

Article

Transgenerational Transmission of Holocaust Trauma and Its Expressions in Literature

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Abstract: Trauma is a central concept in the historiography of the Holocaust. In both the historiographical and the psychoanalytical research on the subject, the Holocaust is perceived not as a finite event that took place in the past, but as one that continues to exist and to affect the families of survivors and the Jewish people. In the 1950s–1960s, evidence began emerging that Holocaust trauma was not limited to the survivors themselves, but was passed on to the next generation born after the Holocaust and raised in its shadow. It is possible to see the effects of growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust and transgenerational transmission of trauma in many aspects of the second-generation children’s lives. In this article, I examine the representations of these symptoms in David Grossman’s novel *See Under: Love*, which deals with the subject of the Holocaust through the perspective of Momik, a child of Holocaust survivors. Grossman teaches us that writing itself has the potential to heal. He also shows us that every one of us contains both victim and aggressor, and that, under certain circumstances, the “Nazi beast” may awaken within each of us.

Keywords: Holocaust; survivors; second generation; transgenerational transmission; trauma; Grossman

1. Introduction

The word trauma originates from Greek, meaning “wound” or “injury”. In cultural discourse, the word is used as a metaphor for a hidden psychological wound (Arev and Gurevitch 2012, p. 452). “Trauma” is a state in which a person suffered psychological harm following a single experience or a series of experiences that are perceived as particularly grievous. The deciding factor that makes an experience traumatic is a person’s ability to deal with the event emotionally. Traumatic experience is subjective and differs from person to person, but among the various factors that are considered conducive to trauma, one always finds a real and significant experience of fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation—a state in which a person feels that their life, physical integrity, or mental integrity is in danger. Trauma is the persistent presence of malaise that remains even after the threat has passed (Herman 2015, pp. 34–35; Perry 2007). It is often described as an out-of-body experience, as something that is not happening to the person him- or herself. This dissociation from the traumatic reality and its memory is accompanied by a series of disconnected images that lack context and continuity, and may also manifest itself as a feeling of time passing in slow motion (Herman 2015, pp. 34–35). Since the event is not fully experienced in real time, it is doomed to never be fully known and is, therefore, compulsively relived by the traumatized psyche. The memories such an experience creates are powerful and crystalized—they are not given to change, even with the passing of time (Amir 2018, pp. 9–10).

Trauma is a central concept in the historiography of the Holocaust. In both the historiographical and the psychoanalytical research on the subject, the Holocaust is perceived not as a finite event that took place in the past, but as one that continues to exist and to affect the families of survivors,

the Jewish people, and Israeli society (Ben-Dat 2015, p. 30). The aftermath of this trauma can be identified in the public, political, and cultural discourse, as well as in the artistic discourse across the various media of expression. The catastrophe experienced by European Jews still resounds powerfully in the collective memory and is a major subject of study across a variety of disciplines. The Holocaust was a massacre of inconceivable cruelty and magnitude, a traumatic event of enormous scope and immeasurable repercussions and, therefore, it is impossible to think of the Holocaust within the temporal framework of 1933–1945 alone (Bauer 1978, p. 92). With the liberation of the concentration camps, most of those who managed to survive this hell on earth immigrated either to the United States or to Israel, and tried building a new life while still in a state of physical and mental devastation, having lost their families and everything they had. Many among the survivors suffered traumatic experiences of various degrees, and many even developed post-traumatic stress disorder in the years after the war, due to the prolonged duration of their trauma (Steier 2009, p. 148).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric condition of the kind that arises due to the trauma and stress caused by an event that jeopardized the individual's physical and mental integrity. Post-trauma is most often accompanied by feelings of fear, anxiety, and helplessness, as well as intrusive memories of the event, efforts to avoid anything that might evoke the event, constant alertness, and difficulties achieving relaxation. The combined effect of all or some of the above can result in severe impediments to the individual's ability to lead a normal life after the traumatic event. Trauma breaks through our self-defense systems and, in its aftermath, the individual may experience apathy, emotional distance, aversion to change, and diminished contact with the world (Ben-Dat 2015). According to several reports, survivors who settled in Israel after the war exhibited fewer pathological symptoms than those who immigrated to North America (Hass 1996, p. 15). It is possible that they saw their rebirth and rehabilitation as part of the foundation and growth of the State of Israel. It must also be noted that the State of Israel provides opportunities to work through grief with special commemoration programs, public days of remembrance, and more. Nevertheless, along with ongoing trauma and a diminished self-image, many of the Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Israel had to endure neglect and degradation at the hands of the caretaker community (Steier 2009), as well as condescension from Jews who immigrated to Israel before the 1930s and who, therefore, had not lived through the Holocaust. They were socially pressured to forget about their past and to draw a line between the "here and now" of Israel and the "there and then" of the Holocaust (Shapira 1992, p. 455).

Starting from the 1950s and 1960s, evidence began emerging that the Holocaust trauma and its after-effects were not limited to the survivors themselves, but were passed on to their children, also called the "second generation" (Kellermann 2008). The term "second generation" refers to the children of Holocaust survivors who were born after the great cataclysm and grew up in its shadow. The prevailing research assumption is that this group was significantly affected by the traumas their parents experienced during the Holocaust, from birth and throughout their lives, and that, even though members of the "second generation"¹ did not directly experience the Holocaust, they exhibit identifiable symptoms and influences of the trauma their parents suffered in various aspects and phases of their lives (Berger and Ivgi 2009). In the 1960s, several clinicians claimed that children of survivors made up a relatively large percentage of all adolescents receiving psychiatric care (Rakoff et al. 1966, pp. 24–26). Children of survivors differ, of course, from one another in personality types, in their level of achievement, and in their lifestyles. Any generalization made about this group is inherently problematic. However, research shows that, despite the variance in their

¹ The author, Bina Nir, is the daughter of parents who underwent Nazi persecution and experienced trauma during the war, as well as PTSD after the war. Her father lost his entire family in the war, including parents, four brothers, grandparents, and uncles. Throughout her childhood, Bina's father was prone to depression, listlessness, and utter silence in regards to anything remotely related to the Holocaust or his family. She was named after her aunt, her mother's sister, who perished at the age of 22 in a transit camp toward the end of the war.

characters and ways of adapting to their environment, certain issues stand out for many of them (Barocas 1973, pp. 820–21; Russel 1974; Hass 1996).

This statement must be qualified by mentioning that the assortment of disorders attributed to “the second generation”, which we will describe in detail further on, are mostly non-pathological and are considered within the range of normal behavior; however, they are still thought to be disorders particular to this generation (Aviad-Wilcheck and Cohenca 2011). Vardi calls the members of the second generation “yahrzeit candles” or “bearers of the mark”, living memorial candles in honor of those killed in the war (Vardi 1990). In her eyes, members of the second generation absorbed and were influenced by the aura of death that surrounded their parents and, therefore, the motif of death and identification with death became a central component of many second-generation members’ personalities.

In this paper, I focus on members of the second generation who were born and raised in Israel. Today, this generation is also approaching old age, and many among them are parents to third-generation survivors and grandparents to fourth-generation survivors. The effects of growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust and its trauma, passed down from survivor parents to their children, can be identified in a variety of facets of the second-generation members’ lives. I examine, in this article, the expressions of these symptoms as they are reflected in the behavior of the protagonist in David Grossman’s novel *See Under: Love*.

The novel tells the story of a couple of Holocaust survivors who went through the horrors of the death camps along with their son (the second generation); they deal with the influence of the Holocaust trauma and its effects on the children of the survivors. In this article, the novel serves as a case study to examine the atmosphere surrounding the children of the survivors during the 1950s in the State of Israel. Although the novel is not a documentary testimony but a fiction written by the award-winning writer Grossman, I would like to learn through it about the cultural and social atmosphere of that period, the first generation’s coping with the subject of parenthood, and the effects of their trauma on their children—the second generation. Fiction literature writings on this sensitive subject have a dimension of therapy for both the writer and the readers. This novel also legitimized Holocaust survivors and their children to experience openly and not to hide their great pain, especially at a time when Israeli society did not show much tolerance. In addition, the writer’s attitude toward the victim and the aggressor has an important contribution to the social dialog.

Humans are natural story tellers—they construct and reflect their personal and social reality through narratives, and thereby sometimes indirectly manage to influence the reality of those who read them (Shakedi 2003). There are books that, in order to love them or identify with them, require the reader to be familiar with the era out of which they emerged, with the prevailing zeitgeist and fashions of the time; and there are books that are independent of their time, that are self-sufficient (Dingut 1986). Literature is a journey of self-discovery, a constantly shifting, dynamic relationship between the individual and the society, culture, and context in which they operate. Literature can be viewed as a dialog or a discussion between the readership, the discourse, and the work itself (Foiss 2006).

Writers have the ability to experience intensively and identify with the psychological impressions of their environment, and to transmit them with refined vigor that is often stronger than the stories of those who actually experienced them. The writer is not committed to the facts and accurate documentation, but to the impact he wants to create in the reader’s mind. The special ability of the writer Grossman to empower deep psychological experiences, difficult to describe and understand, is expressed in the creation of an exaggerated literary character that contains disorders that may belong to more than one authentic person that characterizes the second-generation Holocaust survivors. Such a figure serves in my article as a broad platform for understanding, identifying, and applying psychological theories concerning the problems of the second generation.

2. Transgenerational Transmission and Holocaust Trauma

Many researchers adopted the assumption that the transmission of pathology from survivors to their children is unavoidable (Kestenberg 1972). The term “transgenerational transmission” is usually used to describe the tendency of parents to recreate in their relationships with their children parenting patterns experienced in early childhood—patterns that can be predominantly positive or negative, and have to do with the quality of attachment between parent and infant, as well as the caregiving behaviors that characterized it. Nevertheless, an external traumatic event can also open the door to transgenerational transmission, even in later stages, after early infancy. Researches differentiate between two patterns of transgenerational transmission of Holocaust trauma from survivors to their children (Sigal and Weinfeld 1989; Felsen 1998). The first of these is “direct transmission”, referring to a pathological mental syndrome (e.g., schizophrenia, paranoia, depression, anxiety, etc.) that manifested in the survivor parent following his or her experiences during the Holocaust, and which was also identified in the child. The second kind of possible transgenerational transmission is “indirect transmission”, which is also the prevalent kind. With indirect transmission, a disorder suffered by the parent due to his or her experiences in the Holocaust leads to significant difficulties in his or her functioning as a parent, which leads to an overall feeling of neglect or deprivation on the part of the child. Post-traumatic stress can also be passed on from parent to child through the process of transgenerational transmission (Baranowsky et al. 1998). There are several different approaches to explain the way in which transgenerational transmission of Holocaust trauma occurs.

2.1. *The Psycho-Dynamic Approach*

This approach explains transgenerational transmission of Holocaust trauma as an unconscious process whereby the child over-identifies with his or her post-traumatic parents, leading to a process of internalization that sometimes results in the child feeling like he or she experienced the horrors of the Holocaust him- or herself, as will be demonstrated below by Grossman’s protagonist. An over-identification of the child with his or her parents produces difficulties in the processes of constructing an independent identity and separating from the parents. Because of the children’s internalization of the parents’ experiences and over-identification with them, the children sometimes develop behavioral difficulties that express the trauma suffered by the parents (Kellermann 1999, 2001a; Rowland-Klein and Dunlop 1998).

2.2. *The Sociological or Cultural Approach*

Unlike the first approach which stresses the identification (or over-identification) of the children with their survivor parents, the sociological approach emphasizes the factor of social learning—the ways in which children of survivors construct their world of representations and imagery by learning from their parents, especially from their parents’ behaviors. Children of survivors were often raised under a plethora of restrictions due to their parents’ apprehensions and mistrust in the world. They grew up in households replete with fears and “taboo” subjects that were barred from discussion. Nevertheless, these approaches focus not only on the verbal messages communicated by the parents, but also on indirect learning, based on the parents’ behaviors. Different studies point to the survivor parents’ attitudes and behaviors around food and eating as examples of the kind of behaviors on which social learning is based, including food hoarding, obsessive eating, food-related anxieties, etc., as well as behaviors related to night terrors, among others (Kellermann 2001a). The central theme in the life of Grossman’s second-generation protagonist is fear. This is shown in the analysis of the novel later on.

2.3. *Communication and Family Structures*

These approaches focus on family ties and structures of communication within the family as the central factors explaining the transmission of Holocaust trauma from parents to children. In quite a few

cases, families of survivors functioned as “islands” wherein most of the interactions took place within the family, and perhaps occasionally with other Holocaust survivors. This theoretical explanation of the relationships within the family serves as a basis for understanding the family unit in the novel *See Under: Love*. The effects of this phenomenon on family functioning are described below.

2.3.1. Parental Over-Protectiveness

Natan points out that many members of the second generation grew up under what she calls parental “over-protectiveness”, which manifests itself as excessive worrying and restricting the child’s exposure to the outside world (which is perceived as threatening), wariness of strangers, and more (Natan 1981). A certain facet of this over-protectiveness is expressed in the symbiotic relationship between the children and their survivor parents (Vardi 1990). This symbiotic relationship often gives rise to the feeling that the second-generation children were always with their parents, even in the period preceding their birth (Gampel 1982). The symbiosis, alongside this feeling that the children were “always there”, often leads to over-identification of the children with their parents as victims or survivors (Kellermann 1999).

2.3.2. Guilt and Material Compensation

Vardi claims that one of the central aspects of the survivor personality is the feeling of guilt over the death of their loved ones “back there” (Vardi 1990). In many instances, this guilt presented an obstacle in the way of survivors developing familial attachments to the new families they started after the Holocaust. Natan, as well as Sorcher and Cohen, also argue that, in many cases, the parents, depleted by the ordeals of the past, tended to feel tired, have a short fuse, and to not always be capable of accommodating their child emotionally (Natan 1981; Sorcher and Cohen 1997). Therefore, they tended to make up for these behaviors by over-providing for the child’s material needs, at the expense of emotional availability and support.

2.3.3. High Degree of Codependence in the Child–Parent Relationship

Another characteristic typical of second-generation survivors is a high degree of codependence with their parents. Because of the trauma of separation that was forced upon them in the past, survivor parents were not always able to “separate” from their children or to “let them go”. The children, in turn, could sense their parents’ dependence on them and were thereby held back from developing their own, separate, independent identities. They found it hard to “free themselves” from their original family units even in adulthood, when they became materially independent and started their own families (Vardi 1990; Natan 1981). The symbiotic relationship between parents and children, in which each side is overly preoccupied with the wellbeing of the other, often creates a situation in which the children take on the role of the parents and function as “parental children”. As a result, their needs are not sufficiently met, leading to functional difficulties later on in life.

2.3.4. Conspiracy of Silence

Another dominant characteristic of second-generation families is the conspiracy of silence. The conspiracy of silence is also a central motif in the novel *See Under: Love*. In many such families, there was an “unspoken agreement” not to discuss the traumatic events of the Holocaust, most often out of the desire to protect the children. Despite this, the children tended to perceive this silence as emotional distance, which affected the quality of the relationship between parents and children (Natan 1981). Vardi claims that many survivor parents “closed their hearts” to their children, and the latter, in response, preferred to avoid speaking out or expressing emotions in public, which, in many cases, became a familial pattern (Vardi 1990). Nevertheless, some scholars dispute the “conspiracy of silence” theory, claiming that Holocaust survivors did not remain silent, but were in fact eager to tell their stories (Yablonka 2001). The change, they claim, came about after the Eichmann

trial, since, following this much publicized event, the circle of those willing to listen to survivors greatly expanded.

The Holocaust survivor Primo Levi attested to the conspiracy of silence in his book *Auschwitz Testimonies* (Levi and Benedetti 2017). In an essay included in this book entitled *Anniversary*, Levi writes the following:

Yet the silence prevails . . . That they should keep silent about this in Germany, that the Fascists should keep silent, is natural and, all things considered, not unwelcome to us . . . But what shall we say about the silence of the civilized world, about the silence of culture, about our own silence in front of our children . . . It is not due simply to weariness . . . It is shame. We are men, we belong to the same human family to which our torturers belonged. Confronted by the enormity of their guilt . . . we are not able to feel exempt from the accusation . . . We are the children of the Europe where Auschwitz exists; we live in the century in which science was warped and gave birth to the racial laws and the gas chambers . . . A greater crime would be impossible to imagine. They insolently constructed their realm with the tools of hatred, violence and lies. (Levi and Benedetti 2017, pp. 67–69)

The phenomenon of the years of silence and silencing was not exclusive to Israel. Shapira posits that Zionism and Israeli culture were not the sole culprits in the matter, and points out that the reemergence of the survivors' private memories took place around the same time in the entire Jewish world (Shapira 1997). Therefore, we must also look to the changes that took place in the Holocaust survivors' status in society, as well as in their age and the ages of their children, in their maturing outlook on their past, and in their ability, as years went by, to deal with this past (Shapira 1997, pp. 102–3).

3. Transgenerational Transmission of Holocaust Trauma—Aggravating and Mitigating Factors

The second generation (much like their parents) are by no means a homogenous group—not in their psychological attributes and not when it comes to the specific circumstances in which each of them was born and raised. It, therefore, stands to reason that symptoms listed above are likely to manifest themselves in different ways and in different amplitudes across the second generation of survivors (Kellermann 2008). Indeed, studies that looked at the transmission of Holocaust trauma effects to members of the second generation found that it is possible to attribute the variance in the expression of the abovementioned phenomena, which we can aggregate under the title “second-generation syndrome”, to several factors, as described by Kellermann (2001b). The first factor is the birth year of the second-generation survivor: it was found that the closer the children were born to the end of the war, the first decade after the war in particular (until 1955), the greater the influences of the trauma were likely to be. The second factor that amplifies the potential of trauma transmission is both parents being Holocaust survivors (as opposed to cases in which only one of the parents is a survivor, while the other did not experience the horrors of the Holocaust). Another aggravating factor is being born to parents who lost children in the Holocaust: this set of circumstances, in which being a parent to a child born after the Holocaust is not the first time the survivor experienced parenthood, increases the likelihood that the parent will see the child born after the war as a “replacement” for the child or children who were lost. Yet another factor that affects the potential of transmitting trauma is the severity of the trauma experienced by the survivor parent. Traumatic experience is, of course, subjective, but it was found that parents who experienced torture, great suffering, or a difficult loss during the war—for example, the loss of close family members, had a greater chance of transmitting the trauma to the next generation.

4. Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors

Many survivors saw the act of starting a new family as an act of triumph over the Nazis. The new generation that was born during the first decade after the end of the war emerged into a world that

was half-alive and half-dead, to parents full of internal conflict and confusion. These infants were often burdened with the task of serving as a kind of life preserver for the wounded parents and supplying their lives with new purpose (Vardi 1990, pp. 32–33). The parents expected their children to compensate for and replace the family members who died during the war, and developed unrealistic and unconscious expectations that their offspring would cancel out the devastation they experienced and fill their empty lives with meaning. Becoming an individual and relinquishing the conscious responsibility of constantly taking care of their survivor parents was, therefore, a rather difficult task for many of the second-generation survivors. The parents communicated to their children that they would not be able to withstand another separation and, therefore, we find many instances of survivor parents who are over-involved in their children's lives. As Hass describes it, whenever he would talk back to them or come home late without telephoning first, his parents would invariably lament: "For this I survived the Nazis? For this I survived the camps?" (Hass 1996, p. 51).

4.1. *The Second Generation as Objects*

The functioning of the typical family structure in survivor families after the war also defined the role of the children and their place in their parents' consciousness. In many cases, the children were not perceived as full-fledged individuals in their own right, but as symbols for what the parents lost "back there". This argument, too, is a dominant theme in Grossman's novel. One of the clearest indications of this is the practice of naming the child after a relative who was killed. The bestowal of a name is a symbolic act, as it were; however, in fact, many children named after the dead felt as if they were carrying the dead on their shoulders and serving as a "yartzheit candle" to their memory (Vardi 1990; Russel 1974). In addition to naming, another psychologically significant act was transforming the second-generation children from individual subjects to objects through which the survivor parents tried rebuilding their identity (Barocas 1973). Vardi claims that the children of survivors were laden with the familial and national burden of filling the emotional space left in the hearts of their parents who lost loved ones, and carrying on the family history. At the national level, the children of the second generation were a symbol of victory over the Nazis and material proof that the Jewish people would persevere (Vardi 1990).

4.2. *Post-Traumatic Characteristics*

Many members of the second generation show signs of PTSD such as fear, feelings of helplessness, and more. As already mentioned, the syndrome can sometimes manifest itself as a result of secondary trauma, which can be experienced as real trauma (direct behavior of the parent toward the child) or as internalized trauma in the child's inner world as he or she takes on parts of the parent's experiences through the process of over-identification (Felsen and Erlich 1990; Kellermann 1999; Yehuda et al. 1998). Nevertheless, researchers stress that PTSD can be caused not only through direct experience of a traumatic event, but also through the experience of witnessing trauma in others (Lanzman 2009). The various aspects of post-traumatic patterns in the survivor generation include fear of a second Holocaust, preoccupation with death, fixation on the traumatic events experienced during the Holocaust, distress caused by stimuli reminiscent or representative of the Holocaust, and more. These can also be found, as mentioned previously, among the second-generation children who did not experience the Holocaust (Kellermann 1999). In addition, members of the second generation also exhibit high incidence of anxiety, feelings of persecution, mood swings related to feelings of grief and loss, heightened sensitivity to stressful events, and severe difficulties in developing a positive self-image (Guy 1995).

4.3. *Communication Patterns*

Among the abovementioned patterns related to transgenerational transmission, we mentioned excessive familial dependence. However, we can alternatively also find "excessive independence" that has to do with the child's inability to deal with a state of dependence, as well as difficulties

in developing intimate relationships and social ties. These are often accompanied by difficulties in dealing with interpersonal conflicts, distancing one's self from the social environment, and perceiving it as hostile (Guy 1995; Kellermann 1999). It was also found that second-generation children have a heightened tendency to develop communication problems and to experience a lack of confidence in their relationships with others (Aviad-Wilcheck and Cohenca 2011). However, the researchers qualify this finding by insisting on the difference between second-generation children whose parents went through the Holocaust alone, in which case the communication difficulties were aggravated, and those whose parents went through the Holocaust with a loved one.

4.4. *The Search for Meaning*

Members of the second generation have a heightened tendency (in comparison to their contemporaries who are not children of Holocaust survivors) to search for meaning and purpose in their lives—this as a way of dealing with anxiety and depression (Aviad-Wilcheck and Cohenca 2011). It is of great importance to the survival of man to discover the meaning of existence, however vague. Frankl spoke of the survival value of the ability to invest life with meaning (Frankl 2006). He himself learned of its value during the three years he spent in Auschwitz and other extermination camps, where his parents, his brother, and his wife perished. Throughout this period, Frankl developed his existentialist views on therapy and on mankind. His bitter struggle for physical existence, and his observations of people who succeeded in overcoming the inferno and surviving by virtue of the purpose they set for themselves, as opposed to those who lost the taste of life and perished, led him to a deep understanding of human existence, which is not only self-fulfillment but transcendence of the self and finding the meaning of life: “I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved . . . Soon my soul found its way back from the prisoner's existence to another world, and I resumed talk with my loved one” (Frankl 2006, p. 49).

4.5. *Other Effects on Overall Function*

Naturally, emotional difficulties and deficient communication patterns experienced by the second generation also affect their daily functioning. Learning is one of the areas most affected by the abovementioned symptoms, including overall poor performance at school, learning disabilities, and a lack of motivation (Berger and Ivgi 2009). Difficulties of this kind were also experienced by Grossman's protagonist, as I shall demonstrate below. On the other hand, researches also point to a contrary trend of an excessive need for over-achievement in various fields, which seems to want to compensate for the losses suffered by the parents—not only emotional losses, but also the cessation of their “normal lives”—including education, work, etc. (Kellermann 1999). Other studies looked at the physical and medical symptoms exhibited by the second generation and find that they have a higher incidence of high blood pressure, diabetes, and sleep disorders relative to their age group (Shrira 2017).

5. Representations of the Holocaust in Literature

Representing the Holocaust in any art form poses a significant challenge since, in the symbolic language of the arts, this representation includes an inherent element of failure stemming from the inability of art to contain the dense and traumatic experience of an event as cataclysmic as the Holocaust (Ben-Dat 2015, p. 30). Symbolic language lacks the capacity to represent trauma with any kind of reliability or authenticity and, therefore, cannot be charged with preserving the memory of a traumatic historic event (Felman and Laub 1992, pp. 8–9). On the other hand, testimony takes up a position of unparalleled importance. Bearing witness to a crisis or a trauma can teach us about the depth of the catastrophe; it is the act of communicating to others and in the name of others. In a speech made in Sweden on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Prize, Albert Camus argued that the writer is not exempt from difficult duties. He cannot serve those who make history, but he must serve those who suffer it (Camus 1957). “If someone else could have written my stories”, wrote Holocaust survivor

Elie Wiesel, “I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. My role is the role of the witness . . . Not to tell, or to tell another story, is . . . to commit perjury” (as cited in [Felman 1991](#), p. 39). Testimony is composed of fragments of memory and does not offer a complete statement regarding the events. There are even those who claim that testimony is the predominant literary (or discursive) mode of our times ([Felman and Laub 1992](#), p. 5).

The term “Holocaust literature” is wide-reaching and encompasses the totality of literary texts that deal with the Holocaust period, as well as literature which focuses on the lives of survivors after the war. It includes texts from all kinds of genres across the literary spectrum including fiction, poetry, history, personal diaries and memoirs, short stories, nonfiction, and more ([Yaaz 1980](#)). In this article, I focus on a fiction that deals with the Holocaust period and the experiences of survivors from the point of view of the second generation.

Milner claims that literary responses to the Holocaust in Israel began appearing in the cultural arena directly with the arrival of the first news stories relating to the destruction of the Jews in Europe ([Milner 2012](#)). In the first years after the Holocaust, Holocaust literature served as the background and justification for the establishment of the Israeli state and advancement of the Israeli nation. In the second stage, following the Eichman trial and up until the end of the 1970s, the emphasis was placed on the tragedy of the Holocaust, the personal and collective trauma, and the victims ([Milner 2012](#)). The third stage, beginning with the 1980s and up until today, is characterized by a shift in focus toward the survivors and their ways of coping with the Holocaust experience and its memory. In addition, the literature also deals with members of the second generation—whether as written by authors who write and process their emotional experiences as children of survivors within the framework of autobiography, or as written by authors who are not directly related to Holocaust survivors, but who represent the second generation in fiction.

The characters representing the second generation in “Holocaust literature” are mostly described as educated people with extensive historical knowledge about, among other things, the destruction of European Jews during the Second World War. The literature addresses the socio-cultural reality in which they grew up, in particular the silence that prevailed in the households. The common denominator underpinning all of the psychological literature pertaining to the second generation is the understanding that there exist significant similarities in the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive patterns presented by this generation, and that the functional difficulties they must deal with stem from the dynamic between the survivors and their children ([Berger and Ivgi 2009](#); [Milner 2012](#)).

6. *See Under: Love* by David Grossman

The present article focuses on the novel *See Under: Love* as a case study by the award-winning Israeli author David Grossman, which examines the Holocaust from the perspective of Momik, a child of Holocaust survivors ([Grossman 2002](#)). The book was first published in 1986 and was one of the first works of fiction to deal with the effects the Holocaust had on the second generation. It is considered a groundbreaking work in the field of second-generation literature and is unique in that it is the first novel written about the Holocaust by an author who is not a survivor, nor the child of survivors ([Laor 1993](#)). The novel is composed of four distinct parts that differ from one another in writing style and in the characters they focus on: “Momik”, “Bruno”, “Wasserman”, and “The Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik’s Life”. The character of Momik, however, appears in each part of the story, either as a central character in the plot or as the author/narrator. Grossman’s novel dealing with the family of survivors belongs to the genre of psychological novels. This type of work does not intend to describe the facts accurately, but rather to convey the intense experience of the second generation in Israeli society.

7. Momik’s Childhood

The nine-year-old Momik (full name: Shlomo), Grossman’s protagonist, is a primary-school student in the Beit Mazmil neighborhood of Jerusalem in the 1950s. He is the son of two Holocaust

survivors, Tuvia and Gisella Neuman, who take care not to expose him to the horrors of the Holocaust out of a desire to protect him. Momik's father was a forced laborer (a Sonderkommando) in Auschwitz during the war. We do not know much about Momik's mother's experiences of the Holocaust, but we do know that she too is a survivor. Kellermann's study relating to the aggravating factors of transgenerational transmission indicates four main elements which are all present in Momik's case, in the Neuman family: (1) both parents are survivors; (2) Momik is an only child; (3) the trauma experienced by his father as a Sonderkommando is severe in the extreme; (4) the story hints at the fact that Momik had a brother who died during the war (Kellermann 2008).

His parents experienced a real threat to their physical and mental wellbeing—the definition of trauma in the research literature (Perry 2007). Likewise, the research hypothesis that members of the second generation were significantly affected by the traumas their parents were subjected to during the Holocaust (Baranowsky et al. 1998; Berger and Ivgi 2009) is manifest in multiple aspects of Grossman's protagonist. Momik's parents categorically refuse to share their memories of the Holocaust and avoid any discussion on the subject. The household abounds in signs of anxiety and obsession—the father wakes up screaming at night, the house is always secured with an exorbitant number of locks, friends are not allowed to come over, they obsessively count the cutlery and kitchenware, and the description given of the parents' eating habits is in the realm of the grotesque. The trauma suffered by Momik's father is acute to the point that he cannot touch his son because he feels that his hands are "tainted with death". All of these are expressions of symptoms typical of post-traumatic stress (Steier 2009, p. 148). Momik is aware of his role as the family's "yahrzeit candle" and, as such, he is wholly engrossed in the subject of the Holocaust (Vardi 1990, p. 38).

Momik goes to the family home of Anshel Wasserman, his deceased grandmother's brother, whom Momik calls "grandfather" and who used to be a children's author writing for a Hebrew newspaper in Warsaw during the war. Momik takes care of "grandfather" and, with his help, tries to put together the fragments of the story and deepen his understanding of "the land of Over There" which incites his curiosity. In the absence of reliable information from his parents, he creates his own "Holocaust" world in the cellar of the house, becoming more and more socially isolated as he sinks deeper and deeper into a Holocaust of his own making. The literary characterization of the boy lets us know that, in many ways, Momik is not a "typical child"; he is described by his family members as an "alter kopf"—the head of a smart old man (8).

Even his name is emblematic of the heavy burden placed on his shoulders. Throughout most of the book he is referred to as Momik (or Shlomik as an adult) or by his full name—Shlomo Efraim Neuman. His grandmother used to call him by the names of all the family members who had died in the war: "Mordechai Leibeleh, and Shepseleh and Mendel and Anshel and Shulam and Chumak, and Shlomo Haim, and that's how Momik got to know who they all were" (26). Momik carries a heavy load of dead relatives whose names are attached to him. The research literature likens this phenomenon of naming second-generation children to an act that erases their existence as individual subjects, so they can serve instead as "yahrzeit candles" (Vardi 1990), as objects meant to embody in name and in essence those who were lost (Vardi 1990; Russel 1974).

Momik's parents live in constant anxiety and Momik almost never leaves the house (other than to go to school). His daily life in the house is also subjected to his parents' unrelenting concern: "There's a drumstick in the refrigerator for you and one for him . . . and be careful with the small bones, you shouldn't swallow any, God forbid . . . And be careful with the gas too, Shleimeleh, and blow the match out right away, so there won't be a fire, God forbid . . . And don't drink soda water out of the refrigerator. Yesterday I noticed at least one glass less in the bottle. You drank it, and it's winter now. And as soon as you're inside lock the door twice. The top lock and the bottom lock. Just once is no good" (22–23).

Momik, who can sense that something is amiss, puts all his efforts into finding out about the place he calls "the land of Over There", which, in his mind, is his only chance of saving his parents: "like spying on his parents, and all the spy work to put together the vanished land of Over There like a

jigsaw puzzle, there's still a lot of work left on this, and he's the only one in the whole wide world who can do it, because who else can save Mama and Papa from their fears and silences . . . which was even worse after Grandfather Anshel turned up and made them remember all the things they were trying so hard to forget and not tell anyone" (18). His parents, as stated previously, are unwilling to share any of their memories with him and, therefore, he tries to piece together a picture of Over There from the shards of information that he happens to overhear, while giving that information his own interpretation based on his own world. Thus, for example, when he hears that his father was a Sonderkommando in Auschwitz during the war, he interprets this information based on the meaning of the familiar word "commando"—meaning fighter—and, therefore, associates positive elements of bravery in battle to this period of his father's life. Likewise, he tries to use his limited knowledge of arithmetic to try and decipher the meaning of the numbers tattooed on the arms of the Holocaust survivors around him, etc.

8. The "Holocaust" in the Cellar

As part of his efforts to try and understand what went on in the land of Over There, Momik talks to Bella, his neighbor, who tells him that the "Nazi beast can come out of any animal" (13). Momik then starts to collect various animals—a baby crocodile, a porcupine, a cat, a pigeon, and others—with the aim of raising the "Nazi beast" out of them so he can then fight it and defeat it in order to save his parents: "Momik reversed his tactics, figuring that what he needed in order to fight the Beast was the very thing that most scared it, the thing he'd been avoiding all along, which was to get to know more about the Beast and its crimes, because otherwise he'd just be wasting energy" (65). He endeavors to gain knowledge about the Holocaust by reading books in secret from his parents, while trying to recreate the Holocaust in the cellar. He figures that he must "show the Beast the food it liked best—a Jew" (68).

In my opinion, it is possible to see Momik undergo a transformation from victim (he is a victim of bullying, but also in a certain sense, of his parents) to aggressor: "To tell the truth, there are days when Momik sits in the cellar half awake and half asleep and he envies the Beast. Yes, he envies it for being so strong that it never suffers from pity, and that it can sleep soundly at night even after all those things it did, and that it even seems to enjoy being cruel . . . and to tell the truth, Momik has also been kind of enjoying it lately when he does something really bad . . . he could almost fling himself against the cages and shatter them and smash every head on the Beast without mercy" (69–70).

Also, Vardi addresses this issue of "victim and aggressor" by viewing them as two faces of the same archetype, which a single person may embody; the aggressor is the active aspect of the archetype while the victim is the passive aspect. The character of Momik contains both the victim and the aggressor at the same time—both as a child and as an adult. The child Momik, in trying to save his parents, assumes the opposite role from the role of the victim played by his family, the role he too plays initially in relation to his bully classmates until he himself becomes the aggressor—when he begins to lock up animals, and later people, in the cellar of his house. He puts Grandfather Anshel in the cellar and does not let him go up to the house: "Momik sat looking at Grandfather Anshel . . . He was fed up with this stupid grandfather who did nothing but drawl out his crummy story in a whiny voice. Sometimes Momik felt like going over to him and snapping his mouth shut. Once when Grandfather made a sign that he had to pee, Momik didn't get up to take him out but sat staring into his eyes instead, and he saw how confused Grandfather was, howling like some crazy cat . . . and then he wet his pants and they smelled revolting, but Momik wasn't the least bit sorry for him anymore . . . Momik just got up and walked out, leaving Grandfather all alone in the dark" (79–80).

9. Assimilation of the Holocaust as Part of Momik's Identity

It seems as if his creation of the "Holocaust cellar" and the books he reads, as well as the exposure to information and images unsuitable for a nine-year-old's level of maturity and understanding, make the Holocaust trauma an inherent part of Momik's identity. The more Momik learns about it, the more space it takes up in his mind. Momik becomes part of the land of Over There:

“The cellar was filled with the sounds of danger and fear, and it seemed incredible that only half a minute from here there was a city and people and books . . . he went over to his Jews, and they looked at him with sad, worried faces . . . and he was still laughing at them in his heart for their willingness to forgive him so soon after what he’d done to them . . . but when he opened his eyes and saw them all around him, tall and ancient, gazing at him with pity, he knew with all his nine-and-a-half-year-old alter kopf intelligence that it was too late now” (85–86).

Momik stops going to school and spends all his time either in the cellar or reading books about the Holocaust, which becomes an important part of his world. Another sign of Momik’s transformation into someone from Over There is his attitude toward the green bench—the neighborhood bench that serves as a gathering place for Grandfather Anshel and the “crazy”² people—such as Hannah Zeitrin, who runs naked in the street at night yelling for God to take her, Ginzburg, who keeps asking who he is, Zeidman, who copies the movements of the people next to him, Mr. Munin, who sleeps in the synagogue at night, and Mr. Aaron Marcus, who always makes faces. At first, Momik is afraid to come near the bench, but gradually he comes closer, stands at a distance, and listens to the conversations while jotting down their stories. Later, Momik joins the bench occupants and gives them the title of “secret warriors”. He even claims not to care if people think they are crazy because, as far as he is concerned, they are his friends.

10. Academic Deterioration and Expulsion

Momik’s assimilation into the world of Over There is quick and dramatic. Only five months after Grandfather Anshel comes to stay with them, Momik’s school performance deteriorates to the point where he is expelled. He goes from being an honor’s student—a fact that is listed as one of his strongest qualities—to flunking out, and even his transfer to another school is of little interest to him: “His teacher Netta came over to talk to Mama and Papa, and they agreed about certain things. Momik didn’t care. He didn’t even ask . . . At the end of the school year Momik’s report card said *Promoted*, but not at our school, and Mama told him that the following year he would attend a special school near Natanya, and he wouldn’t be living at home, but this was for his own good” (86). Momik’s relatively high functionality and eagerness to please is replaced by an apathy that bears close resemblance to the descriptions of Grandfather Anshel, who seems to not always be aware of or to simply not care about what goes on around him.

This aspect of Momik’s personality is also present in the research literature, since second-generation children, as far as academic achievement is concerned, tend to oscillate between an excessive drive to overachieve as a way to make up for the parents’ loss of their “normal lives” on the one hand, and a diminished performance at school, learning disabilities, and a lack of motivation on the other (Berger and Ivgi 2009). It is interesting to note that, as a child, Momik exhibits both these patterns at different times: in the period preceding his radical exposure to the Holocaust trauma, Momik is an honor’s student, who strives to please his parents and best his classmates in terms of academic achievement, whereas, after the process of exposure, he is frequently absent from school and shows a lack of motivation that eventually gets him transferred to a “special school”.

11. Fear of Emotion

As an adult, Momik himself becomes an author who tries to write about the Holocaust. His marriage with Ruthy is on the rocks, and he maintains complicated relationships with her and with Ayala, his mistress. One of the main themes that emerge around the character of adult Momik is

² Therapists report that in conversations with members of the second generation, they tended to portray their surviving parents as disturbed (Hass 1996, p. 86). In the post-war period, Israeli society also viewed the post-trauma symptoms of Holocaust survivors as madness and mental illness (as described in Almagor 1985 novel *The Summer of Aviya*, for example), whereas studies point out that the boundary between mentally ill and healthy patients is fluid, since “normal” patients may become “ill” given severe enough trauma (Ofir 2013, p. 147).

the fear of emotion. It seems that Momik's growing up is a gradual process of distancing and active emotional avoidance. Also, according to Vardi's research, "Yarzheit candles", are caught in the internal struggle between the dead part of their psyche—the part that is empty of emotion, and the living, feeling part (Vardi 1990).

The third part of the novel, "Wasserman", tells the story of Anshel Wasserman, renowned Jewish childrens' author and the brother of Momik's grandmother, whom Momik calls "grandfather". This chapter describes the relationship between Wasserman, who is unable to die, and the commander of the camp, Herr Neigel. Wasserman tells Herr Neigel a story in installments and, in return, the camp commander agrees to try his best to kill Wasserman. In this chapter, we come to know that Momik is now residing in a rented apartment in Tel Aviv, without his wife or mistress, for the purpose of trying to write about the Holocaust. It is there that he first comes up with the idea of the "white room" in the Holocaust Memorial Library in Jerusalem—Yad Vashem—where he would be able to write while accessing the violent parts of himself. The fourth part of the novel, "The Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik's Life", is written by Momik and structured in the scientific style of an encyclopedia—alphabetical and ostensibly random. In my opinion, Momik tries to make some sense of the Holocaust experience which he cannot contain or understand. This part attempts to tell the story of baby Kazik, who is destined to live for 24 h only and grows up remarkably fast. Throughout the "Encyclopedia", it is possible to identify numerous expressions of Momik's emotional distance and detachment as an adult. Thus, for example, the entry for "love" in the encyclopedia redirects the reader to the entry for "sex"—an unambiguous sign that he denies the emotional aspect of the love relationship. Similarly, under "feelings", Momik writes that feelings are "a subjective inner experience . . . and rule out the possibility of drawing objective general conclusions" (439). Nevertheless, in the entry for "documentation", Ayala asks the adult Momik (Shlomik) to feel again: "If you want to save yourself . . . write me a new story . . . Yes, yes, I know your limitations: I don't expect a happy ending from you. But promise me that at least you'll write with MERCY [q.v.], with LOVE [q.v.]! Not *See under: Love*, Shlomik! Go love! Love!" (450). Ayelet's supplication attests to Momik's emotional deafness and the same pattern of emotional detachment can be seen in his relationships with his wife, Ruthy, and with his son, Yariv.

12. The Search for Identity

The process of investigation that Momik embarks on as a child continues into his adult life as well. He attempts, through this journey, to bring his grandfather back to life—whether in reality or as a metaphor. However, it seems that this search and the tracing of his grandfather's history prevent him from moving on with his own life: "And I spoke about fear. And about Grandfather, whom I can't seem to bring back to life, not even in the story. And about being unable to understand my life until I learn about my un-lived life *Over There*" (109). Momik is unable to live his "real" life in Israel because he is living a parallel life "*Over There*".

Even as a grown man, Momik is unable to separate the lives of the characters he writes about from his own life. We can see this reflected in the points of resemblance between Momik and Grandfather Anshel: they are both average, both struggle with repression and silence, and Momik decides to be a writer in Grandfather Anshel's footsteps—a decision he makes when he is still a child and which he deems "an important decision". In the last part of the book, about the life of baby Kazik, under "CHATUNA"—"WEDDING", Momik, the author, refers to his own wedding with Ruthy—an excerpt that seems disconnected from the narrative flow, yet emblemizes the intermingling of Momik's world with the world of his characters from *Over There* (333).

As discussed previously, one of the traits attributed to the second generation is the heightened tendency to search for meaning as a way of dealing with depression (Aviad-Wilcheck and Cohenca 2011). Momik is looking for meaning in his present life by trying to untangle and understand the past. This attempt to create meaning is also reflected in his endeavor to write an "Encyclopedia" that would contain the entirety of one person's life—that of baby Kazik. However, as the story gradually reveals,

this attempt too is doomed to failure. Momik proves incapable of writing the encyclopedia and, at the same time, incapable of filling his life with satisfactory meaning.

13. Repercussions on Momik's Adult Life

Momik's interest in death and the Holocaust is obsessive, and the Holocaust experience utterly dominates his inner world and his imagination. As I mentioned, the communication patterns characteristic of the second generation include, among others, an excessive independence that stems from an inability to tolerate dependence on another, which leads to difficulties in developing intimate and social relationships (Aviad-Wilcheck and Cohenca 2011; Guy 1995; Kellermann 1999). Throughout the novel, it appears that the most meaningful relationships Momik has as an adult are with people who are no longer alive (such as Grandfather Anshel) or with fictional characters that he himself invented. His real-life relationships with his family, his son, his wife, and his mistress are described as cold and distant, marred by emotional detachment.

Momik pays a hefty price for a life led in an environment steeped in severe Holocaust trauma. The influences and repercussions of his upbringing can be seen in his professional life, his romantic relationships, and his relationship with his son. For instance, this is how Momik describes his "broken" marriage with Ruthy: "Sometimes I want to make it up to her. I could cry when I think about the day she'll be lying there in critical condition and I walk in to donate a kidney that saves her life. It's hard to imagine a nobler sacrifice. Sometimes I actually look forward to it. Then she'll see: her whole life with me will take on a different meaning. She will understand the truth and her heart will bleed. Oh, my darling, the hell you must have lived through" (104). This relationship ends up breaking down entirely. The couple separates, and Ruthy bids Momik farewell saying: "I hope you find what you're looking for so we can start living again" (107).

Momik has one son, named Yariv. This relationship is portrayed as being devoid of emotion, similarly to the relationship Momik had with his father, who never touched him. For example, this is how Momik describes spending time with Yariv in the park: "He's taller and sturdier than most children his age, and that's good, but he's afraid of them. He's afraid of everything. I have to climb the slide because he refuses to move without me. I climb down again and leave him there crying that he's afraid he might fall. Some kindly soul walks over to inform me that he's afraid. I smile, coldly beatific, and tell her that out in the forests children his age were used as sentinels and made to sit guard for hours high in the treetops" (149). As far as Momik is concerned, his role as a parent is to prepare his son for life. Yet, it seems that the life Momik is preparing Yariv for is life in the land of Over There: "Always stand in the middle row. Never reveal more than you have to. Remember things are seldom what they seem . . . It's a good thing he can sleep through all the noise . . . He may have to sleep with tanks passing in the streets someday. Or on his feet, trudging through the snow. Or in a crowded cell block maybe, with ten more like him to a bunk" (148–149).

In a conversation he has with Ruthy about Yariv's upbringing, Momik stresses the fact that his goal is to "prepare him for life", and when Ruthy points out that his behavior might take a great toll on his relationship with Yariv and affect his son's love for him, Momik retorts: "Love, I sneered maliciously, I prefer a living son to a loving son" (148). Momik is aware of the fact that he is treating Yariv in much the same manner as his parents treated him, but he senses that he cannot do otherwise: "But when his mouth sticks to my neck and trembles with a mournful sob, I feel the heavy pendulum of childish shame swing from his heart to mine with such force it almost knocks me off the ladder. Forgive me, my child, I say inwardly, forgive everything, be wiser and more patient than I am, because I don't have the strength, they didn't teach me how to love" (149).

It is interesting to look at the ending of the novel. For the last entry in "The Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik's Life", the author chose the word "TEFILLA"—"PRAYER". The final sentence of the book is a kind of prayer, ostensibly addressed to Kazik; however, in my opinion, it is really going out to all of humanity: "All of us prayed for one thing: that he might end his life

knowing nothing of war. Do you understand, Herr Neigel? We asked so little: for a man to live in this world from birth to death and know nothing of war" (452).

14. Epilogue

Writing about the Holocaust, according to Grossman, is an impossible task. As his protagonist, Momik, puts it: "For the past forty years people had been writing about the Holocaust and would continue to do so, only they were doomed to failure, because while other tragedies can be translated into the language of reality as we know it, the Holocaust cannot, despite that compulsion to try again and again, to experience, to sting the writer's living flesh with it" (124); "all the books, all the pictures and words and films and facts and numbers about the Holocaust at Yad Vashem to that which must remain forever unresolved, forever beyond our comprehension" (121). On the other hand, as Grossman's protagonist testifies, the very act of trying to write about the Holocaust has a liberating and therapeutic value. As an adult, Momik tries writing about the Holocaust wholeheartedly in order to heal himself from his obsessive preoccupation, a fact that both Ruthy and Ayala realize: "If you really want to pull yourself out of this, start making an effort . . . We think you should rent a room somewhere . . . And you can stay there quietly on your own and write. No excuses. You can't keep torturing everyone around you like this. World War II only lasted six years, yours has been going on for thirty-five. Enough already" (157). The paradox of writing about the Holocaust is embodied in the protagonist's inability to write and understand the Holocaust combined with the obsessive need to be busy with it all the time. Bibliotherapy, treatment with the aid of books, whether by writing or by reading, can help release tension, present problems in a new light, develop awareness, open emotional blockages, break through taboos, create identification, and lead to finding new ways of dealing and self-improvement. Literature amplifies our sense of freedom and makes us question personality types that were forced upon us (Cohen 2010, p. 15). Momik's writing is his way to seek meaning in his life. By revealing and affirming our inner experience, we can achieve a certain internal certainty (May 1994).

In his novel, Grossman describes well the transgenerational transmission to the second generation, but he also points to the possibility of transmitting the Holocaust trauma to the third generation, in the character of Yariv, Momik's son. Grossman was ahead of his time in this respect, for most of the studies that examined this issue and found that members of the third generation also show symptoms of unprocessed post-traumatic stress were written after the book *See Under: Love* was published (Scharf and Maysel 2011). Scholars found that many survivors who rarely spoke of their experiences in the Holocaust to their children were more likely to open up to their grandchildren, members of the third generation. As we saw, there is somewhat of a consensus about the psychological/mental repercussions of the Holocaust on the second generation of survivors; however, things are much more ambiguous as far as the third generation is concerned. Hass maintains that members of the second generation tended to promise themselves that, when they grew up, they would not repeat the harmful or hurtful behavioral patterns of their parents. They aspired to give their children more freedom and avoid the kind of stifling relationship that could suppress their personal expression and initiative. Many of them even hoped to spare their children the fear of the outside world instilled in them by their survivor parents. Some of them vowed to show more empathy and sensitivity toward their children. However, Hass also admits that some of the children of survivors did pass their anxieties onto the third generation and are aware of the fact that their heightened sensitivity has an effect on their children (Hass 1996, pp. 158–63).

In my opinion, the important universal, humanistic message that Grossman wishes to send through Momik is that every single one of us contains both the victim and the aggressor, and that, under certain conditions and in certain circumstances, the "Nazi beast" or its counterparts may awaken within each of us (Azuz 2015, p. 211). There is no understanding evil and there is no point in trying. Momik cannot get to the bottom of the land of Over There because the task he has set for himself is impossible. Nevertheless, Grossman asks us to try and understand the potential for evil in man, rather than evil itself. Momik's obsessive preoccupation with the suffering and evil that

was perpetuated Over There turns him into an aggressor in his own right. The weak, victimized son of survivors who delves into evil and hatred in a hopeless attempt to understand them, becomes indifferent to the world around him, and that, in a sense, is the greatest danger of all.

My main conclusion from Grossman's novel is that the preoccupation with evil has the potential to unleash evil. We have a natural tendency to judge evil and to try to arrive at some scientific explanation of how something so horrible can happen at the hand of human beings (Azuz 2015, p. 211). Since there can be no logical explanation for evil, we tend to classify it as an extra-human phenomenon, something monstrous that cannot arise among "normal" human beings, and by doing so, we abdicate our responsibility for the events. However, if we wish to prevent manmade evil, we must understand humanity's potential for evil. In his essay about the rise of Nazism and the consolidation of anti-Semitism in Germany in the 1870s, Azuz writes that, for most humans, circumstances tend to override the values they "normally" adhere to, and the more extreme the circumstances, the further people will go to adapt themselves to them (Azuz 2015, p. 428).

The Holocaust was an important philosophical junction in human history, and the difficult memory of it was transmitted through different narratives, at different points in time. In Israel, the dominant proclivity in the cultural discourse was to demonize the Nazis, and Hitler above all. However, a demon, according to Bauer, resides outside the boundaries of what we define as human and, thus, demonization is a way for us to abdicate responsibility (Bauer 1978). Grossman in his novel creates a demon in the shape of the "Nazi beast" that Momik tries to confront, unsuccessfully. It is critical for our civilization to make the Holocaust a topic of discussion relevant to the everyday existence of every single human being, by presenting it as a moral discussion. The understanding that the most terrible acts humans ever committed (and are still committing) have the potential to be perpetrated by any one among us is paramount, from the humanistic perspective; only a conscious and deliberate effort to achieve it can stop similar catastrophes from happening again in the future.

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