the Soviets. His maternal grandfather, in contrast, joined the Resistance and brought doom on the family. Yannick Haenel, "The Silent Histories," *The Australian*, February 19, 2011, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/books/novel-sparks-a-debate-about-who-owns-the-holocaust/news-story/2b1738f74f155d8d131aad5ea4c3ba57>.

³⁹ Imre Kertész, "The Holocaust as Culture," *The Holocaust as Culture*, trans. Thomas Cooper (London: Seagull Books, 2011), p. 78.

⁴⁰ Hirsch observes that the son can imagine his father's experience of Auschwitz only by way of the widely available photograph of liberated prisoners in Buchenwald. Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," p. 112.

⁴¹ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, pp. 20–21.

Claude Lanzmann veut-il ainsi *saluer la liberté* de Jan Karski? Ou, au contraire, en jouant sur l'écart entre la voix et l'image, souligner tristement la différence entre l'Europe meurtrie dont parle Jan Karski, et le symbole éclatant de la "Liberté éclairant le monde"? Entre la souffrance des Juifs d'Europe qui s'exprime à travers la voix de Jan Karski, et ce que l'Amérique a fait réellement pour sauver les Juifs d'Europe? Impossible de le savoir...

(Does Claude Lanzmann want to *pay tribute* to Jan Karski's *liberty* in this way? Or rather, by playing on the contrast between the voice and the image, to highlight the tragic difference between the battered Europe which Jan Karski is evoking and the striking symbol of "Liberty enlightening the world"? Or between the suffering of Europe's Jews, as expressed in Jan Karski's voice, and what America actually did to save them? It is impossible to know...)⁴²

The novelist's awareness of the mediatized, rather than empirically based, character of his knowledge also comes through in his book's overt interdiscursivity. As imagined by Haenel, Karski himself is a textual construct, for he is repeatedly identified with—or even reduced to—the message he carries.⁴³ This means that he is either figured as a prophet through whom God speaks or is assimilated with the two Jewish leaders. That the fictional Karski is not meant to be the man of flesh and blood whom Lanzmann believes to know intimately, not to say, to own, also transpires from Haenel's amalgamation of his protagonist with fictional characters, such as the proud, solitary, and melancholy figure from Rembrandt's painting *The Polish Rider* (1637), Kafka's Joseph K., or Moses, to whom Karski is implicitly likened when he seeks refuge in the bulrush basket-like bathtub occupying the center of his hotel room in New York: "En remplissant le fond [de la baignoire] avec des couvertures et un oreiller, j'avais réussi à me confectionner un abri idéal.... Cette baignoire...m'emportait; c'était une barque, un navire, une *nacelle*; j'étais conduit vers le récit." ("By filling [the bathtub] with blankets and a pillow, I made a perfect shelter for myself.... [T]hat bathtub

⁴² Ibid., p. 19. The English translation is Ian Monk's. See Yannik Heanel, *The Messenger* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2011).

⁴³ A similar point is made by Ledoux-Beaugrand who states: "...[Karski] est une présence désincarnée constituée d'un amalgame de textes et de représentations, tout à l'image d'un 'patchwork' textuel. Autrement dit, Jan Karski ne revit sous la plume de Haenel qu'au prix de sa réduction à l'état de texte: il devient une fiction, précisément intitulée de son nom, où sa parole désormais désincarnée trouve momentanément ancrage." ("...[Karski] is a disembodied presence made up of a mixture of texts and representations resembling a textual 'patchwork.' In other words, Haenel's writing can bring Jan Karski back to life only by reducing him to the status of a text: he becomes a work of fiction which bears his name as its title and where his thence disembodied voice finds temporary anchorage.") Ledoux-Beaugrand, "Les Restes d'Auschwitz," p. 160.

transported me: it was a boat, a ship, a *basket*. I was carried away towards my tale.”)⁴⁴ Consequently, rather than depicting Karski as a one-dimensional character, as Lanzmann claims, by incrusting his hero in the intricate web of intertextual references to Europe’s rich cultural tradition, Haenel captures the complexity of the Polish courier’s both character and condition, while highlighting his inexorable fictionality.

Faced with the conundrum created by the passing of the last eyewitnesses of the Holocaust and his desire to honor both Karski’s admittedly undervalued efforts and the Jews whose appeal the Allies never followed,⁴⁵ Haenel echoes Arnaud Rykner, who opens his novel about the horrors of the deportation, *Le Wagon* (2010), by questioning his license to combine historical facts with literary invention.⁴⁶ More succinct than Rykner, Haenel conveys his dilemma by using as his novel’s epigraph a free translation of the closing stanza of Celan’s poem “Aschenglorie” [“Ash-glory”], “Niemand/ zeugt für den/ Zeugen” (“No one/ bears witness for the/ witness”). By rephrasing as an interrogation what Derrida reads as the poet’s constative or perhaps even prohibitive statement,⁴⁷ Haenel probes both the means of preserving Holocaust memory in what, alluding to Wieviorka’s expression “l’ère du témoin” (“the era of the witness”),⁴⁸ Ledoux-Beaugrand has called “the post-witness era”⁴⁹ and his own legitimacy to substitute for a witness. Further, with the epigraph and the novel itself, which is dedicated to the man thought to be the first, or at least one of the first, to report on the Germans’ crimes against Jews, Haenel engages a dialogue with those who, in line with Elie Wiesel’s pronouncements against Holocaust literature,⁵⁰ judge testimonial writing better suited to the representation of the Shoah than fiction.⁵¹ At the same time, however, Haenel, as

⁴⁴ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 141, emphasis added.

⁴⁵ “Entretien avec Yannick Haenel,” p. 235.

⁴⁶ Rykner, *Le Wagon*, pp. 13–14.

⁴⁷ Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” pp. 67, 87. Andréa Lauterwein considers this paraphrase an offensive distortion of Celan’s words. Andréa Lauterwein, “Shoah: Le romancier est-il un passeur de témoin? Le récit de l’histoire suppose une éthique de l’écriture,” *Le Monde*, February 14–15, 2010, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2010/02/13/shoah-le-romancier-est-il-un-passeur-de-temoin-par-andrea-lauterwein_1305324_3232.html.

⁴⁸ Annette Wieviorka, *L’Ère du témoin* (Paris: Hachette, 2002).

⁴⁹ Ledoux-Beaugrand, “Les Restes d’Auschwitz,” p. 147.

⁵⁰ I am referring here to Wiesel’s statement that “[a] novel about Treblinka is either not a novel or is not about Treblinka. A novel about Majdanek is a blasphemy.” Elie Wiesel, “The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration,” in Elie Wiesel, Lucy Dawidowicz, Dorothy Rabinowitz, and Robert McAfee Brown, (eds.), *Dimensions of the Holocaust: Lectures at Northwestern University* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977), p. 7.

⁵¹ This position is mentioned by, among others, S. Lillian Kremer in the introduction to *Witness Through the Imagination* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 13. See, for comparison, Irving Howe, “Writing and the Holocaust,” in Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust*, pp. 175–199. Howe states that “Holocaust writings make their primary claim...through facts recorded or

I will demonstrate later, seems to advocate the use of testimony, which, being subjective and marked by affect, has often been dismissed by historians in favor of their own theoretically neutral and balanced view of the past.⁵² This is despite the fact that, as Dan Stone notes following Giorgio Agamben, “*Histor* is in origin the eyewitness, the one who has seen.”⁵³

Haenel’s metafictional inquiry into the act of secondary witnessing persists in the text itself whose narrator defines and redefines the one who testifies: is a witness someone who, like Karski, has seen with his very own eyes the reality whose existence he confirms?⁵⁴ Or is it someone who, like Karski (and now Haenel), is willing to speak?⁵⁵ Or is the witness the one who refuses to forget what he has seen?⁵⁶ Or, finally, is it the one who has suffered?⁵⁷ By asking these questions and, additionally, by focusing his attention on a Catholic witness to the Holocaust, Haenel appears to be probing his own position as a non-Jewish third-generation author writing about the Shoah. That he indeed seeks to narrow the gap between himself and the reality he is describing is confirmed by *Jan Karski*’s suffusion with intertextual echoes of Levi and Agamben’s works which, concerned with the ethics of witnessing, relate specifically to Jewish suffering. To recapitulate the two Italian thinkers’ remarks, Levi exposes the tragic unreliability of human memory and hence of testimony,⁵⁸ questions the moral integrity of those who did not “drown” since they are likely to have survived through their prevarications,⁵⁹ and, finally, goes as far as to undermine the survivors’ right to testify since the real witnesses are those who have perished.⁶⁰

Reading Levi’s work, Agamben—like Derrida in his study of Celan’s poems—maps the heterogeneous etymology of the term “the one who testifies.” In Latin, for instance, there are

remembered.” p. 182. Leslie Epstein has been even more emphatic when stating that “almost any honest eye-witness testimony of the Holocaust is more moving and more successful at creating a sense of what it must have been like in the ghettos and the camps than *almost* any fictional account of the same events.” Leslie Epstein, “Writing About the Holocaust,” in Lang, (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust*, p. 261.

⁵² For a re-evaluation of testimony as a source of information about the Holocaust, see Dan Stone, “Holocaust Testimony and the Challenge to the Philosophy of History,” *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), pp. 132–147. See also Annette Wieviorka, “The Witness in History,” trans. Jared Stark, *Poetics Today*, vol. 27 (Summer 2006): pp. 395–396.

⁵³ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), p. 94, quoted by Stone, “Holocaust Testimony,” p. 134.

⁵⁴ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁸ Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, pp. 17–19.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63

two words: “*testis*,” signifying the person who in a lawsuit is in the position of third party (**terstis*),⁶¹ and “*superstes*,” designating the one who has experienced an event and can therefore bear witness to it.⁶² The Greek word for witness is, in turn, “*martis*,” martyr,⁶³ whose usefulness, however, Agamben vehemently dismisses, as the idea of the Jewish deportees’ martyrdom would justify “the scandal of a meaningless death, of an execution that could only appear as absurd.”⁶⁴ Having said that, the philosopher concedes that “witnessing” and “martyrdom” are semantically linked, as the Greek term for both derives from the verb “to remember”: “The survivor’s vocation is to remember; he cannot not remember.”⁶⁵

Illuminated by the aforementioned remarks, Haenel’s protagonist ceases to aspire to mimetic accuracy, which, according to Haenel, is in any case unattainable.⁶⁶ This is because without, in contrast to Agamben’s ahistorically construed survivor,⁶⁷ being detached from a specific historico-political context, Haenel’s Karski becomes a “quintessential” witness incarnating the term’s multiple meanings as well as the complexities related to testifying. Indeed, like the deportees described by Agamben, whose survival was motivated by the urge to bear witness,⁶⁸ it is primarily through loyalty to those in whose stead he was to speak that Haenel’s Karski stays alive despite wishing to perish with the Jews he powerlessly watches being murdered in Izbica Lubelska.⁶⁹ Implicitly alluding to the already mentioned phenomenon of the “gray zone,” the protagonist then questions his own moral position as a witness and decides that unless one is a victim oneself, one cannot avoid being on the side of the executioners: “Personne n’échappe à cette abjection qui partage les hommes entre ceux qui meurent et ceux qui donnent la mort.” (“No one escapes from that abjection which divides mankind between those who die and those who kill.”)⁷⁰ Consequently, what Lanzmann sees as a sign of the uncharacteristic unmanliness of Haenel’s protagonist⁷¹ can now be

⁶¹ “*Terstis*” is a theoretical derivational form of “*testis*” used to explain the possible origin of the word “*testis*.”

⁶² Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p. 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26. See, for comparison, Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” pp. 73–76.

⁶⁶ “Entretien avec Yannick Haenel,” p. 238.

⁶⁷ For a critique of Agamben’s dehistoricized conception of the Holocaust witness, see Esther Norma Marion, “The Nazi Genocide and the Writing of the Holocaust Aporia: Ethics and *Remnants of Auschwitz*,” *MLN*, vol. 121 (Sept. 2006), pp. 1009–1022.

⁶⁸ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 185.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁷¹ Those who personally knew Karski speak of his deep pessimism, traumas, and frustration, which resulted from his continuing sense of failure. See Maciej Kozłowski, “Was It Really a Failed

reinterpreted as the witness's shame of having survived and her/his correlated inability to forget, theorized by Agamben and, in Karski's case, symptomized by sleeplessness and asymbolia, as Kristeva terms a linguistic disorder resulting from depression.⁷² By the same token, even though Agamben rejects the possibility of a Holocaust survivor becoming a juridical category,⁷³ Karski's accusatory tone, so fiercely condemned by Haenel's critics,⁷⁴ turns the Polish courier into a *testis*. More specifically, he extends the responsibility for the Holocaust to the Allies, accusing them of having failed to save the Jews and then covering up their crime of non-assistance with the Nuremberg trials.⁷⁵ Ultimately, Haenel's Karski is a witness in both senses of the Greek term *marturion*⁷⁶—martyr and proof—for not only is he the one who suffers for bearing witness and can therefore serve as an exemplar of courage, moral integrity, and perseverance, but also, in his own words, he becomes “une preuve vivante” (“a living proof”) of the Holocaust when he transmogrifies from a messenger into a witness.⁷⁷

Jan Karski as a “pseudo-testimony” and “the aporia of Auschwitz”

Returning to the question of secondary witnessing raised by the novel's epigraph, Haenel, as already suggested, seeks to establish an analogy between his own and the Polish courier's position as a “prosthetic” or “vicarious” witness.⁷⁸ He does so by systematically casting his character as a secondary witness who so strongly identified with the Jews being reduced, in Celan's terms, to “ashes,” that he called himself a “Catholic Jew,”⁷⁹ accepted honorary Israeli citizenship, and married a Judeo-Polish dancer whose family had been nearly entirely wiped

Mission?,” in Eugeniusz Smolar, (ed.), *Memory and Responsibility: The Legacy of Jan Karski* (Warsaw: Jan Karski Educational Foundation, 2015), p. 37.

⁷² Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 54.

⁷³ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 17.

⁷⁴ In fact, Karski publically blamed the world for having let down the Jews. Smolar quotes Karski addressing the International Liberators Conferences at the U.S. State Department in 1981: “My faith tells me the second Original Sin has been committed by humanity: through commission, or omission, or self-imposed ignorance, or insensitivity, or self-interest, or hypocrisy, or heartless rationalization. The sin will haunt humanity to the end of time. It does haunt me. And I want it to be so.” Eugeniusz Smolar, “The Legacy of Jan Karski: Responsibility for the Fate of Others,” in Smolar, (ed.), *Memory and Responsibility*, p. 263.

⁷⁵ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 153 and pp. 166–67.

⁷⁶ Whereas Agamben uses “*martis*,” Derrida uses “*marturion*,” which can signify both “the act of bearing witness” and “proof.”

⁷⁷ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 146. It needs to be stressed that for Derrida producing “proof” is heterogeneous to providing “testimony.” Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” p. 75.

⁷⁸ The two terms are used by Franklin, *A Thousand Darnkessses*, p. 224.

⁷⁹ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 176. Karski identified himself as both a Christian and a Jew in the keynote address he delivered at the International Liberators Conference quoted above.

out in the Shoah. Karski's empathy with the Jews affects the book's not only diegetic, but also textual level, through the systematic intermingling of Biblical and Christian imagery, as instantiated by the references to Moses and the Resurrection. The protagonist's empathy with the persecuted is also visible in Haenel's description of Karski's appearance in *Shoah*, which I read as a metatextual comment about Haenel's desire to disappear behind Karski, as he attempts to do in Parts I and II, or indeed to merge with his hero, as he does in Part III, where he fancies himself a medium through which the dead courier articulates his innermost thoughts.

[Karski] ne s'exprime plus au passé, il révèle le message.... En parlant il s'anime, sa main droite se lève, ses yeux sont baissés, parfois il les ferme, il se concentre.... [C]e sont des paroles qu'il a prononcées mille fois..., et pourtant les voici, prononcées par Jan Karski comme elles sont sorties de la bouches des deux hommes au milieu de l'année 1942, prononcées au présent, directement, comme si c'était eux, les deux hommes qui parlaient, et que lui, Jan Karski s'effaçait.

([Karski] no longer uses the past tense; he reveals their message.... As he speaks, he grows animated, he raises his right hand, his eyes are lowered, sometimes he closes them, he concentrates.... [T]hese are words that he has pronounced a thousand times,... and yet here they are, being spoken by Jan Karski as if they were coming out of the mouths of the two men in mid-1942, announced in the present tense, directly, as if they, those two men, were speaking, and Jan Karski himself has faded away.)⁸⁰

Still, Haenel's affinity with his hero has nothing to do with the spooky identity theft performed by Wilkomirski who, though a child of a Swiss Protestant mother, presented himself as—and perhaps also genuinely believed himself to be—a Jewish Holocaust survivor. Hence, rather than a “false testimony,” as Wieviorka calls Haenel's text, *Jan Karski* could be redefined as “a pseudo-testimony,” which is how, analyzing Levi's and Wiesel's study of the impossibility of bearing witness to the Holocaust, Agamben dubs the survivor's account.⁸¹ To clarify Agamben's expression and return to Levi's already mentioned remark, both thinkers observe that it is the “drowned” and not the “saved” who are the true, the integral witnesses,

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 17–18. In the English version wording has been slightly changed in relation to Ian Monk's translation.

⁸¹ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 34.

and so the “saved” must “speak in their stead, by proxy.”⁸² But—and this is the locus of the “aporia of Auschwitz”⁸³—the “drowned,” states Agamben, have nothing to report—no story, no voice, and no thoughts—which means that “whoever assumes the charge of bearing witness in their name knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness.”⁸⁴ This thought is echoed by Celan’s “Aschenglorie,” which, while using poetic language, articulates the failure of words in the face of what in his reading Derrida assumes to be the Holocaust.⁸⁵ Indeed, the poem suggests that the possibility of testifying has been, together with the actual witnesses, annihilated, as figured by the recurrent image of ash and the total consumption by fire it implies.⁸⁶ According to Derrida, the poem’s final line—“Niemand/ zeugt für den/ Zeugen”—could be understood as an affirmation of “the irreplaceability of the singular witness.”⁸⁷ Or, if interpreted as a proscription, it could even be conceived of as forbidding altogether the act of witnessing for a witness,⁸⁸ since testifying can only take place in the first person.⁸⁹ Having said that, Celan’s resorting to poetics defies his poem’s gloomy message, suggesting that, in Derrida’s words, “all responsible witnessing engages a poetic experience of language,” whereby it potentially grants the poet a license to say the unsayable.⁹⁰

That Haenel endorses Derrida’s interpretation of “Aschenglorie” transpires from his decision to replace the pessimistic “No one” with the questioning “Who,” an operation that lightens the weight of, if not resolves, the aporia posed by the poem and, consequently, reopens the possibility of testifying to the Holocaust. Haenel’s intentions are corroborated by the novel’s paratext; in an interview, the author proclaims the writer’s “duty” to testify through “intuitive fiction” other possibilities of writing about the Holocaust in the post-witness era being wanting.⁹¹ “[U]ne fiction scrupuleuse...sera l’un des modes possibles de transmission de certaines vérités sur des sujets aussi difficiles que la Shoah. ... Il s’agit à ce

⁸² Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, pp. 83–84. See, for comparison, Elie Wiesel, “For Some Measure of Humanity,” *Sh’ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility*, vol. 5, Oct. 31, 1975, pp. 314–315.

⁸³ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 12.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸⁵ Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” p. 68.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁹¹ Yannick Haenel, “Le recours à la fiction n’est pas seulement un droit, il est nécessaire,” *Le Monde*, January 25, 2010, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2010/01/25/le-recours-a-la-fiction-n-est-pas-seulement-un-droit-il-est-necessaire-par-yannick-haenel_1296378_3232.html.

moment-là d'aller jusqu'à l'irreprésentable, et c'est là que la littérature a un rôle à jouer." ("A scrupulous fiction...will be one of the possible modes of transmitting certain truths about topics as difficult as the Shoah.... It is a question of going towards the unrepresentable, and this is where literature has a role to play.")⁹² One could therefore conceive of Haenel's relation to Karski's story as analogous to Derrida's relationship to Celan's writing, the French philosopher's work being a counter-signature of the poet's testimony on behalf of those unavailable to speak. Just as with his deconstruction of Celan's poetry Derrida inscribes the Holocaust into Western philosophical tradition,⁹³ Haenel, as we will see later, re-inserts Karski's feat into the history of not only World War II, but also mankind, with war, for the French novelist, being a continuum rather than a conflict neatly terminated with a peace treaty and the public punishment of culprits.

Testimony vs. "historism," or Jan Karski's mission as a differend

While overtly advocating the use of fiction in maintaining Holocaust memory in the face of the unlikelihood of fresh survivor testimonies, through his choice to bring Karski back into the limelight, Haenel, paradoxically, seems to be revalorizing eyewitness accounts as a source of knowledge about the past. If the novel's self-contradictory position can in itself be regarded as a signature of the postmodern,⁹⁴ we can view Haenel's advocacy of individual memory as symptomatic of the postmodern stance against conventional historiography. More precisely, the advent of testimony in the 1970s corresponded to the postmodern reevaluation of individual experience, and especially of that belonging to those hitherto silenced and marginalized.⁹⁵ Consequently, the remaining part of my discussion will be informed by the work of a major theorist of postmodernism, and notably by Lyotard's conception of "Auschwitz"—a term he uses metonymically—as an event eluding both reason and representation, and therefore requiring historians to abandon their traditional critical apparatus and instead take into account testimony and the underlying trauma.

However perplexing this may sound, ever since the end of the war, a bias has existed against the use of survivor testimonies in writing about the Shoah, a bias that was particularly strong in the immediate aftermath of the war. To substantiate this claim, one can quote Léon

⁹² "Entretien avec Yannick Haenel," p. 239.

⁹³ I am indebted here to Gabrielle Hiltmann's review of Derrida's book, which appeared in the *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 39 (2008): p. 218.

⁹⁴ For Linda Hutcheon, postmodernism is an inherently contradictory (or paradoxical) phenomenon as it "uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges...." Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Oxford: Routledge, 1988), p. 3.

⁹⁵ Wieviorka, "The Witness in History," pp. 391–392.

Poliakov's or Raul Hilberg's preference for testimonies of executioners rather than survivors,⁹⁶ or Wieviorka's remark regarding the historian's stupefaction before the suffering conveyed by the survivor's story.⁹⁷ Similarly, Stone brings up the skepticism about testimony of prominent historians, including Lucy Dawidowicz, although he himself appears to side with Wieviorka's position that the writing of history cannot take place without testimonies.⁹⁸ More poignantly, Stone seems to share Lyotard's conception of "Auschwitz" as a "differend," which means that, unlike a plaintiff in a litigation, the survivor has no means of proving the "wrong" (as opposed to the "damage") that s/he has suffered, as the wrong is inexpressible in the dominant idiom and/or is impossible to assess according to the prevailing rules. What the historian must do, therefore, is account for not only the damages, but also the wrongs, for not only the testimony, but also "what is left of the testimony when it is destroyed..., the feeling": "[T]he historian," writes Lyotard, "must break with the monopoly over history granted to the cognitive regimen of phrases, and he or she must venture forth by lending his or her ear to what is not presentable under the rules of knowledge."⁹⁹ The key terms here are plainly "testimony" and "feeling," and indeed, following Lyotard, Stone founds his defense of eyewitness accounts on the traumatic character of Holocaust memory, which, consequently, possesses a specific, non-linear temporality. Nor does traumatic memory dutifully rest in the past, instead incessantly engulfing the present with affect.¹⁰⁰ Conversely, "historism," as Stone calls a philosophy of history commanding that narratives conform to the principles of chronology, logic, and closure,¹⁰¹ tries to "domesticate" the trauma while insisting on the essential "pastness" of the past.¹⁰² This sense of finality is achieved by imposing on Holocaust memory "the doctrine of salvation...whether this comes in the shape of the liberation of the camps, the founding of the state of Israel, or resettlement in America."¹⁰³

Unlike Laurent Binet's 2010 novel *HHhH*, which adopts postmodern narrative techniques to retrace Czechoslovak resisters' assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, and which has been praised by one of the critics of *Jan Karski* for gratifying the reader with a cathartic

⁹⁶ Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony," p. 277.

⁹⁷ Wieviorka, "The Witness in History," pp. 395–396.

⁹⁸ Wieviorka, *L'Ère du témoin*, p. 22.

⁹⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 92.

¹⁰⁰ Stone, "Holocaust Testimony," pp. 138–139.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

ending,¹⁰⁴ Haenel's novel breaks with the traditional pattern of historiographic or cultural representations of the Holocaust. Notably, it proposes a view of history as an endless circle of differends where the victims' wrongs are never heard in a world functioning according to the laws dictated by "the masters of humanity," if one may extend the use of Karski's designation of Roosevelt to the entire political establishment.¹⁰⁵ One symptom of Haenel's refusal to impose the conventional narrative pattern used by historians and novelists alike on his hero's story is the book's composition, which abandons linearity for a reiterative model. The sense of closure is also denied through Haenel's conception of World War II, which, implicitly drawing on the notion of the "gray zone,"¹⁰⁶ flatly rejects the Manichean categories of "perpetrators" and "humanity." Rather, by accusing the free world of the crime of non-assistance, Haenel redefines the Holocaust as a crime committed by—rather than against—humanity.¹⁰⁷ To the fictional Karski, Yalta thus becomes a new Munich, while Nuremberg, which was supposed to offer some redemption to the victims' families and draw a line under the six-year-long conflict, a whitewash of the Allies' complicity in the Holocaust. Finally, since 1945 witnessed the atomic bombings of Japan, for Haenel's Karski, it becomes "la pire année dans l'histoire du XX^e siècle" ("the worst year in the history of the twentieth century") and not the year of triumph over fascism, liberation of German-occupied territories, and reestablishment of peace.¹⁰⁸

With its circular structure, which undermines closure and fixity, *Jan Karski* also implicitly shares Stone's conception of the unusual temporality of Holocaust memory, which follows from the traumatic nature of the latter. It may be for the same reason that the novel insists on the presentness of Karski's past, which it communicates by describing his words as condemned to "répétition désespérée" ("hopeless repetition"),¹⁰⁹ or with a systematic (con)fusion of temporal levels. For example, Haenel narrates Parts I and II in the present tense and emphasizes both Karski's own use of the present during the interview with Lanzmann and

¹⁰⁴ Golsan, "The Poetics and Perils of Faction," p. 66. Unfortunately, Golsan fails to elaborate on how Binet has achieved this.

¹⁰⁵ See Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁶ Haenel's implicit extension of the "gray zone" to the Allies has met with the disparaging criticism of Leichter-Flack, who accuses the writer of "moral relativism" and of demeaning the sacrifice of American forces. She also considers it "the most striking expression of a commonplace mistake made about the notion of the 'gray zone.'" Leichter-Flack, "Second Generation," pp. 75–76. Conversely, Luc Rassin has praised Haenel for introducing nuance into the black-and-white conception of the war, without, however, downplaying the Germans' responsibility for the Holocaust. Luc Rassin, "'Frankenstein romancier': Littell, Haenel, Binet," *Études romanes de Brno*, vol. 33 (2012): p. 32.

¹⁰⁷ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 165.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

the power of his words to transport him back to the past: “Maintenant il parle au présent, il n’y a plus de distance avec ce qu’il décrit.” (“He is now using the present tense again, he has no distance from what he is describing.”)¹¹⁰ Moreover, the past and the present come together when, as mentioned earlier, Karski becomes one with the Jewish leaders; like the two men in 1942, it is now Lanzmann’s interviewee who is breaking down and losing control of himself, so that, unable to restrain his tears and sobs, he has to move out of the frame. How profoundly Haenel’s protagonist is affected by his experience also becomes evident in Part III, where the fictional Karski spares us no details regarding his psychosomatic troubles: recurrent bouts of nausea, chronic insomnia, and melancholia.

Finally, *Jan Karski* becomes an apology of testimony by presenting itself as a text bearing witness to a differend, which, according to Lyotard, conventional history struggles to articulate. The key wrong to which Haenel’s novel testifies is the Allies’ deafness to the Polish courier’s message concerning the extermination of the Jews, who, first brutalized, were then prevented from communicating this brutalization to the world. The novel also speaks up for the Poles whose heroic stance against Hitler would not save them from Sovietization. Consequently, unlike many other texts about the Shoah, which derive their thrust from thematizing the conflict between imperative of testifying and impossibility of expressing the unrepresentable, *Jan Karski* is more about the predicament of someone “qui porte une parole qui n’est pas reçue, qui n’est pas entendue” (“who is carrying a message that is not being heard”).¹¹¹ This does not mean, however, that the unspeakability of Karski’s trauma is absent from the text; on the contrary, when summarizing Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, Haenel describes the interviewee’s sentences as “entourées de silence” (“encircled by silence”)¹¹² and as bearing a trace of the difficulties the interviewee experienced earlier, when his resurging emotions made him leave the room. The fact that Karski’s language “[est] fidèl[e] à l’impossibilité de parler” (“reflects the impossibility of speaking”)¹¹³ manifests itself again in his account of his passage through the ghetto. Complete sentences give way to single words, which are themselves separated by long pauses:

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 28. Sadly, neither the writer’s use of the present tense in Part II nor his choice to present his protagonist’s monologue in Part III as a running narration without paragraphs have been carried through in the English translation.

¹¹¹ “Alexandre Gefen et Émilie Brière rencontrent Yannick Haenel,” *Revue critique de fiction française contemporaine* (2012), <http://www.revue-critique-de-fiction-francaise-contemporaine.org/rcffc/article/view/06.15/720>.

¹¹² Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 14.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Les phrases de Karski n'ont pas de souffle. Elles sont minuscules, un mot, deux mots, pas plus.... Maintenant, le langage n'a plus de vie, il ne cherche plus à convaincre ni à expliquer, il ne pourra secourir personne. De pauvres visions s'accrochent à de pauvres mots: oignons, biscuits, yeux, seins. Ces mots-là ne sauvent pas.

(Jan Karski's sentences are now breathless. They are short. One word, two words, no more.... Now his language is lifeless, he is no longer trying to convince or explain, he will not be able to help anyone. Impoverished visions attach themselves to impoverished words: onions, biscuits, eyes, breasts. Such words save no one.)¹¹⁴

The theme of the ineffectiveness of words in saving those who themselves have been brutally silenced returns in the much-debated scene of the protagonist's interview with Roosevelt. The scene, which, according to Richard Golsan, "borders on the ridiculous, or worse,"¹¹⁵ has been described by another critic as violating the historical record not only by misrepresenting the American president as a simultaneously apathetic and lustful conformist, but also by doubting Karski's allegedly favorable impression of him.¹¹⁶ Rather than being ridiculous, the scene is—despite the incontestable presence of the grotesque—tragic in tone, as it casts Karski as a witness to a differend, that is, to a violence that had been done without witnesses and was then covered up as much as possible so that it may not be represented.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Karski himself becomes a victim, for, as had previously happened in London,¹¹⁸ his message now falls on Roosevelt's deaf ears. The incompatibility of the speaker's and the listener's idioms and the resulting impossibility of communicating the Jews' and the Poles' wrongs are conveyed here with bipolar oppositions, such as that between the absolute horror of the overcrowded camps and ghettos in which Jews die from hunger and disease and the bourgeois comfort of Roosevelt's office filled with plush sofas, porcelain tureens, and elegant women. As the Jews are being denied their most basic rights before being indiscriminately sent to their death, the American president, comfortably seated in an armchair, stifling his yawns, and eyeing up his secretary's legs, is digesting his evidently copious dinner while

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 29. In the English version, wording has been slightly changed in relation to Ian Monk's translation.

¹¹⁵ Golsan, "The Poetics and Perils of Faction," p. 63.

¹¹⁶ Jacques-Pierre Amette, "Le torchon brûle autour de Jan Karski," *Le Point*, January 1, 2010, <http://www.lepoint.fr/actualites-chroniques/2010-01-28/le-torchon-brule-autour-de-jan-karski/989/0/418326>. Golsan, "L'Affaire Karski," p. 93.

¹¹⁷ Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. 57.

¹¹⁸ In London Karski met with Anthony Eden, Lord Cranborne, Hugh Dalton, Arthur Greenwood and other members of Winston Churchill's War Cabinet, but not with Churchill himself.

building up his appetite for further pleasures. Roosevelt's peaceful regurgitation is then opposed to Karski's violent vomiting in the aftermath of his infiltration of Izbica Lubelska, which, in Kristeva's terms, can be read as a sign of his body's struggle to evacuate the abject constituted by the sight of a corpse, of countless corpses, of dying men and women, and of children being murdered, who in their disturbing inbetweenness threaten the witness's position as subject.¹¹⁹

Conclusions: Yannick Haenel as a witness to the differend?

Continuing to structure my discussion with Lyotard's rhetoric, in this article's concluding part, I will comment upon Haenel's relationship with Karski, which, as suggested by the following reference to the technique of *mise en abyme*—"peut-être, à l'intérieur du message, y a-t-il un *autre message*" ("perhaps, inside this message, there is *another message*")¹²⁰—the author models on his protagonist's own relationship with Holocaust victims. In other words, by relating the Polish resister's story, Haenel implicitly follows Lyotard's recommendation that writers and philosophers identify and then bear witness to differends as a means of redressing the victims' wrongs.¹²¹ However, rather than using the dominant discourse, whereby they would run the risk of doing the victims further injustice, they ought "to find new rules for forming and linking phrases," so that the differend disclosed by the feeling may be expressed.¹²²

By the same token, since Lyotard states that "Auschwitz" abolished the possibility of the pronoun "we," as the deportees were, on the one hand, surrounded by solitude and silence,¹²³ and, on the other, forever excepted from the "we" by their race,¹²⁴ one must not attempt to occupy the victims' position. And if, rather than merely representing the differend, the writer/philosopher tries to speak in the victims' stead or to offer a solution to the differend, s/he will inevitably misinterpret those victims, do violence to the wrongs they have already endured, and make them victims once again.¹²⁵ This is indeed the risk Haenel takes by

¹¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1983). It is worth adding that for Kristeva, the Shoah is the zenith of abjection. p. 12.

¹²⁰ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, p. 120.

¹²¹ Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. 13.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 98.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 101–102.

¹²⁵ Jacob M. Held, "Expressing the Inexpressible: Lyotard and the Different," *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology*, vol. 36 (2005): p. 83.

patently identifying with his hero and, to many critics' outrage, speaking on his behalf.¹²⁶ Moreover, instead of limiting himself to secondary witnessing, as Lyotard recommends, Haenel tries to "solve" the differend by vociferously accusing humanity, and the Western Allies in particular, of letting down the Jews, or even of secretly rejoicing in their demise.¹²⁷ One could argue therefore that, unable to respond to Haenel's representation of him, Karski, who passed away in 2000, has once again been victimized, which would mean that the book does no more than replicate the injustice the Polish hero suffered when his desperate pleas were not heard.

Yet if we displace attention from *Jan Karski's* thematics to its aesthetics, Haenel's recognizably postmodern narrative strategy may provide a counterargument to the afore-stated charges. By adopting the traditional approach to telling the life-story of an actual person, which in this case would be biography with its reliance on documents and adherence to the principles of objectivity, historical accuracy, and academic rigor, Haenel would have had to inscribe Karski's life into a rhetoric that, as stated earlier, accounts only for hard facts and not for "feelings," and hence cannot do justice to a differend. In writing a conventional biography, Haenel would have also been obliged to adopt a dry-eyed, logical, and chronological approach to Karski's travails, which would have meant, in Stone's terms, to deny or "domesticate" the trauma, and to endow the Pole's life with an artificial sense of closure.¹²⁸ Finally, Haenel would have been forced to accommodate his hero's story to the metanarrative of the Allies' moral superiority over the Germans with the image of Nuremberg as the ultimate accomplishment of the free world's triumph over fascist barbarity. This is because the real Karski, who wrote *Story of the Secret State* when there was still hope for saving the Jews from Hitler and the Poles from Stalin, and who broke his silence when the Cold War was in full swing, largely maintained the predominant view of the United States as a bastion of freedom, civil rights, and democracy.

Hence, although his ambition to resolve the differend and speak for his hero may be considered, whether viewed in Lyotard's terms or otherwise, unethical, Haenel potentially redeems himself by renewing the biographical form in order to relate Karski's and, indirectly, the Jews' and the Poles' wartime plight. In so doing, he fulfills the task Lyotard assigns to postmodern writers, who must be able to "pu[t] forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies the solace of good forms..., that which searches for new

¹²⁶ See, for example, Panné, *Karski*.

¹²⁷ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, pp. 129–130.

¹²⁸ Stone, "Holocaust Testimony," p. 138.

presentations...in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.”¹²⁹ Declaring a war on totality (“*le tout*”), mimesis, and pre-established rules, Lyotard proclaims that postmodern writers’ output must not be evaluated by applying familiar categories or determinist judgment, since it creates its own rules and has the quality of a landmark event (“*l’événement*”).¹³⁰ By creating a heterogeneous, fragmented, and reiterative text that, having announced its double-coded nature as of its cover, methodically refuses all generic classifications, Haenel subscribes to Lyotard’s definition of the postmodern writer’s praxis. Likewise, by bringing to public attention Karski’s inability to save the Jews or the fact that the Polish courier was shamelessly exploited by Lanzmann, who, having muzzled him for nearly a decade while the documentary was in the making, grossly misrepresented his mission,¹³¹ the novelist follows the French philosopher’s appeal to artists to bear witness to all difference and differends,¹³² and thus save the honor of the written word (“*le nom*”).¹³³ Additionally, Haenel voices the wrong done to Karski’s homeland, which, with the Western Allies’ agreement, was partially annexed by the Soviet Union, while the rest of its territory slipped under Stalin’s yoke. Then, as the former theater of the Holocaust, Poland has often been erroneously lumbered with the responsibility for the Final Solution, while the Poles themselves have been stigmatized as fervent antisemites by, among others, one-sided representations of the extermination such as *Shoah*.¹³⁴ That Haenel himself believes in his ability as a writer to articulate—if not undo—the wrongs of the past transpires from the recurrent motif of the power of literature, which, to merit its title, must strive to alter the course of history.¹³⁵ The other sign of the author’s belief that he can breathe life back into his protagonist and, as Wiesel reportedly said to Karski, “redonner vie à la parole, par la parole” (“give life back to the word, by the word”),¹³⁶ is the theme of resurrection underpinning his narrative. Indeed, it is unquestionable that, even despite—or perhaps largely because of—the inaccuracies he has committed and the liberties he has taken with Karski’s story as recorded in documents, Haenel has been more effective in popularizing the Polish emissary’s heroics than the existing and undoubtedly more rigorously

¹²⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 81.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ For a discussion of Lanzmann’s manipulation of the material in *Shoah* and its recent sequel *Le Rapport Karski* (2010), see Bragança, “*Faire parler les morts*.”

¹³² I have chosen this phrasing since the word “*différend*” is rendered in the English translation as “difference.”

¹³³ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 82.

¹³⁴ Haenel, *Jan Karski*, pp. 180–181.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182. In the English version wording has been slightly changed in relation to Ian Monk’s translation.

written scholarly works on the subject. At the same time, while asking vital questions about Holocaust memory in the post-witness era, Haenel has had—and this is again in accordance with the postmodern ethos—the courage to destabilize the history of World War II as written by the victors. Instead, he has offered a counternarrative construed from the perspective of the “ex-centrics,”¹³⁷ “losers of history,”¹³⁸ or “silenced Others,”¹³⁹ as theorists of postmodernism have called the peoples and individuals who, having been subordinated or defeated, have had little opportunity for making the official historical record.

¹³⁷ Hutcheon, *A Poetics*, pp. 12, 230.

¹³⁸ Elisabeth Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations in a Historical Novel* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 110–111.

¹³⁹ Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women’s Writing* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 142.