

**Locating and Reading Trauma Ethically in Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz
and After***

by

Ellen Graham

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ABSTRACT

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Ellen Graham
University of Guelph, 2015

Advisor:
Dr. Christine Bold

This thesis begins with the assumption that underlying every Holocaust work of literature there is the presence of psychic trauma. Moreover, that the duty to remember the Holocaust places a moral claim on its readers. By placing contemporary theories of psychic trauma in dialogue with post-Holocaust theories of selfhood, memory, and unspeakability, it examines how Charlotte Delbo's creative writing in her trilogy, *Auschwitz and After*, presents the possibility of trauma's expression through poetry. Contemporary discourse and Delbo's own assertions around trauma's unspeakability, and the Holocaust's affront to understanding, are assembled in order to detail the challenges that face readers in the present. Delbo's text puts forth an ethical call for the reader to remember and thus necessitates a specific reader- a Levinasian reader. The result is the construction of an ethical reader who is able to responsibly approach the Holocaust anew in the post-post context of the present day.

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Introduction

An Analysis of Current Theories of Holocaust Poetry Translation and How They Bear on a Reading of Lamont as Delbo's Translation

As an English-speaking student of a French work, I open this study by addressing the topic of translation. Fittingly enough, in order to begin to explore the layers of mediation, alteration, and complication at work within a translated piece, I reference a number of scholars as they quote, and often translate, other scholars on this issue. Thus, I begin by reiterating Dorota Glowacka's citation of Primo Levi's description of the death camp as a "perpetual Babel," in which the inability to communicate, mainly due to the inmates' lack of knowledge of German and of one another's languages, was the true force of extermination" (16). This statement by Levi properly frames the crucial and essential nature of Holocaust translation in the present. In order to properly explore the possibilities of translation, Theodor Adorno's injunction about the inconceivability of producing art and literature in the wake of Auschwitz must be addressed. An alternative response to Adorno is found in a retort made by fellow survivor Imre Kertész; it is only accessible in English through translation. In Glowacka's translation of Kertész' text *Jezyk na wygnaniu*, she translates his reply to Adorno: "after Auschwitz, one can only write poetry about Auschwitz" (213). Glowacka expands her translation of Kertész by interpreting this statement and adding her own inferences. She argues that Kertész means that despite the destructiveness of the Holocaust, it has also "been 'a source of a new culture'" and that even though Kertész believes the Holocaust will never "go away" he hopes "that memory of the disaster will continue to be a cultural need that grows

out of the rebellion against historical amnesia, permeating the present and reaching far into the future, beyond its immediate historical context” (213). If there is even the possibility of renewed understandings of what it means to “remember” in the post-Holocaust world, Kertész believes that the “legacy of the Holocaust is [thus] ultimately affirmative” (Glowacka 213). Post-Holocaust theory has taught us that the state of remembering is directly tied to the figure of the witness¹ and both these concepts are intimately tied to the possibilities presented by translation.

In the introduction to the compilatory work *Literary Translation: Redrawing the Boundaries*, editors Jean Boase-Beier, Antoinette Fawcett and Philip Wilson quote an argument posed by Walter Benjamin in his 1923 essay “The Translator’s Task” where he declares, “translation acts to preserve the afterlife of a work of art. Even if translation is later than the original, it nonetheless indicates that important works have ‘reached the stage of their continuing life’”(7). This idea is generally accepted by scholars who concern themselves with works that represent themselves as tributes to a memory or as forms of memorialization. However, the various intricacies and mechanics of how translation reproduces works and figures within the context of the Holocaust have continued to pose undeveloped problems in literary theory. In personal correspondence, the translation and linguistic expert Jean Boase-Beier confirmed to me, “not much has been written about either

¹ This concept of witnessing will be explored later in this thesis.

² At the time of this thesis’ writing, I have found there to be a tremendous lack of literature on the translation of Holocaust poetry. In this email, Boase-Beier did mention that she was in the process of co-editing a book on the subject of Holocaust

Holocaust poetry or the translation of Holocaust writing.”² This thesis employs a translated edition by Rosette C. Lamont of Charlotte Delbo’s *Auschwitz and Afterits* primary text. I will provide a brief account of the current, preliminary writings on the subject of Holocaust translation in order to address the linguistic barriers posed to the accurate translation of poetry from one language to another. Furthermore, I will discuss how to approach Lamont’s English as a secondary representation of Delbo’s French testimony.

In an essay titled “Holocaust Testimonies: A Matter for Holocaust Studies or Translation Studies?” from *Literary Translation*, Holocaust and language scholar Peter Davies undertakes a preliminary exposition of what happens when Holocaust theory encounters translation studies. He points to many key and fundamental issues, and their consequences, that arise when the two fields are brought into dialogue with one another. His offering remains in an unanswered question-stage of inquiry but it does serve to underline how the two fields intrude upon one another in complex ways. A significant example of such is detailed in Davies’ quotation of Annette Wieviorka’s theory of the “witness” from her text *The Era of the Witness*, where he explains that fidelity by a translator to a primary work stems from the idea that:

Witnesses are considered to be the “public embodiment of history,” and their texts are discussed in terms of voice, authenticity and commemoration of those who did not survive: thus, there is pressure on the translation to be

² At the time of this thesis’ writing, I have found there to be a tremendous lack of literature on the translation of Holocaust poetry. In this email, Boase-Beier did mention that she was in the process of co-editing a book on the subject of Holocaust poetry but also shared that it would not “be out for a while yet” (January 2015).

faithful not only to a text, but to an individual, an experience, and a whole range of ideas about the Holocaust. (212)

Certainly, Lamont and Delbo must be considered as an exemplary model of this idea.

In Wieviorka's analysis, we see how prominently ethics feature in Holocaust theory's approach to translation.³ Davies explains:

The voice of the witness is a key term in discussion of Holocaust testimony, referring not just to an individual style, but also to a claim to authority, to directness of communication...with it [come] connotations of public performance and ritual, of speech elevated out of the normal run of discourse, and an implied appropriate attitude on the part of the reader. (215)

In other words, the status of the witness influences the reader's reception of the testimony. Davies is suggesting that the figure of the witness remains uniquely present in testimony, even in a mediated translation, as a reader's approach to a testimony is informed by the context of the Holocaust.

Davies redirects his focus to question how the translator's subject position creates either an influence or denotes a presence within their reproduced work. In either instance, the problem of ethics arises for Davies as "ethics presupposes freely choosing, autonomous individuals; it also assumes that these individuals' choices are readily identifiable in textual features that can be traced back to a moment of intention, and that these are the most significant features of translation" (213).

Holocaust theory imposes the weight of its context upon the translator, who, in turn,

³ See Wieviorka's *The Era of the Witness* for further explanation of this thought and the effects of Holocaust testimony. Also, for more on context and testimony, see *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* by the scholar Zoë Vania Waxman.

applies their own frame of reference to their recreation. Both create effects on a translated work that are perhaps not present in the original. Exactly how this dialogue unfolds, and its implications for present theories of literary ethics, has yet to be traced. Davies closes his examination by stating: “we need to find a way of describing and making visible the effects of and influences on translation without proscriptiveness and with a proper appreciation of context” (216). His final thought offers a viable approach for moving forward that stems from Annette Wiewiorka’s post-Holocaust theory and historical analysis: “if it is the case that ‘testimonies [...] express the discourse or discourses valued by society at the moment [a] witness [shares] their stories as much as they render an individual experience’ (Wiewiorka 2006: xii), then the same is likely to be true of translations of those testimonies” (216). Davies offers this idea with the caveat that Holocaust theory must not be used restrictively by placing a “limit [on] our understanding” (216). By highlighting the overlap between the witness, testimony, Holocaust ethics and theories of translation, Davies’ essay reveals the tensions that stir beneath the surface of the many literary Holocaust translations that have circulated the globe in the past few decades.

The problem of translation becomes increasingly complex when the object of conversion is poetry. Language plays uniquely in the context of poetic style and its nuances may shift, become altered or even be lost altogether when its original language is transposed into the expressive framework and expressions of another. By drawing on three selections from Jean Boase-Beier’s self-published work, I will trace her findings concerning translation’s effects on poetry and how they can be

applied to a reading of Lamont. There are pertinent points that can be drawn from her analysis and they can serve as an informative, applicable basis.

Any analysis of the process of translation must begin with the fundamental question of how and where to locate “the divergence of target from original, the point at which such a divergence arises, and [then to reveal] what [this] tells us about poetic translation” (“Translating the Eye of the Poem” 4). The target can loosely be understood as the central idea of the poem that the translator is focused on transmitting from one language into another. In order to answer if and where the central theme of the original is altered, one must first look directly at “what” comprises the original poem and its poetic-style. Boase-Beier proposes that these two aspects are a direct reflection of the author’s mind: “poetry reflects a mind and interacts with minds: it is not just a matter of linguistic features in a text” (2). This must also be recognized by the translator and be the first assessment they make. This requires a level of engagement with the poem as a reader. Boase-Beier writes that reader-response theories have revealed that poetic-style creates various cognitive effects on the reader and this serves to develop the poem’s meaning. The translator must engage with these effects and in doing so take on a role that is “both reading and writing” (2). According to Boase-Beier, *reading* the poem during the process of translation is what draws the translator’s attention to the poem’s ambiguities and these qualities must be preserved. This means, for the reader, the translator has already once-read the poetic work. The translator’s task is not to clarify the meaning of an original poem for a new audience, but to re-represent the original on its own terms and maintain the poem’s openness (“Translation and

Timelessness” 4). It is in this way, such devices as metaphor and ambiguity work within a poem to create the nature of poetry itself: “poetry in particular works by communicating non-propositional effects, by representing a cognitive state and by engaging the reader, who becomes actively involved in developing meaning” (4).

In order to translate a poem’s image into another language, the translator must wrestle closely with the text. Boase-Beier notes that translation has often been described as “reading in a particularly attentive way, to explore the original for every possible nuance, whether or not it is then possible or desirable to capture all these nuances in translation” (“Bringing Home the Holocaust: Paul Celan’s *Heimkehr* in German and English” 2). The translator pays great mind to the sanctity of the original and never represents their translation as anything other than (2). However, Boase-Beier argues that a general reader first approaches a translated work with the original itself in mind and only secondly as a translated “copy” of the original (2). Significantly, this revelation shows that the translator understands and engages with an original work more closely than even a reader who does not require a translation: “the process of translation both requires and enables a detailed and intensive engagement with the poem which goes beyond that of the reader or critic, and beyond their experience of or explanation for the effects of the text, because it automatically confronts the nature and origins of language” (15).

Boase-Beier focuses largely on the translator’s approach to the subject of translation and this emphasis places an onus on the translator’s ethics and close engagement with the original work. I will close this preface by recounting Lamont’s descriptions of her relationship with Delbo in order to follow Boase-Beier’s

suggestion that it is an examination of the subject position of the translator that speaks to the validity of their adaptation.

In her article “The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo,” Rosette C. Lamont draws an in-depth portrait of Delbo as a writer, survivor and courageous woman. The two developed a great literary understanding and friendship. Lamont writes that Delbo “in the course of numerous conversations, entrusted [her] with a message” by sharing the following reflection:

“Although I did not know it at once, I came to the realization that I wrote this text so that people might envision what [the concentration camps were] like. Of course it wasn’t ‘like’ anything one had ever known. It was profoundly, utterly ‘unlike.’ And so, I knew I had to raise before the eyes of a future reader the hellish image of a death camp: senseless killing labor, pre-dawn roll calls lasting for hours, death-directed, minute-by-minute, programming. We were made to stand for hours on end in the snow, on ice, envying those of our companions who had died that night in the bunks they shared with us. I hope that these texts will make the reoccurrence of this horror impossible. This is my dearest wish.” (485)

Lamont and Delbo were friends and confidantes. Such intimate recollections reveal that Lamont was aware of the aim and magnitude of Delbo’s project. Delbo began writing this memoir, along with various other works, “immediately after the war [but] all of her work appeared between 1961 and 1985, the year of her death” (Trezise 859). Lamont points out that waiting so long to publish could likely have caused severe consequences for Delbo’s work: “[it] might have buried her

witnessing forever. She might have died early, with her manuscripts undiscovered” (“The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo” 490). By first putting her manuscripts away, Delbo shared with Lamont that she was hoping to ensure that they would “stand the test of time” so that she might “carry the word” for her lost companions (496). Such a patient gesture reveals how deeply Delbo felt her role as a witness. By choosing to eventually publish, it is also clear that Delbo trusted her voice to represent her own experiences and to stand in as a voice for others who could no longer represent their own. Moreover, by enlisting Lamont as a translator, it must be concluded that Delbo believed in the ability of Lamont’s voice to represent her own as a survivor.

I would like to propose the idea that in the context of Holocaust poetry, or survivor testimony in general, a form of translation is already at work before an original text is translated from its mother tongue. As a survivor, Delbo felt, as did many others, the burden of sharing her story and the stories of others: “Je veux donner à voir!” [Delbo] kept on repeating. She was referring to the moral obligation she felt to raise the past from its ashes, to carry the word” (*Auschwitz and After* viii). In the aftermath of the Holocaust’s genocide, the words of many came to be told by the mouths of the few. The single voice that chooses to transmit a testimony is always encroached upon by the memory of those voices that can no longer speak. In the particular instance of poetry translation, Boase-Beier’s research suggests that an ethically responsible translator has the ability to create a close modification of an original work. Lamont’s close relationship to Delbo shows that she is a prime example of such. Since Delbo’s work also represents a form of Holocaust testimony,

Davies' suggestions can validate a reading of Lamont's translation since her writing would have been informed by a similar cultural context and shared comparable values to Delbo's own. Moreover, Davies' analysis proposes that even for an English-speaking reader of Lamont's translation, the figure of Delbo as a witness is still preserved.

Glowacka, Boase-Beier, Davies, Delbo, and Lamont have impressed to excess the need for translations to be examined, to be read and to be produced and that this can be done faithfully. In *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-century Poetry*, Carolyn Forché relates a sobering fact: "fewer women poets seem to have survived the horrors of our century than their male counterparts, and many fewer have been translated" (31). Forché's statement and the overarching presence of the Holocaust cannot be divorced from the context of Lamont's translation. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to compare Delbo's original French to Lamont's English and to check for discrepancies. It is my hope that this survey has warranted a reading of Lamont as a trustworthy reflection of Delbo. We are the "future readers" that Delbo imagined and her words have only reached us through Lamont's reimagined, English translation. In order to learn from the past, and for the Holocaust to have an "affirmative legacy," translation must be employed as a means of communication as remembrance.

Chapter One

Introducing and Situating Charlotte Delbo's Life and Trilogy Within Women's Post-Holocaust Writing

Charlotte Delbo's Biography

Charlotte Delbo was born in August of 1913 in the suburb Vigneux-sur-Seine in Paris, France. At nineteen, Delbo joined the Young Communists while studying philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. She eventually met her husband, Georges Dudach, through the group in 1934 and the two were married the same year. During her studies, Delbo was sent to interview the acclaimed theatrical producer Louis Jouvet for her student newspaper. Two days after their meeting, she received a letter requesting that she be his secretary. Holocaust scholar Camila Loew places great significance on Jouvet's influence on Delbo's writing career:

It is important to bear in mind that Delbo's professional formation in France before deportation was strongly linked to literature...she worked with Jouvet from 1937 to 1941 and then again from 1945 to 1947. Delbo's textualization of her experience is strongly influenced by the training she received from Jouvet and other artists she met through him. (Loew 1)

During this formative period in 1940, Delbo's life was forever altered. She was on a company tour with Jouvet in Buenos Aires when she received startling news from occupied France. Back at home, Philippe Pétain's collaborationist Vichy regime had made an example of her friend André Woog. As a member of the French Resistance,

Woog was guillotined for his beliefs and efforts. Delbo immediately returned to her husband in Paris and the two purchased an apartment under false names in order to devote themselves to publishing anti-German pamphlets and to transcribe foreign radio and newspaper articles for an underground French Resistance newspaper. In March of 1942, both were caught and arrested by the police and imprisoned in the La Santé in Paris. Dudach was offered an opportunity to “enlist as a ‘volunteer’ for the German war effort” but refused on the assumption that it was a death sentence (“The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo” 494). Shortly afterward, Dudach and Delbo were given five minutes to say their final farewells before they were separated (Kamel 66). Later that same day, on May 23rd of 1942, Georges was assassinated by firing squad at Mont Valérien prison. For roughly three more months, Delbo remained incarcerated in Paris before she was sent to Romainville with 229 other French women for five months. In January of 1943, the group was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland.

In the introduction to the second edition of *Auschwitz and After*, Holocaust scholar Lawrence L. Langer recalls the words of Caroline Moorehead in *A Train in Winter* where she states that “the only train, during the entire four years of German occupation, to take women from the French Resistance to the Nazi death camps” was the one occupied by Delbo (x). Langer continues by concluding, “no one has ever discovered the reason why” (x). Upon their arrival at the camps, the group of women was absorbed into the mass of inmates. Sources cite differing survival rates for the group of French women. Some sources claim 49 women exited the camp, while others report that the number was 57 (*Preempting the Holocaust* 43,

Schweitzer 5). Langer attributes the count of 49 survivors that his work accounts for to Delbo's investigative work: "we have specific information about the women in Delbo's group because after the war, with the help of a handful of other returnees from her convoy, she tracked down the details of the previous lives of all but one of the 230 women who were deported with her" (xii). The memory of many of these women is preserved in the final book of Delbo's trilogy.

After leaving Auschwitz, Delbo was moved on to the Raisko camp in July 1943. The conditions were better there⁴ and she lived as a "useful member" of a "special project [where she] lived in barracks and worked in laboratories or the gardens" (Kamel 66). The "special project" was Delbo's job of "extracting latex (rubber) from the dandelion roots that grew profusely in the area around the camp" (Langer xiv). Finally, Delbo was relocated to Ravensbrück where Soviet Forces liberated the camp on April 29-30 in 1945 (Hudson Osborn 2).

Upon reclaiming her freedom, Delbo was moved to Sweden to recuperate. She began to write straight away. The trilogy *Auschwitz and After* appeared first as three separate texts. The volume "None of Us Will Return" was the first to be written and was completed in 1946 but Delbo "put it away in a drawer and did not let it be published in France until 1965, when, as she said, it had stood the test of time" (Langer xvii). Her second volume, "Useless Knowledge," was composed between 1946 and 1947 but only appeared publicly in France in 1970. Langer writes that

⁴ Throughout this thesis, an understanding of the overall conditions of the internment camps are based on Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich's, *The Holocaust as Historical Experience*.

“The Measure of Our Days” appeared in France shortly after the second book’s publication (Delbo x).

There is a great deal of conflicting information regarding the time period of Delbo’s writing and the dates of her writing’s publications. Many critics claim, and all do so without citing sources, that the second two books were written twenty years after the first. Langer, who had interviewed Delbo before her death, claims the two books followed shortly after. Similarly, there is very little information available to Delbo’s English-speaking audience in regards to her other works of playwriting. Their existence is often briefly mentioned by her critics but without their title names or any supplemental information. A rare example to the contrary was published online by the American newspaper the *Jewish Daily Forward*. Written by Benjamin Ivry and published on August 10, 2013, the article is in remembrance of the 100th anniversary of Delbo’s birth. The article refers to Delbo as a UN stenographer and playwright. It also mentions three of Delbo’s plays—“Who Will Relate These Words?”, “Theory and Practice” and “The Court Sentence.” All three take up and philosophize themes from Delbo’s life—one is set in a concentration camp, another is informed by Delbo’s Resistance past and pits Marxism against German-Jewish thinkers, and the third explores issues of fascism. Ivry explains the invisibility of Delbo’s plays by noting, “[Delbo’s] writings remained a mostly private activity, in part because philosophical plays were unfashionable, as was the entire subject of the Holocaust in France” (Forward.com). As a very late result of such concerns, Delbo’s plays have still yet to gain an English-speaking readership.

After leaving Sweden, Delbo “immediately” returned to work for Jouvett but her recovering health kept her from working for him for long (Hudson Osborn 2). Later, Delbo put her stenographer skills and ability to speak several foreign languages to use at the United Nations in Geneva until 1960 when she quit and returned to Paris. Once home, Delbo accepted a position working for her previous university studies director, Henri Lefebvre, at the National Centre for Scientific Research (Hudson Osborn 2). The first English translation of Delbo’s work was the book *None of Us Will Return*. It was published in a limited edition in 1968 by Grove Press and was translated by John Githens. Delbo lost her battle with cancer and passed away on March 1, 1985. Later that same year, Delbo’s final work, *Days and Memory*, was translated and published by Lamont. The short text is a thoughtful study of Delbo’s Auschwitz recollections from the perspective of her older self. Ten years after her death, in 1995, Lamont published her translation of Delbo’s three works as the trilogy *Auschwitz and After*.

Introducing *Auschwitz and After*

Auschwitz and After resists the standard survivor narrative and template by offering a work that lacks any traditional structure. The trilogy is a harrowing portrayal of physical and psychological traumatic experience at the hands of the Nazis. It is a compilation of raw impressions that stylistically most represent a stream-of-consciousness type of writing that travels across and between genres, voices, and narrative points of view. Delbo employs this combination to illustrate a

gendered camp experience that portrays what life in the camps was like for a French political prisoner.

Delbo's poetry and short prose are chronologically ordered by technicalities. She begins the book at the start of her camp experience in the short passage titled "Arrivals, Departures" and ends the trilogy with the title "Envoi." The opening of the trilogy describes the confusion of the train station at the doors of the camps and the smoke of the crematorium in the sky. The short poem that closes the trilogy does so by describing a prophetic dawn that is marked by blood. This sense of order, progression, and perhaps closure, is often disrupted by poems that are distinctly written in a present tense and that explore thoughts and queries that do not fit into the storyline they appear in. For example, in the second book *Useless Knowledge*, Delbo clearly writes from the perspective of her post-liberation self. She describes watching people who are living with a carefree air in post-war France that she cannot connect to: "can you how can you...this desert is peopled / by men and women who love one another / love and shout their love...I came back from the dead" (227). It is clear that such images of love and life are not available for her consideration in the camps. Similarly, in the first book, following a horrific description of camp suffering, Delbo interjects with "presently I am writing this story in a café—it is turning into a story" (26). Such lapses of temporality are interspersed throughout the trilogy and are only two examples of the text's complicated genre. Most significantly, the trilogy cannot be properly described as a memoir - the reader is given very little personal information about Delbo and she predominantly writes using the plural pronoun "we." Indeed, the final book is

almost entirely composed of monologues written from the perspectives of other survivors whose names appear in the titles of their passages.

The majority of the prose explores the mundane, everyday details of camp life. Namely, how the inmates suffered the extreme deprivation of food and water in the camps. By exploring such experiences through physical descriptions and the accompanying mental agony, the trilogy illustrates the markings of severe trauma.⁵ Without pointing explicitly to trauma, and risking watering down the impact of its experience, Delbo is able to provide a representation of it through her powerful use of metaphor. Her poetry, on the other hand, is deeply reflective and centers on the psychological experience of internment and liberation. Delbo often addresses abstract ideas and themes that concern the isolation of the survivor and the plight of the sufferer in the unimaginable context of the camps and then in the unbelievable circumstances of having survived them. Her words are often accompanied by a skilled use of blank space on the page. This method recalls her playwright background by providing a dramatic context for her poems.

The two modes, of poetry and prose, work by usurping traditional categories of communication in order to impart knowledge of the universe of traumatic experience. In order to properly reflect, or transmit at all, the nature of trauma, Delbo, as a victim of trauma, could not write a work that adhered to the demands of specific traditional genres.⁶ The entity of trauma subverts all categories of its

⁵ Examples from Delbo's writing, concerning physical deprivation within the camps, will be explored in the final chapter as articulations of trauma.

⁶ A reading of Lina N. Insana's *Arduous Tasks* encouraged this thesis' broad understanding of what works constitute "testimony." In the text, Insana takes up the

definition or expression. What emerges from a reading of *Auschwitz and After*, coupled with an analysis of psychological trauma and accompanying ethical philosophies, is an awareness of how to trace trauma in her work and how to do so ethically. An ethical reading recasts Delbo's trilogy as an attempt to transmit a collective representation of trauma that strives to stay true to the instance of its appearance—in all of its impact, its horror, and its complexity.

Delbo Amongst Her Peers: French Holocaust Survivor Women's Writing and Poetry

Delbo's poetry possesses a singular status as Boase-Beier explains, "what is striking [to me] is that almost all French poetry from the camps is by men...most French poetry we have from the camps is from Buchenwald...but the inmates were mainly men there" (January 2015). The reality is, very few non-Jewish minorities from the camps have either published their work or are known to have written at all about their experiences. In the introduction to *Auschwitz and After*, Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer opens by noting:

Charlotte Delbo is still little known in this country [the United States], and not very well known in her own, even though her memoir about her experience in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück and her return to France after liberation shows the pen and imagination of the genuine artist. (ix)

The literature specialist Thomas Tresize makes a similar point, commenting on the lack of Delbo's visibility and summarizing the contents of her "memoir" with the

work of Primo Levi and convincingly argues for diverse types of writing and autobiography that can be deemed as testimonial.

admonition that “while the trilogy may lend itself to such chronological summary, chronology constitutes neither its sole nor even its most important organizing principle” (859). For Langer, a particular sort of survivor figure pens *Auschwitz and After*: “she writes not as a heroine but as a victim. Her language is exquisite, but the pain of her memories is not” (ix). It is because of the horrific content, he suggests, that the text has not been widely circulated (ix). Tresize goes further to specify that the “chronology” of *Auschwitz and After* includes not only “poems whose interspersions disrupts any rigorous narrative continuity, but its prose assumes the form of relatively short and discrete texts whose own narrative interrelations are not predominantly linear” (859). In fact, Tresize states, the lack of linear structure is directly caused by the “fragmentary articulation of trauma and survival” that Delbo is presenting. Holocaust scholar Camila Loew argues that this quality of rawness was entirely intentional: “[Delbo] did not want to narrate a story with beginning, middle, and end; she wanted to actualize the pain” (2).

Tresize and Langer both provide accurate descriptions of the content of Delbo’s work and why her method of organization in *Auschwitz and After* sets her apart from many of her survivor contemporaries. However, her experiences are no less horrific than those of her fellow inmates, or any other male or female prisoners.⁷ In the decades following the Holocaust, the voices of male survivors have shared harrowing tales of their experiences and detailed their memories in widely circulated publications. The most significant, and arguably only, female name to be attached to the Holocaust is the Jewish Anne Frank and there are at least ten male

⁷ This passage is a summarized perspective drawn from Lillian Kremer’s text *Women’s Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination*.

names that can compete with her status. Delbo has been relegated to diminutive and overlooked categories that have kept her work from being adequately appreciated. She is often referred to first as a “non-Jew” or “survivor,” which linguistic scholar Virginia Hudson Osborn has suggested is the cause of her restriction and invisibility in the realm of Holocaust studies. The inference can be made that such labels have denied Delbo recognition as a credible writer. However, these specific particularities of Delbo’s authorship are precisely the virtues that contribute to her work’s distinction and value. As a French woman, and survivor, Delbo’s voice is a rarity that can speak to the experience of internment for minorities and political prisoners in the camps. Moreover, the experience of psychological trauma has become a compelling object of study and research in present society. Delbo’s status as a trauma victim can represent an important case study for scholars concerned with the connections between PTSD and the act of writing as a means of therapy.⁸

Delbo in Historical Context: The “Jewish” Holocaust and the Community of Auschwitz

Today, it is largely only within the academic community that there is a long-overdue recognition of the collective experience of the Holocaust. Holocaust scholar Rose Yalow Kamel argues that the collapse of time in Delbo’s narrative, coupled with the final sections of her text that are marked by the first names of her inmates, allows Delbo to succeed in “universalizing an unnatural landscape...a landscape with expanse but without chronology, a landscape where time (and even life) remains

⁸ Delbo as a PTSD victim, and the possibilities of her writing as a form of therapy, will be explored in chapter three through an analysis of Cathy Caruth’s analysis of Onno van der Hart’s findings.

'hollow'" (Kamel 80). Elsewhere, the literature scholar Margaret-Anne Hutton remarks that "class is simply not an issue in Delbo's work" and that Delbo "avoids mention of French superiority and indeed of national antipathies" (166 and 167). These beliefs are explicitly written into Delbo's prose. For example, she describes the inmates as sharing a single heartbeat: "[Delbo writes that] they are joined together by a 'single circulatory system'" (Hutton 167). This collective representation is also mirrored in the author's point of view; scholar Nicole Thatcher argues that Delbo "adopts deliberately [the point of view] of the victims" ("Delbo's Voice" 43). This is exemplified, Thatcher points out, by the "use of the collective *nous*: [wherein Delbo reveals that she] is speaking for all the women" (45). Thatcher notes that "being part of a group allows the narrator to pass naturally from the collective 'nous' to the singular 'he' and, through continual exchange, to present her personal experience of the unbearable thirst, cold or pain from ill-treatment as standing for that of each detainee" (45). The result, Hutton argues, is that the book is written from the standpoint of an "ethical, exemplary memory" (161).

Hutton's and Thatcher's analysis is correct. However, arriving at such a conclusion must be a process that is properly nuanced by the inclusion of an insight by Tresize that is drawn from an example of Delbo's writing. The passage he recalls is from early on in the trilogy and relates a conversation between Delbo and a Jewish woman inmate. Delbo recognizes difference by relating the inmate's words that her ethnic background determines her fate and that Delbo's heritage does not ensure her death in the same way. However, Delbo's response, despite the woman's words, still answers with the inclusive "we." This passage reveals within the text

how Delbo doesn't ignore dividing lines between groups but includes their reality in order to enforce solidarity through her use of the inclusive "we" as a response. Tresize's analysis explores how this specific passage figures within the larger framework of Delbo's narrative voice and he does so by considering it within the larger context of traumatic life writing.⁹

Outside of Delbo's work in *Auschwitz and After*, Lamont wrote that Delbo spoke profusely about the difference of her ethnic background, and subsequent treatment, within the camps. Lamont attested to this by sharing:

Delbo stresses the fact that there existed basic differences from the start between the treatment of political prisoners, and of members of the so-called inferior races: the Jews and the Gypsies. The first were not subjected to the initial selection process whereby young mothers, infants, small children, the aged and the infirm were sent at once in the line "to the showers," that is the gas chambers. ("The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo" 487)

It would be easy for a reader to not mark these signifiers in Delbo's work. Lamont's information shows the reader how to interpret the opening passage of the trilogy "Arrivals, Departures." Her words also reveal that Delbo was by no means ignorant about her status in the camps as a French prisoner. This calls attention to the trilogy's repeated use of an inclusive narrative voice and begs the question- why its persistence? The repetition creates emphasis and casts Delbo's narrative voice as the agent of her objective to place the reader in a position to ethically consider

⁹ Delbo's use of "we" and the inclusion of ethnic difference must be considered more deeply once the effects of psychological trauma have been properly explored in chapter three. See chapter four for a return and analysis of this issue.

suffering within the camps equally. Delbo's "we" demarcates difference while also communicating a call to solidarity to the reader. By doing so, Delbo insists on a nuanced portrayal of a sense of community amongst Holocaust victims in her writing.¹⁰

Delbo as a Political Prisoner and Non-Religious French Woman

Auschwitz and After curiously does not include any mention by Delbo of her Resistance activities or communist beliefs (Thatcher 43).¹¹ It has been remarked upon by many critics of Delbo that it is significant that she chose to become a part of the French Resistance in the first place.¹² For the scholar Jeremy Popkin, the act of joining such a movement represents and suggests the adoption of a new identity (64). For many European Jews, the Holocaust produced an identity crisis as their birthright was forced upon them whether or not they identified with their heritage at all (Popkin 63). Delbo was imprisoned for actively pursuing ideological beliefs that went directly against those of the Nazis. This decision distinguishes her, aside from her French heritage, from a majority of the Holocaust's victims who were detained for the sole reason of being Jewish.

¹⁰ Since this chapter is concerned with situating and defining Delbo's work, a detailed analysis of this thought will be explored against examples of Delbo's writing in the final chapter.

¹¹ My interpretation of Thatcher's analysis of Delbo has been supplemented by her text *A Literary Analysis of Charlotte Delbo's Concentration Camp Re-Presentation*.

¹² It is also curious that Delbo, who studied philosophy in university, does not write explicitly from the perspective of an intellectual. See Jean Amery's *At the Mind's Limit* for an example of such a testimony.

In Delbo's writing, she makes a comparison between the long period of suffering in the camps and the relatively short duration of Christ's pain on the cross. The contrast emphasizes the scale of a Holocaust victim's experience while also making a religious comment: "you have wept for two thousand years / for one who suffered three days and three nights" (Heinemann 51). For Heinemann, these lines display a "dispensation with God" by Delbo (51). Hutton's analysis contends that this line "captures the tenor" of the entire trilogy (165). Meaning, they are meant to point to the absurd comparison between three days and three nights of suffering, that have been remembered for thousands of years, and the years of daily anguish experienced by those in the death camps. These lines do not reflect a specifically Jewish faith, and appear to be a religious criticism on the whole. Yet they still draw attention to Delbo's status and perspective as a non-Jewish prisoner.

Many historians have written about the privileged living conditions for political inmates in the death camps. Heinemann addresses this fact by commenting specifically on Delbo's experience:

Delbo's status places her chances above those of the Jews, and although the moment-by-moment suffering seems often the same, other factors argue against compatibility. Jews were beaten more, selected more often for the gas chambers, and were often faced with linguistic isolation when housed with Jews of different nationalities. It seems that Delbo's situation was worse than many other political prisoners, whose political contacts enabled them to find protected jobs sooner. (100)

Despite their efforts, the Nazis were unsuccessful at streamlining the experience of torture and deprivations within the camps. Many historians and Holocaust scholars, such as Langer, have argued that women, in particular, underwent differently gendered experiences from those of men¹³ but that when it comes to calculations of suffering, there ought never to be a hierarchy (*Preempting the Holocaust* 58). A claim to superior hardship is not represented anywhere in Delbo's writing: "Delbo's self-effacing portrayal allows her to convey the intensity of suffering and to reject any notion of justification for her survival in place of many others" (Heinemann 49). Rather, as Tresize suggests, the traumatic nature of the Holocaust is shown to undo such frames and barriers in Delbo's writing.¹⁴

Gendered Representations of Camp and Life-Writing in Delbo

Linda Anderson's study of autobiography refers to Virginia Woolf's thought that autobiographical writings by women "require[e] a different emphasis; [they] fly in the face of conventional modes of representation, producing a multiplicity which cannot be captured within one and the same, the singular 'I' of masculine discourse" (Anderson 98). Woolf insists that female writers create an "entanglement of

¹³ This point has been, in part, stimulated by a reading of the scholar Joan Ringelheim's "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research." In this critical essay, Ringelheim points to the lack of documentation surrounding the common experience of women's sexual abuse in the camps. For a thorough and detailed examination of women's particular experience in the camps, see Carol Rittner and John K. Roth's volume *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*.

¹⁴ See chapter four of this thesis for further explanation of this thought.

identities in their writing”¹⁵ and, as a result, first-hand autobiography is able to be more authentic to the truth of women’s writing as “the biographer cannot simply contain the difference which the autobiographical peroration makes to the narrative they are attempting to tell” (99). However, as we have seen, Delbo’s memoir is not preoccupied with her personal recollections as an individual¹⁶ but instead represents an effort to stand for the interned women’s experience as a whole. This desire for universality perhaps explains why Delbo declared that she “was not a woman in her writing” (Thatcher 42). As Thatcher notes, Delbo’s writing is singular in itself as “she is one of the rare women to have written about Birkenau, the women’s camp which had the dual function of concentration and extermination” (42). Yet her writing is distinctly feminine. The short prose and poems that constitute her memoir detail the tedious events of everyday life and Kamel writes that this form is exemplary of traditional women’s writing: “Delbo makes use of the traditional forms often used by women writers to inscribe their lives as gendered beings: the diary, with its focus on daily-ness as process without closure” (66).

A major theme at work in Delbo’s writing is her portrayal of the female body as the centre of survival: “Delbo emphasizes the body as the representative locus of the struggle for survival. While psychological issues have some importance, they are not the most striking. Survival reduces to physical endurance, an outcome essentially resistant to logical explication” (Heinemann 48). Amidst the extreme

¹⁵ See chapter two of this thesis and Delbo’s discussion of the self.

¹⁶ Delbo’s lack of self-description is remarkably curious against the scholar Suzanne Juhasz’s argument that the aim of women autobiographers is to communicate “what the person was like” and to show women that they “are” (221). This comparison emphasizes Delbo’s decision to write for the universal experience of women in the camps.

physical distress that Delbo describes, Heinemann argues that it is the “subordination of the will to the body” that carries the women through.¹⁷ Thatcher argues that in Delbo the prominence given to the body is drawn from her history with theatre and its focus on theories of the body: “the influence of the theatre led Delbo to give prominent place to the body in the writing of her experience [and] she did it from a woman’s perspective” (44). This emphasis, Thatcher argues, creates a cultural women’s framework where Delbo’s numerous descriptions of women’s “sexless” physical state¹⁸ or clothes denote feminine awareness (44). Indeed, by writing about the female body’s degradation under such conditions, Delbo creates a powerful illustration of the effectiveness of the Nazis’ evil and its traumatic effect. For example, Delbo describes herself and a group of her fellow inmates coming across a city window and being unable to identify themselves in the reflected image:

Indeed, there were no shops
 only display windows
 wherein I would have liked to recognize myself
 I raised an arm
 but all the women wished to recognize themselves
 all raised an arm
 and not one found out which she was. (Delbo 87)

¹⁷ An example from Delbo’s writing that is drawn on by Heinemann: “our hearts thump, thump as if they were to burst...I will have heart failure. It has not failed yet, it is still holding up. For how many yards? Our anxiety breaks up the miles into paces, yards, light poles, bends in the road” (49).

¹⁸ See page 109 of Lamont’s translation for examples.

Of all the ways that the women might identify their reflection in the glass, they all choose to raise an arm. In order to recognize oneself, most often it is the face that is searched out and examined in a mirror. Yet here, the women all choose a means of identification that is absolutely impersonal and entirely physical. The women don't wave at themselves—they only raise an arm. The simple gesture speaks for itself. The detachment that Delbo is articulating by the fact that she literally cannot recognize her arm in the confusion of all the women's limbs is doubled by this display of bodily self-detachment. The Nazis not only stripped their victims of identity or self-identity but also of their womanly claims to gender.

Heinemann's discussion of anatomy in Delbo's prose points to the common experience of amenorrhea in the death camps. With the presence of amenorrhea in Delbo's writing, Heinemann argues, comes the suggestion that "the fear of infertility was much more widespread than the actual incidence of the more extreme forced sterilization" (20). It is only in Delbo's work that Heinemann finds an example of this fear in Holocaust women's writing. Heinemann draws her analysis from a passage in Delbo's chapter "None of Us Will Return," where Delbo describes watching the men await sterilization:

The men continue waiting. Silent. Their gaze far-off and colorless. One by one, the first one steps out. They dress on the threshold. Their eyes are averted from those who are still waiting. And when you see their faces you know why. How can one relate the distress of their gestures? The humiliation in their eyes? Women are sterilized in the surgical ward. (95)

Heinemann suggests that the brief mention of female sterilization is made because the “quicker process of male sterilization allows the author to describe the confrontation of the men waiting and those leaving the infirmary” (20). However, it could also be argued that Delbo features the male experience of sterilization in order to insinuate the taboo experience of female amenorrhea. When she writes, “when you see their faces you know why,” it can be deduced that the female prisoners saw the reflection of their own pain and experience in the faces of the men. The indirectness of Delbo, who is elsewhere exceedingly descriptive, also emphasizes the emotional distress that amenorrhea must have inflicted upon the minds of the female prisoners. As Heinemann notes, too, the return of the menstrual cycle in a survivor has been written of positively and is used to signal “the return of life and the possibility of the future” in survivor writing (21).

Through such examples as amenorrhea, women’s Holocaust literature has challenged cultural trends and attitudes that have repressed the discussion of menstruation (21). The war produced other, more visible and widespread, social affects as well. The severity of the war pervaded women’s lives more dramatically than it had ever before and it altered women’s relationship to war. Thatcher quotes a poem by Delbo where she describes life after the war as “a humdrum life” (41). For Thatcher, this description of once coveted freedom “encapsulates the considerable shift in the relationship of women with war brought by World War II” (41). Women participated in the war effort closely and Thatcher cites Billie Melman’s reminder that the German occupation across Europe, and Delbo’s own France in 1940, meant

“the impact of the war on entire populations blurred the borderlines between ‘front’ and ‘rear’ in their gendered perspective” (41).

Such major historical changes in circumstance for women¹⁹ must be marked by literature. Women’s Holocaust scholar, S. Lillian Kramer, argues for this by stating, “women’s fiction validate[s] women’s history” (Kramer 5). Moreover, Kramer insists that even fiction that describes the female Holocaust experience is beneficial because “unlike male narratives, in which women appear as minor figures and often as helpless victims, in women-centered novels female characters are fully defined protagonists, experiencing the Shoah in all its evil manifestations” (5). In a canon of literature dominated by male experience, Delbo’s work is crucial.²⁰ *Auschwitz and After*, by virtue of Delbo’s writing method, offers a feminine account of trauma that aims to encapsulate its impact on a body of women.

French Women’s Holocaust Poetry: Similarities to and Differences from Delbo’s Contemporaries

At the time of this thesis’ composition, there are only two other examples of women French survivor poets to be found. Their names are Fania Fénelon and Madeleine Riffaud. Neither of the two women is known for her poetry and their critics mention their contributions to the genre only as after-thoughts. Moreover, neither of the two women’s poetry has been translated and read by a wide body of an English-speaking

¹⁹ My assessment of the severe effects of the war on the role of women has been drawn from literary critic Lynne Hanley’s diverse analysis in *Writing War*.

²⁰ The importance and undue invisibility of women’s autobiographical writing has been inspired by, and included in this thesis, a reading of Shari Benstock’s edited compilatory work *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings*.

audience. Thanks to Delbo's relationship with Lamont, the translation of *Auschwitz and After*, by comparison to these two contemporaries, has allowed Delbo's writing to be more widely circulated. A broader circulation, by comparison to these two women, has certainly enabled her poetry to retain its visibility in the Holocaust canon.

Fania Fénelon was a Jewish French woman who was born on an unknown date as Fanny Goldstein in Paris, France. She was a member of the French Resistance and after her arrest, presumably made on the basis of her ethnic background and Resistance activities, was interned in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen. In the camps she was a member of the women's orchestra until she was freed in 1945. She is famous for having written about her experience playing the background music to the extermination of thousands in the death camps. Boase-Beier writes that she is known to have written only two poems: "Dans le desert glace" in Auschwitz and "Bombadiers" in Bergen-Belsen (January 2015). Neither seem to have been translated anywhere into English and only "appear in a German translation, with the French originals, in a 1994 collection titled *Draussen steht eine bange Nacht* by Ellinor Lau and Susanne Pampuch" (January 2015). Fénelon wrote a book inspired by the writings of her camp diary, called *Sursis pour l-orchestre*, which was published in France in 1976. Later, Syracuse University Press published the text as *Playing for Time* in English in 1997. Her poems are absent from the narrative.

In comparison to Delbo, Fénelon offers a poor comparison outside of her French Resistance activity. Her writing is indisputably a memoir. It is a testimony of Fénelon's specific, personal camp experiences and follows a clear narrative

structure. Moreover, Fénelon's Jewishness complicates her comparison to Delbo. Critics of *Playing for Time*, and other Holocaust historians, have written about how the camp's orchestra members received better treatment and conditions than other victims. However, as many Holocaust critics would argue, Fénelon's camp experience is undoubtedly still overshadowed and informed by her Jewish heritage. Delbo and Fénelon are artistically dissimilar and ethnically unlike.

Madeleine Riffaud wrote about her Resistance efforts in France through her poetry. Thatcher notes that her poems are nearly impossible to attain today (*Six Authors in Captivity* 111). Indeed, there is at present no English translation of her works and Thatcher makes an analysis of her poetry accessible to an English-speaking audience only through a review of her text. Riffaud's book, *On l'appelait Rainer*, contextualizes her early writings during the war from her much later perspective in 1994. The poems reflect a much younger Riffaud: "the accompanying poems, written in her teens, reveal the thoughts, dreams and feelings of the adolescent and youthful Resistance worker" (113). Riffaud's poetry is published as originally written, while the very recent addendums serve as commentary and deliver a developed perspective of Riffaud's past experiences. Thatcher makes a connection between Delbo and Riffaud's work as it details similar homecoming experiences of isolation: "the difficulty of being heard or understood, of fitting into ordinary life and society, the obsession of traumatic events, are also mentioned by other resistance fighters" (115). However, Thatcher's analysis reveals distinct stylistic departures by Riffaud from that of Delbo. Riffaud writes an autobiography and yet refers to herself using a third-person pronoun. Moreover, the idealism of a

teenager is written distinctly into her poetry and would surely make an impassioned comparison to the maturity that informs Delbo's prose (120). One can also infer from Thatcher's analysis that this perspective creates the preoccupation of writing about emotion in Riffaud's work and would contrast sharply with the reflective, detail-driven subjects of Delbo (127). Thatcher comments that the overarching tone of Riffaud's poems is "essentially [one of] resistance, a denial or negation of the way the world is...[they] express an emotional experience of the interdependence of self, language and circumstances" (140). Delbo's age and work experience allowed her the advantage of experience and education over Riffaud. A university-level education in philosophy was behind the pen of the trilogy's author. As such, the work is littered with erudite and qualitative reflections on suffering, pain and survival. Delbo's work experience in theatre undoubtedly also affected the poignancy of her metaphors and her use of dramatic blank space. Moreover, Lamont's emphasis on Delbo's desire to make her reader "see" points to an ethical impulse in her writing that goes beyond the portrayal of the Holocaust's horrors. The influence of these drives can allow for a reading of Delbo's work as a final play in her Resistance work—*Auschwitz and After* is an informed rebuttal to the perversions of Nazism.

The Holocaust produced several notable Jewish women-poets as well such as Kadya Molodowsky, Ruth Whitman, Irena Klepfisz and Alicia Ostriker. Their work is visibly accounted for in the historical record. The lack of recognition awarded to Delbo and her contemporaries highlights the issues surrounding the minorities who suffered during the Holocaust and the work yet to be done on behalf of translation.

Moreover, the visibility of Delbo's poetry in comparison to Riffaud and Fénelon's writing reveals the crucial nature of translation and the importance of Lamont's role in Delbo's life.

Chapter Two

Applying Holocaust Theory to Holocaust Narrative: Emmanuel Levinas' Ethical Theory

Many Holocaust scholars have argued against the application of theory to the Holocaust narrative.²¹ Such critics have offered diverse arguments that Glowacka outlines in order to respond with a challenge—that such categories have evolved and must be rethought and reexamined. The Holocaust was an unprecedented event of such magnitude that it has demanded the reevaluation of disciplinary boundaries: “[The Holocaust has] exceeded the framework of traditional categories of thought, [therefore,] it is imperative to reflect on their implications for every domain of thought” (Glowacka 5). The application of theory has already begun²² and such changes are beginning to gain momentum with productive results. Glowacka attributes the gradual acceptance of theory from Holocaust scholars to critical theory's “ethical turn” in the 1990's and the “ensuing recognition of theory's

²¹ Dominick LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* connects theories of trauma to the event of the Holocaust. His connection between the two, and his discussions surrounding testimony, were a major inspiration for this thesis' major concepts.

²² One such example is literary theorist Cathy Caruth's prolific work on trauma- as examined in this thesis.

political and ethical ramifications” (4). Glowacka credits part of this shift to the increased notability of Emmanuel Levinas’ ethical theories that centre on ideas of responsibility and the concept of the other. Despite Levinas’ scarce references to the Holocaust, Glowacka convincingly discusses his theories of subjectivity, witnessing, and testimony, within the context of post-Holocaust themes and concerns. His ideas have never been applied to a study of Delbo’s writing.²³

Delbo’s desire to create a work that would properly reflect the reality of the Holocaust and keep its memory alive is an ethical imperative that must be properly acknowledged by the reader. Such recognition inevitably affects the act of reading Delbo’s work. A study of Levinas’ theory provides a corresponding frame for Delbo’s authorial intention. The trilogy represents specific values that the reader must engage with by reading in a like manner. Levinas’ ethical theory provides a framework for interpreting the expression of Delbo’s literary ethics. For example, Levinas’ theory of the self and the other is echoed in Delbo’s narrative “we” and his concept of substitution can be illuminated and dramatized by the literary techniques of Delbo’s character, and fellow victim, Mado. If the reader is to read the text as Delbo wrote it, in other words, read an ethical text ethically, Delbo’s particular characterizations of trauma are clarified by Levinas’ theories of responsibility and witnessing. The application of Levinas’ ethics to Delbo’s articulation of trauma by

²³ At the time of this thesis’ compilation, there is no known application of Levinas’ theories as a framework for inquiry into Delbo’s writing. Moreover, the women’s Holocaust scholar Kathryn Robson wrote, in a footnote to her text, that Delbo’s explicit ethical stance has so far not been critically engaged with either (161). However, the ethical scholar Paul Prescott has interpreted Delbo’s maxim “they must be made to see” as an ethical demand—an interpretation that this thesis shares and explores.

the reader emphasizes the abomination of the Nazi forced labor camps and powerfully responds to the call for remembrance.

Delbo as an Author: The Ethical Self and Radical Substitution as an Act of Bearing Witness

Glowacka employs Levinas' theory of the self and the self's relation to others²⁴ in order to discuss the role of the witness and testimony and to explore the effects of how the ethical survivor adopts these two modes. Levinas defines ethics, in Glowacka's summary, as the "calling into question of the same—that is, of my self-identity as an autonomous subject—by the other. Since identity arises from the impossibility of escaping ethical assignation, responsibility is the primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity" (34).²⁵ Before the self is an autonomous subject, it is always first and foremost indebted to the other.²⁶ This requires the constant denial of the self and this process is central to Levinas' definition of subjectivity: "subjectivity is constituted in recurrence, a repeated movement going outside of oneself and withdrawing into oneself" (34).

Recurrence is also a form of witnessing. By witnessing through recurrence, the subject acts out their responsibility to the other, which Levinas states is the "everyday event of my responsibility that answers for the faults and misfortunes of

²⁴ This passage's radical understanding of the self and the self's relation to the other is a summary of Levinas' thoughts in his essay "The Trace of the Other."

²⁵ For Levinas' foundational concepts regarding the "other" see *Totality and Infinity*.

²⁶ My interpretation of the self, and its responsibility to the other, is cited through Glowacka's interpretation of Levinas because she directly connects these concepts to the event of the Holocaust. I agree with her reading of Levinas' theories that are summaries largely drawn from his text *Ethics and Infinity*. This text also informs my own interpretation of these concepts and Glowacka's reading of them.

others” (37). However, this never leads to the other being known by the self, as it is only ever located in a “non-place,” and therefore the other can never be fully claimed. Despite this, the self “spends itself without counting” and the endless recurrence of the self disrupts the ego by denying “the subject to coincide with oneself [and thus disrupts] self-presence and self-possession” (35). Recurrence is always an endless, timeless cycle in Levinas’ description.²⁷ The self constantly responds to the plea of the other, the other who can never be fully grasped. This requires, Glowacka argues, the rethinking of temporality as the other is only ever located in the non-place of their alterity. The nature of such a requirement means that the ethical subject is “always out of step with that to which it bears witness” (36). This non-place reaches out to the self through what Levinas calls “listening to the echo” (36). By moving towards this non-place, “the function of [the self’s] indebtedness to the other [and] the emergence of the subject is already testimony to the other’s existence” (35). The result, Glowacka writes, is that the ethical subject “is a witness before intentionality and thus before it assumes the task of witnessing” (35). The act of responding to the “echo,” which the self does continually, can be reflected in the reverberations of the witness’ speech and this “foregrounds its status as a response to the other, who is not only an interlocutor but also the source of the witness’ language” (36).

Levinas’ theory of the self, his radical articulation of the self’s absolute responsibility to respond to the other, can be applied to the figure of the Holocaust survivor and nuance our understanding of the rehabilitation experience that follows

²⁷ See Levinas’ *Otherwise than Being* for further explanation of how the self acts out its indebtedness to the other.

liberation. Glowacka begins her discussion of the witness by describing examples of survivors, much like Delbo, who wrote immediately upon their return home of their experiences in the camps and still returned, again and again, to their writing for years after. By writing the survivor exemplifies Levinas' concept of recurrence but does so by recasting it as a ghost-like haunting. This repetition created a specific sort of witness for Glowacka and she refers to them as "a recollecting subject as a witness" (27). The habit of constant return emphasizes "the open-ended nature of witnessing" and thus "foreground[s] the very gesture of testifying" (27). Many witnesses shared the moral imperative of Delbo to testify, to make others "see," and post-Holocaust study of these testimonies has found a widespread acknowledgement of this desire as the source of many men's and women's desire to survive.

Survivors have often described the source of this movement as the need to represent those who had been denied life. For Emmanuel Levinas, this position is the ethical stance he refers to as "substitution" (Glowacka 28). When the self encounters a trauma in alterity,²⁸ it acts out its responsibility by stripping away recurrence and directly putting itself in the place of the other as a substitute. By doing so, Levinas states that this is an act of "bearing witness" to another (29). The act of "bearing witness" that Delbo enacted, by penning *Auschwitz and After*, casts her as an ethical survivor and can be traced in multiple ways throughout Delbo's project. The trilogy's use of a narrative "we" acts out Delbo's indebtedness to the other by using the plural pronoun to memorialize and represent the other. By way

²⁸ See Levinas' "Useless Suffering" in *Entre Nous* for more on his theories of extreme bodily trauma and what is revealed in the circumstance of suffering.

of creative interpretation, Levinas' concepts can be traced throughout the body of Delbo's literary work and represent a secondary mode of her ethical state of self. Since Delbo recreates the experiences of others in her text and represents other survivors by name, she can be argued to engage in a creative act of recurrence. By giving voice to the other in her work, and by always representing them as another, Delbo maintains the distance of self and other, the radical alterity of otherness, that Levinas discusses. Moreover, the context of the Holocaust camps radicalize the "non-place" of the other by recasting its "location" as the total-non-place of death itself. Indeed, the very point in Delbo's writing is that this non-location of the other can never be claimed because the other has been brutally stripped of their existence. Delbo's trilogy, as a form of speech, is enacting the self's response to the "echo" from alterity. In other words, Levinas' study provides a theoretical means of rereading the narrative voice, and its effects, in Delbo's text as an ethical one that posits a selfless act of remembrance despite the trauma of return.

The Weight of Remembrance: The Connection Between Survival and Testimony in Instances of Trauma

What is involved when Delbo undertakes the ethical act of responding to the "echo" from alterity? Since Delbo memorializes the other through the creative act of writing, she, as an author and survivor, must return to her memories in order to recreate them in her text for the reader. However, her trilogy explores how her memories exist for her in the present as well. Indeed, their temporal pervasiveness is precisely part of their disturbing horror. The "echo" in the present is the "useless

knowledge” that Delbo learned in the past. As a survivor in post-war France, she, it must be imagined, was an alienating and traumatic reality. Thus, Delbo’s survival has come with consequences: “I’m left with the fact that I know many more human beings than I require to continue living among them, and there will always be between them and me this useless knowledge” (254). In one of her reflections, Delbo attempts to describe this “useless knowledge” she has learned:

Each one had taken along his or her memories...the weight of the past. On arrival, we had to unload it. We went in naked. You might say one can take everything away from a human being except this one faculty: memory. Not so. First, human beings are stripped of what makes them human, then their memory leaves them...that a human being is able to survive having being stripped in this manner is what you’ll never comprehend. And I cannot explain it to you...the survivor must undertake to regain his memory, regain what he possessed before...if you’re unable to gauge the effort this necessitates, in no way can I attempt to convey it. (255)

The Nazis, by stripping away the intimacy of personal memory, robbed their victims of selfhood and identity. In the afterlife of the survivor, the knowledge of such a lonely truth is another example of how pervasive their evil was. An additional after-effect is offered by Robson, who recalls the insight of Terrence Des Pres who pointed out that because “men and women were reduced to a single human mass [in the camps]...almost all survivors say ‘we’ rather than ‘I’ when describing their camp experiences” (158). As much as Des Pres’ words illustrate the Nazis’ cruelty, and the

camp's effect on memory, they also speaks to how survivors have represented the dead by representing their identities in their own voices to bear witness.

Glowacka refers to the need to write, to bear witness, as an "undeclinable duty" by the survivor (39). Survival has also often been accompanied by "survivor's guilt." This feeling is manifested in the recollection of those such as Elie Wiesel, who reportedly said to Giorgio Agamben, that his own survival was only due to another's death: "I live, therefore I am guilty...I am here because a friend, an acquaintance, an unknown person died in my place" (38). Another famous survivor figure, Primo Levi, developed this notion by asking, "are you ashamed you are alive in place of another? And in particular, of a man more generous, more sensitive, more useful, wiser, worthier of living than you?" (39). These two quotations underline the widespread burden of guilt that many survivors unfortunately felt after their liberation. However, an application of Levinas' theory offers a powerful recasting of the survivor figure and suggests that by witnessing to the past, their life can carry on the meaning of the dead's life too.

Glowacka writes that within the philosophical context that Levinas places his theories, "the shame of the camp survivor is an immediate indictment of Martin Heidegger's *Dasein*: its 'being there' in the world always amounts to taking up someone else's place under the sun" (39). In other words, the survivor's guilt reveals that the self does experience their responsibility to the other as primary to their own self. However, Glowacka argues that in both Levi's and Levinas' terms, the survivor is "almost literally [living] in the other's stead" (39). This is, of course, precisely what induces the majority of the survivor's guilt. However, in Glowacka's

text, this position allows the survivor to carry the life of the dead. It does so by expressing the need for testimony and by recalling the act of substitution: “Holocaust narrative[s] express the testimonial exigency by mobilizing the Levinasian notion of ethical substitution and recurrence while at the same time evoking the psychoanalytic framework of traumatic repetition” (39). In this way, turning to testimony is an ethical move on the part of the survivor. Moreover, it is a selfless one. As Glowacka has noted, substitution and recurrence also create a repetition of trauma that the survivor must constantly allow himself or herself to relive in order to testify.

Substitution, in this case, implies a conceptual barrier. The survivor becomes, in Glowacka’s words, a witness who acts as a proxy for the dead. Yet, in Levi’s famous words, the survivors are “never true witnesses since they cannot testify to the limit of experience at which only those who were permanently silenced had arrived” (38). This means, that if a survivor is to witness to the present and future by resurrecting the testimony of the dead, the survivor must also be “like Levinas’ notion of the ethical subject...already a surrogate witness, speaking ‘in their stead, by proxy,’ borrowing the authority to speak from the dead” (38).

Traumatic Narrative Mutations: The Representation of a Multiple Self and How Memory Leads to the Construction of the Self

After the war in the 1950s, Delbo sat at a commemorative ceremony held by the government for some of the French men and women who had died in the camps. From the podium, she heard her own name called out among the list of the dead. She

told Lawrence L. Langer that she raised her hand and murmured from the crowd, “Non, Monsieur: présente” (Delbo xviii). However, as she has attested to, Delbo’s name was not altogether out of place. Towards the end of Delbo’s final section “Useless Knowledge,” she writes:

As far as I’m concerned
 I’m still there
 dying there
 a little more each day
 dying over again
 the death of those who died. (224)

In this selection, Delbo complicates the notion of self-presence. She writes that she exists in two places at once—with her past self in Auschwitz and her present, physically alive post-Auschwitz self. At the same time, her words play explicitly with an idea of self-doubling—her memory performs the deaths of others too. For Langer, the “presence” that Delbo claimed at the ceremony is also the presence of the dead’s “absence” (Delbo xviii). This notion embodies Levinas’ theory of substitution as Delbo has displaced herself in an act of unconditional testimony to the trauma of another. By placing herself with the dead, she is also ushering herself into the realm of an extreme non-place as she gives herself over to her sense of responsibility. By taking on the dead’s otherness and memory so radically, Delbo becomes a powerfully selfless ethical figure.

Applying Levinas’ theory of substitution to a reading of how Delbo represents the other, at the cost of herself, profoundly allows for a reading of her as

an ethical figure and writer. Kathryn Robson, in *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life-Writing*, argues that Delbo represents others in her text by engaging in an unconventional form of “ghost-writing.” By doing so, Robson concludes, Delbo’s work “explores crucial questions about the possibility of ethical testimony to collective trauma” (161). Robson makes this assessment by virtue of literary analysis—she explores how Delbo includes the names of fallen friends, writes from their perspective, and often uses the first-person plural pronoun “we.” Levinas’ ethical theory radically reformulates her suggestions by relegating them to a secondary impulse. His theory gives primacy to the very action of Delbo’s attempt to write at all—as his theory places the advent of ethical witnessing at the very moment of gesturing towards the other. The “after” effects of witnessing, meaning Delbo’s work as a whole, are a secondary example of her selfless substitution.

Reading Ethics in Delbo’s Narrative: The “Character” Mado and Radical Substitution

Applying the framework of Levinas’ ethics to Delbo’s writing draws the reader to a closer examination of the character Mado by emphasizing her role in the final book. Moreover, her inclusion on the level of story enforces the portrayal of Delbo as an ethical writer and figure. The scholar Petra Schweitzer argues that through the character of Mado, Delbo “recalls Auschwitz and the responsibility of testifying” and the passage functions as a “personal narrative within a larger context in relation to survival and specifically to the question of what ‘life’ means after Auschwitz” (“Art

Under Duress” 30). Mado’s story is placed within the larger context of the third book’s subject—the difficult process of return into post-war society after liberation. “The Measure of Our Days” accounts for the experiences of Delbo’s fellow French women survivors and for the memory of some of the women from the convoy that did not make it through the war. The passages in this book are juxtaposed, as the rest of the text, with poems that move the reader from specific stories of war and post-war circumstances to abstract concepts of what it really means to have survived the camps.

In the first section of the trilogy’s final book, titled “Return,” Delbo writes that upon reentering “normal” society “everything was false”: “I was no longer open to imagination, or explanation. This is the part of me that died in Auschwitz...how can one continue living in a world stripped of mystery?” (239). The following page continues this train of thought and expresses her struggle to reintegrate further:

There is no wound that will not heal
I told myself that day
and still repeat it from time to time
but not enough to believe it. (241)

Still, Delbo does not present her experience as singular. She accounts for the circumstances of others as well, which contrast starkly with her own:

And then...I don’t know. I’m not doing anything. If someone were to ask me what happened since I came back, I would answer: nothing. I admire those who had the courage to start life over again. Mado...she married, had a son, is useful to her husband and her son. She has a reason for living. For those who

rejoined [family]...perhaps they are happy. To be happy, is that a question we ever raise? (253)

Critics who consider the character of Mado rarely cite this passage. Perhaps this is because Mado's own words seem to refute Delbo's perception of her here. Indeed, a few pages later, Mado begins her section by stating, "it seems to me I'm not alive" (257). It is important to read Delbo's analysis of Mado against Mado's own articulation of her emotional life. It emphasizes how positive outward circumstances, such as Delbo points to, in fact did nothing to temper the survivor's inner pain. Moreover, it reminds the reader of the reality that each survivor dealt with the after-effects of their trauma individually and it affected each of their life choices uniquely.

Surviving, Schweitzer argues, always draws the survivor back into an identification with death—as Delbo and Mado's experiences make clear. Schweitzer cites the words of trauma scholar Robert Jay Lifton, and remarks, "the encounter with death is central to [Mado's] psychological experience" by way of recalling Lifton's insight on the connection between death, survival and trauma:

Focusing on survival, rather than on trauma, puts the death back into the traumatic experience, because survival suggests that there has been death, and the survivor therefore has had a death encounter, and the death encounter is central to his or her psychological experience. (31)

Lifton points to an important distinction that is absent from Delbo's perspective of Mado. Even though Mado has "moved" on, her survival, as it implies "moving past the event," does not exclude her from trauma. She possesses a split perspective of

herself: “I’m not alive. I see myself from outside this self pretending to be alive” (257). Her trauma functions in the present through her experience of being haunted by the dead: “all dead. Mounette, Viva, Sylviane, Rosie...” (257). Schweitzer argues that Mado’s preoccupation “takes the form of a profound mourning that cannot be completed...[this] can indeed be read as the return of trauma” (38). To speak to this, she cites Mado’s words near the close of her section: “forgetting or remembering doesn’t depend on our willing it, had we the right to do so” (266). Trauma has robbed Mado of a normal grieving process that would otherwise allow her to reintegrate emotionally and cognitively into society.

By including Mado’s interior monologue, alongside the other inmates that are named throughout the final book, Delbo performs the Levinasian concept of substitution on a writerly level. By reading through the frame of Levinas’ theory, the reader is drawn into an engagement with the role of other characters in Delbo’s writing and can bear witness to their stories. Moreover, the emphasis that a Levinasian reading creates gives an emphasis and a significance to the role of other characters in the trilogy- roles that otherwise may have stayed as secondary and thus gone under-examined by Delbo’s readership.

A Survivor’s Post-War Reality: Delbo’s Multiple Selves

How else does Lifton’s traumatic “death encounter,” and the unresolved grief experienced by Delbo and Mado, affect the afterlife of the survivor? Alongside Delbo’s representations of others, her text also engages with intimate discussions of

subjectivity and selfhood under the strain of trauma's impact. For the reader, it is imaginable, perhaps even assumed, that a Holocaust survivor would be forced to live beside their memories from the camps for the rest of their lives. However, such accounts as Delbo's trilogy share in detail how the rawness of these horrific memories somehow persist and are maintained far into the future of the survivor's life. Literary theorist Cathy Caruth explains this phenomenon by arguing that bearing witness to trauma can, in fact, only occur "belatedly":

The breach in the mind's experience of time, of self, and the world...an event that...is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor...and it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar temporal structure of the belatedness of historical experience: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time. (*Trauma and Experience* 35)

Caruth's words emphasize the assault that the Holocaust inflicted on the self by attacking the function of the mind's self-presence and memory. As a result, the ability for such testimonies to even be received was impossible for many years—until, Glowacka's work argues, and as found in such examples as Annette Wieviorka's *The Era of the Witness*, the Eichmann trial created the social context for testimony and erected the figure of the witness (33).

Caruth's insight also bears upon the act of Delbo's writing—if it was impossible for the events of the camps to unfold truly for Delbo while she was there, did they only truly “happen” for her when she wrote about them? If so, does this not mean that the act of writing, in some sense, must have constituted an encounter, and a fully experienced one, with trauma? Understanding Delbo as an author in light of Caruth's findings calls the reader to regard her act of writing itself, once again, as a tremendous and commendable act of self-sacrifice.

Memory and the Construction of the Self

Delbo's writing explores trauma's ability to rupture the sense of self by attacking its victim's memory: “since Auschwitz, I always feared losing my memory. To lose one's memory is to lose oneself, to no longer be oneself” (Delbo 188). The scholar Mikaela Janet Malsin discusses the work of trauma philosopher Susan J. Brison who explains that the self is undone by trauma as it works by “breaking the ongoing narrative, severing the connections among remembered past, lived present, and anticipated future” (“Reading Rhetoric Through Trauma: Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*” 16). Malsin traces the connections between narrative and memory in order to reveal how they are imperative to a unified sense of self. In order to sum up their relation, she quotes the noted trauma theorist Pierre Janet's contention that memory “is an action: essentially it is the action of telling a story” (17). It can be inferred from these theories that, though the act of writing constitutes the real experience of trauma, it may also be therapeutic in the long

run.²⁹ Once the victim's memories are on the page, a narrative, in some form, may be created and possibly restore the survivor's connection to their memory and thus to their sense of self.

In the case of Delbo, Langer points to her final work, *Days and Memory*, where Delbo wrote of her memories splitting her sense of self in two and into "her Auschwitz self and her post-Auschwitz self" (Delbo xi). Delbo turned to metaphor to describe the abstract notion that her self-identity had become, as Langer explains:

[She] used the image of a snake shedding its skin to conjure up a sense of her "new" nature emerging after the camp years. Unfortunately, unlike the snake's skin, which shrivels, disintegrates, and disappears, what Delbo called the skin of Auschwitz memory remained. (xi)

Delbo wrote that she "live[d] next to [Auschwitz]" inside of the snake's skin that rendered it "the skin of memory, an impermeable skin that isolates it from my present self" (xi). Langer notes that Delbo recognized that if she was experiencing such problems, others must undoubtedly be also and that because of this, "those who came after her might prefer not to think about it at all" (Delbo xi). This encouraged Delbo, so Langer writes, to develop two definitions of memory's operation as a solution. Delbo's writing self, her "now" self, Langer translates as "common memory" and her Auschwitz self as "deep memory" (xi). Therefore, in Delbo's writing, two perspectives are present:

²⁹ See Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck's compilatory work *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* for a broad examination of the importance of self-writing and a unified sense of self. My supposition that writing can be therapeutic is a conclusion that was inspired by their discussion on autobiography's role in self-unification.

Common memory urges us to regard the Auschwitz ordeal as part of a chronology, a dismal event in the past that the very fact of survival helps to redeem. It frees us from the pain of remembering the unthinkable...[as] Delbo writes, “[I don’t recognize] myself in the self that was in Auschwitz...I feel that the one who was in the camp is not me” ...deep memory, on the other hand, reminds us that the Auschwitz past is not really past and never will be. (Delbo xii)

Delbo’s “common memory” suggests the disavowal of the reality of the Holocaust due to its tendency to defy social registration in normal conceptual frameworks. Her past represents an event that escapes belief in the logical reality of her life post-liberation. In order to be an ethical reader in the Levinasian sense, one must study “common memory” through the lens of trauma and it is “deep memory” that must be thoroughly engaged with.

From the standpoint of Malsin’s theoretical considerations on trauma and narrative, this articulation of Delbo’s recognition of two perspectives, that she is able to express in language, suggests that a measure of self-unification is possible through writing. If the two selves can coexist in narrative, in all of their conflict, does this not warrant a reading of writing’s therapeutic possibilities in Delbo?

Chapter Three

Understanding Delbo's Experience in the Camps and Her Subsequent Writing By Discussing Psychological Trauma

How to Understand Delbo's Trauma Psychologically

Tresize's analysis accounts for the fact that trauma is a relatively new area of study and has been subject to a tremendous amount of repression. Despite the massive, immeasurable, effects of the war on Europe, trauma did not receive adequate social exposure or recognition. Tresize argues that these circumstances "tended more often than not to favor a forceful reimposition of prewar norms" as Europe dealt with the aftermath by forgetting and returning to "life as it used to be" (866).

Delbo's writing stems from, of course, an experience of extreme suffering that was traumatic. It also comes through the trauma she is referencing—despite its presence in her present self. Her trilogy is an attempt to account for trauma's effect on her life, the life of her fellow survivors, and on those who did not survive its impact. In order to analyze what her work presents the reader with, specifically what reflection of trauma her trilogy constitutes, the reader must first understand the workings of trauma itself and how it poses a challenge to writers such as Delbo.

Glowacka writes that when a survivor recalls their story, when Delbo enacts the duty to remember, it constitutes a moment of return. As suggested earlier, Delbo

is returning to more than her memory—she is returning to the site of her present trauma as well. From the standpoint of Caruth’s “belatedness” Delbo may even be experiencing its reality for the first time. Her traumatic past still exists, through the presence of trauma, in the present. This process establishes a recollecting witness who by referring back to “the site of trauma...draws attention to the continuous, open-ended nature of witnessing” (27). This return is a compulsory action for many survivors.

Cathy Caruth has used the question of trauma to summon the help of many renowned analysts to create a critical and interdisciplinary dialogue between the fields of literature, clinical practice and theoretical discipline. Caruth opens her seminal work, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, by providing a working definition of traumatic experience that is supplied by the American Psychiatric Association’s definition of PTSD as an “event outside the range of usual human experience” (3). The revised third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* defines the essential component of PTSD as:

The development of characteristic symptoms following a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of unusual human experience (i.e. outside of the range of such common experience as simple bereavement, chronic illness, business losses, and marital conflict). The stressor producing this syndrome would be markedly stressing to almost anyone, and is usually experienced with intense fear, terror and helplessness. The characteristic symptoms involve re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli associated with the event or numbing of general responsiveness, and

increased arousal. The diagnosis is not made i[f] the disturbance lasts less than a month. (1)

Caruth writes that the pathology of trauma consists entirely within “the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it” (4). In other words, Caruth explains, to be traumatized is to be “possessed by an image or event” (5). The articulation of such a phenomenon goes back to Freud, who after World War I, Caruth writes, was “astonished at [war neuroses’] resistance to the whole field of wish and unconscious meaning [and he] compar[ed] [it] to another long-resistant phenomenon he had dealt with, the accident neurosis” (5). Caruth quotes a passage from Freud where he explains:

Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accidents, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright. This astonishes people far too little...anyone who accepts it as something self-evident that dreams should put them back at night into the situations that caused them to fall ill has misunderstood the nature of dreams. (5)

Freud’s patients were returning in their sleep to the instant of their trauma, against their own conscious or unconscious wishes. The patients were suffering from “the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabit[ed]” (5).³⁰ Caruth notes that modern analysts have commented on the “surprising *literality* and nonsymbolic nature of traumatic dreams and flashbacks, which resist cure to the

³⁰ For an example of this thought, recall Delbo’s articulation of the “skin of Auschwitz”.

extent that they remain, precisely, literal" (5). This literality, and its incessant return, Caruth writes "constitutes trauma" and exposes it: "the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely *true* to the event" (5). For Caruth, this truth means that trauma is not a symptom of the unconscious brain but a "symptom of history" as it describes the fallout of human experience (5).

It follows, as Caruth recognizes, that trauma encounters questions of truth.³¹ The "literality" of return that Caruth has described is "factual" in the sense that it is "unassimilable to associative chains of meaning" (5). Therefore the problem of "truth" arises from the fact that the instance of traumatic recall is "not a possessed knowledge, but itself possess, at will, the one it inhabits, often produc[ing] a deep uncertainty as to its very truth" (6).³² This doubt and unpredictability have consequences for the survivor, the receiver of trauma, and the historian.³³

It is this "crisis of truth [and] the historical enigma betrayed by trauma" that Caruth argues are the greatest concern to psychoanalysis. In the moment of trauma, if the event is not possessed or fully experienced, it occurs as a "confrontation with reality" that also features "absolute numbing to it [and] that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness" (6). Whatever explanation may follow, Caruth argues, neither science nor the victim will ever fully grasp the complexity of trauma's belated arrival.

³¹ For an example of this, see scholar Patricia Yaeger's critical essay "Testimony without Intimacy." It explores what happens to "factual history" in the context of literary language when a testimony is written using creative expression.

³² Recall here Delbo's epigraph in *Auschwitz and After*.

³³ See Karin Doerr, in her critical essay "Memories of History," for further explanation of Holocaust literature's effect on the historical record.

Caruth includes the insight of the prominent psychiatric and Holocaust scholar Dori Laub, who she says has suggested that massive psychic trauma “precludes its registration” as it is a “record that has yet to be made” (6). For Laub, the Holocaust created a “collapse of witnessing” where:

History was taking place with no witness: it was also the very circumstance of *being inside the event* that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist...the historical imperative to bear witness could essentially *not be met during the actual occurrence*. (7)

The suggestion here, as Caruth properly details, is that the only way to have properly witnessed to the Holocaust was to have fallen victim to the event: “[Laub] touches on something nonetheless that seems oddly to inhabit all traumatic experience: the inability fully to witness the event as it occurs, or the ability to witness the *event* fully only at the cost of witnessing oneself” (7). The suggestion here is that a traumatic event entails a forceful affront to understanding that follows by featuring “the collapse of its understanding” (7).

Since the problem of truth that arises in the instance of belatedness is, as Caruth argues, still not properly understood by the trauma community, I will propose an address to this issue for the purposes of justifying a reliable reading of Delbo in this thesis. The suggestion in Caruth’s work is that what creates the crisis of truth is the possibility for facts and details about the traumatic experience to be lost in the “collapse of understanding.” Moreover, that this collapse cannot be rectified and the information cannot be regained. However, this potential will never be as significant as the fact of the trauma’s occurrence at all. In other words, the reality of

the Holocaust camps will always hold an absolute claim to truth. Moreover, it would be supremely unethical and morally wrong for such a reading of trauma's impact to undermine the claims to experience that victims share in their testimony. Whatever information can be salvaged, whether partial or incomplete, is also still valuable.³⁴ Moreover, examples such as Delbo's trilogy prove that whatever can be accounted for later is still a profoundly productive and meaningful piece of history and writing. In the context of Holocaust testimony, such illustrations of trauma are being read in this thesis for their compelling portrayal of trauma's devastating power.

The Process of Trauma's Effect on the Self and Memory in Cathy Caruth's Interview with Onno van der Hart

In light of Caruth's findings, and the challenges that trauma poses to memory and a sense of self, it must be asked how a trauma victim such as Delbo came to write about her experiences at all. How could Delbo be the traumatized victim Caruth defines, and yet, immediately upon her return, write coherently and be cognitively present enough to write about herself and her past? Moreover, how was Delbo mentally able to return to those memories? Or even move past them once again? This is a remarkable accomplishment. One can argue that Delbo exhibited great bravery by recalling her past in order to fulfill the objectives of remembrance. However, this does not express the cognitive intricacies of how such a feat was achieved. In order to properly locate the markings of trauma at all in Delbo's words,

³⁴ For further reading of testimonial works that are effected by trauma, see scholar Sylvianne Finck's dissertation "Reading Trauma in Post Modern and Postcolonial Literature."

we must first begin by probing how they came to exist in narrative form. In *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*, Caruth interviews various leaders in the field of trauma and psychoanalysis. In the chapter “The Haunted Self,” dissociative disorder pioneer Onno van der Hart discusses the conception of trauma as the “structural dissociation of personality” (179). His analysis is illuminating for several reasons. It offers a psychological definition of the concept of the “split” self that Delbo expresses in her writing. Moreover, he offers an account that explains how these two selves came to be “reconciled” by a survivor such as Delbo— “reconciliation” to mean the ability for the two to be creatively represented in narrative together. In other words, how the markings of trauma came to be present in Delbo’s trilogy at all. Finally, van der Hart’s work on trauma offers a reading of the activity of authorship that allows it to be compellingly regarded as a therapeutic enterprise. This is achieved by comparing Delbo’s efforts to his discussion of the project of the therapy office. This analogy reveals an important truth for readers—that the attempt to understand suffering can lie very close to the possibility of alleviating, in whatever measure, the survivor’s pain.

In the course of their conversation, van der Hart explains dissociative symptoms as “problems in daily life, that relate to adverse experiences from the past that he or she is not directly, or consciously, in contact with” (180). At issue for van der Hart is how to contact these experiences and he explains to Caruth, “in a dissociative state of being, there is somebody who is consciously speaking up, although with a different voice from the one that the person has in daily life” (180).

This “other voice” consciously speaks up and van der Hart regards this “voice” as one “stream[] of consciousness” that in daily life one is not aware of (180). This perception insinuates that the traumatized possess multiple selves that speak within the survivor in their own voice.

Later in the interview, Caruth and van der Hart discuss the history of dissociative disorder’s reception in the diagnostic community and Caruth notes that “the latest DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) has brought PTSD closer to dissociation; they are placed right next to each other in the list” (185). This brings van der Hart to a clarification of the relation between trauma and dissociative disorders. He tells Caruth, “dissociation is, for me, a division of the personality into different subsystems. All with their own first-person narratives, or pseudo-first-person perspectives, since they are not real persons. And each part has its own sense of self” (185). This description is reminiscent of Delbo’s own articulation of self, or selves, in her trilogy. Where do Delbo’s voices come from? And how do they represent her psychological trauma? Van der Hart’s analysis explains them as symptoms of PTSD. He writes that PTSD, in its most simple form, is where “one dissociative part function[s] in daily life and [is] phobic of the traumatic memory and one other part, which when reactivated, is engaged in the reenactment of trauma” (186). An example of this can be found in Delbo’s need to write about her traumatic past. In the passage “Return,” Delbo describes the attempt to “move on” by explaining the challenge of rehabilitation: “with the utmost difficulty...an effort I cannot name, I tried to recall the gestures you must make in order to assume once again the shape of a living being in this life” (Delbo 236). Though one part of

Delbo is shown to desire to move past the event, she is still, as in van der Hart's definition, engaging with her trauma, willingly or not, by writing.

In the context of therapy, van der Hart and Caruth discuss how one of the traumatized patient's voices, or streams of consciousness, perpetuates an "I don't want to know" desire (182). Van der Hart refers to this as the characteristic of the traumatized. Van der Hart continues by telling Caruth that he and his colleagues later located this phobia within the "dissociative part functioning in [the] daily life" of his patients (182). The dissociative part holds the traumatic memory in the same instant that it also possesses the fear of traumatic memory. Caruth clarifies van der Hart's assertion by summarizing, then, that "there can be terror, but it's not present to the person in the ordinary way" which provokes van der Hart to agree and explain that "the persona as the part functioning in daily life knows *too little* of the trauma, and the part involved in its reenactment knows *too much*...and when it becomes present...then one becomes dysfunctional" (186). A victim becomes "dysfunctional" because the two cannot be reconciled with one another in one single moment. Delbo's writing attests to the truth of this experience. Her work is the attempt to make the trauma of her past, and others, compatible within the realm of language so that the future can remember such trauma by "seeing" or "understanding" it in all of its complexity and contradiction.

Van der Hart regards what Delbo's critics have previously termed a "split" self as a "divided" self. Caruth explains that one part involves attraction toward stimuli (trauma) and another is aimed at escaping or defending aversive stimuli (187). Each self thus constitutes its own "sense of self." One self is the "emotional

part of the personality” or the “EP” (189). Through patient testing, van der Hart’s studies found that the EP was the “self” that was affected and defined by the memory of their trauma. In Delbo, she referred to this self as “deep memory” or her “Auschwitz self.” By comparison, the apparently normal part of the personality (ANP), van der Hart explains, has “more capacity to differentiate between the past and the present” while the EP regards each new experience within the “mold of their traumatic past” (190). For Delbo, this functional half, such as her writing self, was her “common memory.” Caruth follows by asking van der Hart: “so you can ‘know’ [about your trauma] as an ANP, but you don’t have any emotional relation to the trauma or a diminished one?” (191). Van der Hart responds by referring to the work of Pierre Janet, who argued that all trauma-related disorders were indistinguishable from “non-realization”:

Syndromes in which the process of integration does not take place, or only insufficiently takes place—that is, the process that allows me to make my own autobiography. This process of realization is the highest level of integration: “it was I in that situation; it was my father who did such and such to me” —we call this dimension of realization “personification.” The other dimension being “presentification”: “I realize it happened in the past and that the danger is over.” All trauma-related disorders are, in Janet’s language, disorders of non-realization. And that is a type of experience on a continuum. (191)

In other words, the traumatized contain an EP who is tied to the past and an ANP who cannot relate to the past at all. However, this ANP is distanced enough from the event to be able to write about it- as was the case with Delbo.

These distinctions necessarily bring Caruth and van der Hart to a discussion of time. In Caruth's study, she states that her study of trauma has been based on the Freudian model of trauma as delayed experience or "a repetition of something that was never assimilated" (194). The EP, of course, resides in the time of the trauma. This leads Caruth to assert that what appeared, as a spatial model of division, between the selves, is actually a temporal one. In turn, temporality shifts the discussion between Caruth and van der Hart to the function of traumatic memory. The Holocaust scholar Brett Ashley Kaplan, in "Pleasure, Memory and Time Suspension in Holocaust Literature," provides a compelling articulation of the connection between memory and time. She writes that to "remember the worst," as the EP self does, creates a sort of time suspension as to "remember necessarily means to elide time, and many times function simultaneously in most instances of memory" (311). It can be inferred, then, by applying Kaplan to van der Hart, that the EP is affected by trauma to the extent that, as one self, it does not acknowledge the present because of this transportative function of memory. Caruth recalls that there are two distinctions in van der Hart's work where he distinguishes between narrative, or autobiographical, memory and traumatic memory. If memory is the act of relating a story, as in Malsin previously, traumatic memory must constitute something else. Caruth probes this belief of van der Hart by asking, "why think of memory as a form of action, as opposed to the consolidation of a representation [?]" (196). Van der Hart explains that to tell a story is a personal action—even if it includes mental actions. In terms of the EP and PTSD, when trauma emerges and returns to the past through PTSD, van der Hart argues that the "EP is reenacting. So

it's acting without the action of telling a story" (197). In comparison, narrative memory, van der Hart continues, is a "combination of the story and of the event. And the EP can only re-experience, even though this re-experience is also a kind of reconstruction" (197). For Delbo, the inference here is that her deep memory, or EP, needs to be joined with her common memory, her ANP, in order to attempt to put itself into a coherent narrative. This is because, van der Hart explains, the ANP can identify that at one point the traumatized event took place. However, on its own, it cannot self-identify or fully engage with the traumatic event: "it cannot say, 'it happened to *me*'" (197). In the language of Caruth's other text, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, and van der Hart agrees with this description that the EP self cannot fully possess the traumatic event (198).

Caruth continues by particularizing van der Hart's description of the self. In the EP, she notes that the sense of self maintained by this version of the self, is a "sense of self, but not as self-possession. It is, rather, *being* possessed" or, in other words, "doesn't own its experience" (198). Caruth then turns to a quotation from one of van der Hart's texts (which specific work she pulls the quotation from is unspecified) which takes up an example from Delbo's writing that was adapted in Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*:

Charlotte Delbo, a survivor of Auschwitz, recounted the difference between the depersonalized memory of ANP and the traumatic memories of EP. She had recurrent intrusive nightmares in which EP relived the traumatizing events:

[I]n these dreams, there I see myself again, *me*, yes *me*, just as I know I was: scarcely able to stand...pierced with cold, filthy, gaunt, and the pain is so

unbearable, so exactly the pain I suffered there, that I feel it again physically, I feel it again through my whole body, which becomes a block of pain, and I feel death seizing me, I feel myself die.

Upon her awakening, her ANP would struggle to regain emotional distance from the EP:

Fortunately, in my anguish, I cry out. The cry awakens me, and I [ANP] emerge from the nightmare, exhausted. It takes days for everything to return to normal, for memory to be “refilled” and for the skin of memory to mend itself. I become myself again, the one you know [ANP], who can speak to you of Auschwitz without showing any sign of distress or emotion...I feel that the one who was in the camp [EP] is not me, is not the person who is here, facing you [ANP]...and everything that happened to that other one, the Auschwitz one [EP], now has no bearing upon me, does not concern me, so separate from one another are this deep-lying [traumatic] and ordinary memory. (198)

This passage illustrates the temporal shifts from differing “I” to “I”s that Caruth and van der Hart have described. Here, the shift is instigated by sleep. However, as this thesis has outlined, Delbo also experienced the division of herself in waking moments. Caruth responds by asking van der Hart whether, metaphorically or not, the “therapy office is, in a way, the site of that transition from sleep to awakening...” (199). Van der Hart agrees and this leads Caruth to offer that two may touch or overlap with one another in this instance—metaphorically speaking. If the therapy office is a moment of such transgression, Delbo’s writing must also constitute a

moment of the ANP and EP's overlap. Both the context of therapy and the practice of writing require similar methods and instances of self-reflection and recall. The breach of the ANP and EP that takes place when the two are at work in the same moment provides a compelling explanation for the way Delbo presents her multiple selves and multiple temporalities in her writing.

It is precisely this moment of "encounter" that van der Hart explains he is attempting to recreate in therapy: "to create, let's say, the conditions in which the EP comes with its re-experiences, its reenactment, and the ANP stays present, in a state of compassion" (199). The possibility of fusion between the two becomes increasingly difficult the more complex the dissociative disorder is. When the two selves near one another, it creates a moment of integration, that van der Hart explains combines "two different levels of experience" (199). Sharing takes place "at the level of synthesis" but in many cases, depending on the level of complexity, does not result in full fusion (199). This explanation recalls Delbo's juxtaposition in her writing of the horror of the camps against the reality of her present self—such as writing in a Paris café. The two experiences are fundamentally opposed. The result, van der Hart admits, he does not have a complete answer for, but to some extent he posits that the EP and ANP "might" share something with one another (199). What may be passed between the two, in Delbo's case, is the ability to represent the two together in narrative form. The two entities must still be presented as separate, yet, Delbo's ability to even attempt to linguistically account for the EP must mean that the ANP is able to comment on and observe the EP with some rationality. In other words, Delbo, through writing, is locating a means of self-expression that identifies

and reflects her trauma. Van der Hart's suggestion that this is the aim of the therapy office suggests that such a process is, indeed, therapeutic for a PTSD victim. The attempt to understand trauma, then, must be understood as an attempt to alleviate it. Still, this does not imply that a survivor such as Delbo can then "possesses" the event of her trauma—merely that the act of her writing allows her to express and locate its presence by means of reference to it.

Chapter Four

Tracing Delbo's Depiction of Her Psychological Trauma, and Traumatic Memories, in *Auschwitz and After*

Caruth's work with van der Hart offers a psychological definition of trauma and its complex effect upon the survivor's memory, their sense of self and their ability to express themselves in language. In turn, Caruth's broader analysis, on the psychological definition of trauma itself, serves as an explanation for the ambiguities in Delbo's writing and allows the reader to understand her more fully as an author writing against severe psychic restrictions and struggles. As this final chapter will detail, Delbo's writing places the reader into reference with their ignorance as onlookers and not fellow survivors. From this vantage point, the reader is forced to read in a particular manner—their object can no longer be to read with the pursuit of acquiring knowledge in the traditional sense. The reader must adjust their expectations and engage in an imaginative exercise of pursuing the meaning of Delbo's words without the objective of fully knowing or grasping the reality that she points them towards.

Delbo masterfully creates this engagement by the reader with her text most compellingly through the abstract poems³⁵ that litter the trilogy. Poetry's ability to gesture towards the ungraspable reveals, for the literary scholar Ulrich Baer,

³⁵ For criticism against the use of abstraction in the realm of Holocaust literary art, see Berel Lang's argument in favor of direct reference in his text *Holocaust Representation*. I believe his arguments are void in the case of Delbo—as her writing is explicitly in reference to her experience during the Holocaust.

poetry's capacity to "refer to historical experience by transcending its own representations of historical experience [which] seem[] to level crucial distinctions between imaginary and real experiences" (300). *Auschwitz and After* is a work of mourning and loss and it is critical to remember that it was created so future generations could not forget the atrocities and crimes committed by the Nazis.³⁶ As such, Delbo is not concerned with just relating information to her readers. Instead, the trilogy is rife with seeming contradictions, fragmented memories, posits followed by refutations and convincing statements that turn out to be confusingly false. The presence of trauma prevents Delbo's work from being documentary. Her commanding use of poetry and prose allows Delbo to meet the challenge of trauma and memory by addressing the reader in a powerful call to remember the Holocaust in an ethical manner.

How Does Delbo Seek to Account for Trauma in Literary Frameworks?

How does trauma function in the realm of narrative and how does it pose a challenge to representation?³⁷ Lea Fridman Hamaoui, in "Art and Testimony", offers a literary articulation of Caruth's definition of trauma. Trauma, in literary criticism, is often referred to, or can be understood as, "unrepresentability." Fridman Hamaoui herself often employs this term and explains its meaning by stating:

³⁶ The idea of a Holocaust literary work that represents horror as a means of remembrance, is a complex issue that here is summarized from my reading of Lawrence Langer's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*.

³⁷ The importance of this issue, as explored in this thesis, has been influenced by a reading of the complex challenges that the Holocaust poses to depiction in Saul Friedlander's volume *Probing the Limits of Representation*.

The issue of art and testimony arises where the facts of experience border on the unreal and demand, of the speaker no less than of the writer, elaborate strategies of authentication and equivocation to anchor the unreality that forever slips away from the attempt to give it verbal definition. (243)

If trauma cannot be fully located, and occurs only in an after-effect, it necessarily follows that its representation poses obstacles for its verbalization and this is the major challenge that faces figures such as Delbo. Moreover, this obstacle is a crucial one if the act of writing presents a means of therapy for the survivor. Fridman Hamaoui includes the experience of the reader in this issue by explaining that “extremity strains beliefs and exceeds the experience, expectations, and capability of the reader to reimagine the event told” (243). The result is a crisis of truth in representation, as memories “cannot ‘exist’ for us because they lack the lexicon of words and forms into which they might be translated” (243). Fridman Hamaoui uses the example of Jean Amery who, in *At the Mind’s Limits*, described the difficulties that a writer faced when trying to account for their memories of the camps. He argued that the primary form of explanation is often delivered by way of analogy (245).³⁸ Yet the nature of trauma breaks such assumptions and defies such structures. The reader cannot possibly truly grasp the analogies that the survivor may posit. In this way, trauma’s conversion into language “disrupts conventions of beliefs and disbelief upon which speakers and listeners, readers and writers are agreed” (243). In order for a literary work to account for extreme experience,

³⁸ Scholar Elizabeth Scheiber argues that across the body of Holocaust literature “figurative language not only indicates that we are in a literary realm, it also provides the trace of a scar in the poet’s psyche...” (“Figurative Language in Delbo’s *Auschwitz et après*”).

Fridman Hamaoui suggests that a new contract must be negotiated with the reader. Such an agreement often entails a “shift[] from the tale itself to the breakdown of the forms and conventions that sustain telling” (243). A writer must offer, whether they succeed or not, in “his or her construction of narrative and use of language...in formal and writerly ways, [to] propose a solution to this problem” (244). Writers such as Trezise have proposed that Delbo has attempted just such a solution by offering a fragmented writing style that reflects the disjointed character of trauma. By doing so, Delbo can speak *to* trauma through her writing structure and avoid making statements, that inevitably fall short, about its presence.

Moving Beyond Structure and Out of the Narrative: How Delbo Addresses the Reader's Role

Delbo's trilogy rethinks traditional modes of communication by dramatically moving past a trauma inflected structure and directly addressing the ignorance of the reader at every turn. In the poem, “O you who know,” Delbo explicitly references trauma's inability to be accounted for in description, or for its reality to be understood by those who have not experienced it themselves:

O you who know

did you know that hunger makes the eyes sparkle that thirst dims

them

O you who know

did you know that you can see your mother dead

and not shed a tear

O you who know

did you know that in the morning you wish for death

and in the evening you fear it

O you who know

did you know that a day is longer than a year

a minute longer than a lifetime

O you who know

did you know that legs are more vulnerable than eyes

nerves harder than bones

the heart firmer than steel

Did you know that the stones of the road do not weep

that there is one word only for dread

one for anguish

Did you know that suffering is limitless

that horror cannot be circumscribed... (Delbo 11)

The tone of the poem addresses “those who know” mockingly as the subject of the addressee’s “knowledge” takes on describing increasingly significant and unimaginable horrors. The repetition of “o you who know” exaggerates and dramatizes the impossibility and falsehood of those who claim to understand such traumatic experiences. This is, in part, an ethical move on the behalf of Delbo—by pointing to the reader’s incomprehension, and writing it directly into her narrative, she safeguards the sanctity of her own, and her fellow survivors, particular claims to trauma. The poem makes it clear that no one but a victim can take ownership of an

event they did not undergo themselves. It also illustrates another revealing possibility for Delbo to reference an important aspect of trauma—its total unfeasibility and its incompatibility with traditional frames of understanding and comprehension. In other words, Delbo communicates the essence of trauma to her readers indirectly by pointing to their ignorance of it.

Delbo's Creative Articulation of and Term for Trauma as "Useless Knowledge"

I came back from the dead
 And believed
 this gave me the right
 to speak to others
 but when I found myself face to face with them
 I had nothing to say
 because
 I learned
 over there
 that you cannot speak to others. (Delbo 228)

This passage from Delbo's second chapter, "Useless Knowledge," evokes many of the aforementioned Holocaust themes in this thesis. Most significantly, it epitomizes the concept of "useless knowledge" that Delbo plays with throughout her entire

trilogy.³⁹ This concept points to the content of trauma in, comparatively for Delbo, direct ways. It does so by pointing to the breakdown of language that follows the recalling of a traumatic past and the problem of addressing such memories in the present to an audience who has no frame of reference with which to interpret the meaning of such words by. By “speaking” to the reader in the same moment that she declares she “cannot speak to others,” Delbo creates a paradox that is a playful echo of the irony she presents the reader with in the trilogy’s epigraph: “today I cannot be sure that what I wrote was true. I am certain that it is truthful” (Delbo 1). Such word-play powerfully demonstrates the contradictions dealt with by a survivor and offers a means of overcoming trauma’s affront to the reader’s understanding and language itself. For her translator, Lamont, Delbo’s epigraph is a fearless reaction to the national dimension of her work. Namely, to the Hitler generation who pleaded ignorance to the reality of the camps in the years that followed the war. The statement also reflects a personal aspect; as Lamont writes, “[Delbo] knew that her project was threatened by factors which [could] obliterate and deform mnemonic inscription. The enemy of lucidity and recall is coiled within the subterranean depths of the unconscious. In every survivor lies a deep-seated longing to forget” (“The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo” 492). If testimony is a form of remembering,⁴⁰ the “enemy of lucidity” within the delineation of traumatic memory is the “useless knowledge” that Delbo imparts to her readers in the same moment that she denies their ability to ever understand or learn it.

³⁹ Literary scholar Yasco Horsman also argues that part of Delbo’s “useless knowledge” is the survivor’s bond with the dead (88).

⁴⁰ See *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* by Lawrence L. Langer (2).

What, precisely then, is the “knowledge” in “useless knowledge”? The idea of “useless knowledge” has been extrapolated by many of Delbo’s critics and has been carried as a literary theme that denotes scholarly concepts of unrepresentability, memory, and suffering throughout her work. By sustaining such extensions, the term has been able to carry numerous applications. It can be, at its most simplistic, understood as a banner signifier for the entire body of Delbo’s memories from the camps. As such, it most compellingly bears the traces of psychological trauma and expresses the same issues that problematize the concept of trauma itself—memory and representation. At the root of the Holocaust’s trauma is an encounter with the existence of evil.

The scholar Jennifer L. Geddes works on the supposition that Delbo’s writing about the Holocaust complicates our notion of evil by revealing the “limitations and temptations [that face] scholars of evil...[and thereby] Delbo helps us to resist the temptation to domesticate suffering” (104). The danger in communicating trauma is the impact of its actuality being mitigated by words, and clichés, or standard metaphors that strip it of its raw power. In other words, the “knowledge” imparted by Delbo’s “useless knowledge” is a particular depiction of extreme suffering brought about by traumatic experience. By attempting to express the inexpressible, Geddes argues that Delbo takes up the ethical task of delivering justice to the experience of evil (105). *Auschwitz and After* presents an “empirical” example of evil as it “focuses on the particular [by centering] on a specific event” (104). Geddes continues by explaining:

The suffering of evil is not circumscribed by the facts of the events of harm. To know that someone was stripped, shaved of all her body hair, and beaten is one kind of knowledge. To know that you have seen your mother dead and not shed a tear is quite another. The latter is “useless knowledge.” By this Delbo means that the knowledge one acquires from extreme suffering is not useful for life. (111)

There are two inferences to be drawn from Geddes’ insight that illuminate two different applications of Delbo’s work. Firstly, by advocating for the validity of suffering that is separate from a factual narrative, Geddes is unconsciously referencing the psychological definition of trauma and its belated appearance in the survivor’s mind. Her statement proves that this controversial aspect does not rob trauma of its importance. This is because the context of the Holocaust has revealed that society’s previous definition of “facts” and “knowledge” has been too exclusive. Secondly, the description that she argues is “useless knowledge” is an example of a straightforward, more traditional, literary representation of trauma by Delbo.

The Narrative “We” as a Reflection of Trauma

How does Delbo’s inclusive narrative “we” reflect trauma in her prose? In order to interpret this significant aspect of Delbo’s trilogy, the first question one must ask is who the “we” refers to and includes. Tresize argues that Delbo references trauma and survival through the raising of the question of community. He says this is done through Delbo’s explicit problematization of the frame itself, which calls into dispute

the “tacit agreement on whose basis ‘we’ as a community would assume the intelligibility of traumatic experience and its aftermath” (860). I take Tresize’s argument to mean that Delbo complicates the reader’s claim to inclusion within the “we” of the text by offering a foreign narrative structure that reminds the reader that the experience of trauma is similarly unknown to them. Thus Delbo’s “we” excludes the reader. This seems, on the surface, to be contradictory, as the project of Delbo’s writing is to precisely *make* the reader see, and by seeing understand in some manner, the trauma she is representing. This exclusion is a necessary technique that allows Delbo to detail the events of the camps while also reminding the reader of the “ungraspable” nature of the event of the Holocaust and that they cannot make claims about suffering they have not themselves experienced.

So, who does the “we” or “us” used by Delbo address then? Tresize suggests that either could refer to the entire fifteen thousand women imprisoned in Birkenau or because of Auschwitz’s notoriety (as in the title of the trilogy) it could also extend to the entire body of deportees within the camps (861). Most significantly, Tresize also points to the original French where “the masculine ‘aucun’ of *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* clearly indicates that the ‘nous’ should be understood to refer as well to the men incarcerated in Auschwitz” (861). Tresize’s insight into Delbo’s “we,” that could possibly refer to the entire universe of inmates, regardless of gender, aligns well with the arguments of Thatcher and Hutton from the first chapter. Still, this recognition must be made with various caveats in mind.

It is important to remember that Delbo was French, and not Jewish, and that there were many prisoners of many different backgrounds who were targeted by

the Nazi regime uniquely. Victims were often imprisoned for many varying reasons and not all inmates received the same treatment. As such, Tresize notes that the “acuteness of [the inmates’] despair, and hence the inclusiveness of the ‘us’ itself, [was] bound to vary” (861). He follows by pointing to an example of Delbo’s in the passage titled “Dialogue” where the narrator relates a conversation with a Jewish compatriot. In a rare allusion to her difference from the Jewish inmates, Delbo writes:

“You’re French?”

“Yes.”

“So am I.”

She has no F on her chest. A star.

.....

”And you think we can survive this?”

She is begging.

“We’ve got to try.”

“For you perhaps there’s hope, but for us...”

She points to my striped jacket and then to her coat, a coat much too big, much too dirty, much too tattered.

“Oh, come on, it’s the same odds for both of us.”

“For us, there’s no hope.”

“We’ve got to keep up courage.” (Delbo 15)

The narrator ignores the Jewish compatriot’s insistence on difference as reflected in her insistence of the use of “we.” Tresize points specifically to the end of the passage,

where the pronominal “us” is used again—“smoke lingers in the camp weighing upon us and enveloping us in the odor of burning flesh” (862). The smoke, Tresize observes, is earlier invoked by the gesture of the Jewish woman’s hand and thus “is precisely what confirms the distinction she implies in saying that ‘for you perhaps there’s hope, but for us...’ the distinction between the narrator’s ‘F’ and her own yellow star” (862). The dual silence of the smoke of the crematoria, and the gesture, illustrate the “crux” of their conversation—as Tresize concludes, “[it] centers around the unstated point that the ‘us’ for whom the Jewish woman speaks is defined by the much greater odds of its being excluded from speech or dialogue itself” (862). Meaning, the “us” refers to the Jews who possessed a greater likelihood of shortly being denied the ability to speak ever again. In this passage, Delbo’s narrator accounts for difference and, at the same time, denies it by the persistence of the “we.” This is most poignant in Delbo’s response of “we’ve got to keep up courage.” The line grammatically signifies her effort to equalize herself in the camp community.

If the narrator’s “we” includes those who were in the camps, how does it address those who survived and those who did not? Tresize points to the basic fact of Delbo’s survival and argues that perhaps her return emphasizes or proves the fears of the Jewish woman. By extension, it also betrays a corporeal contrast as those “who chose to bear witness...[and did] so by availing themselves of the very speech forever denied to the dead, and as, furthermore, they could not speak *for* the dead without purporting to represent an ‘us’ in which they no longer were included” (863). On the other hand, Tresize argues that the title of the final book still retains a

sense of “return” that goes beyond biology. In the original French, Tresize offers a different reading of the negation of the future tense of the verb: “(‘*aucun...ne* reviendra,’ ‘*none...will return*’)[] although obviously ‘alive’ as the dead are not, survivors remain nevertheless in what Delbo calls ‘a place where time is abolished’” (863). As Delbo’s writing has explored, there is no real “after” Auschwitz—despite what the title suggests. The result is another contradiction within Delbo’s work. Tresize surmises that just as “return” in one manner separates the survivors from the dead, it also reunites them by the presence of trauma after liberation: “their experience of trauma, here articulated in temporal terms, precludes in another sense any ambiguous ‘return’ to that community” (863).

In this way, “return” always carries with it an inner tension—as survivors can never really join the living after their traumatic experiences. They can only have genuine union and community with the dead. This perspective offers a literary justification for the therapeutic possibilities of writing. Meaning, the act of returning to her memories could constitute a return to a sense of community for Delbo and allow her to experience it once more.

Identifying Trauma in the Everyday in Delbo’s Narrative

Michael Rothberg, in his chapter in the compilatory work *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community*, uses the example of the Jewish Holocaust survivor Ruth Klüger’s memoir *Still Alive* to discuss the specificities of the camp’s trauma and how it has been accounted for in survivor narrative. The camp experience, Rothberg

refers to as the “everyday” because the inmates were deprived there of the most basic human needs. The perversion of the “everyday” was precisely what constituted their trauma⁴¹. Rothberg identifies this theme across the entire body of Holocaust and trauma narrative⁴²:

The evocation of the traumatic relationship between the extreme and the everyday through the tracking of a homely object in an unhomely landscape is not unique to [Klüger’s text] but rather constitutes a significant, traumatic realist subgenre of recent autobiographical writings and art. (61)

An example of the “homely” is most poignantly offered by Rothberg through his brief reading of Delbo where she creates the image of a child’s teddy bear resting on the ground outside of a gas chamber’s door (61). This portrait powerfully illustrates what Rothberg means by the “homely” being juxtaposed with the “unhomely.” Or, in other terms, just how warped the elements of the “everyday” became for the prisoners in the context of the camps.

Another, more in-depth, example of the “everyday” being perverted by the Nazis, can be located in the passage of Delbo’s that she titled “Thirst.” The discomfort of being parched is a bodily sensation that Delbo’s readership can well imagine. On a small level, it is an “everyday” bodily occurrence. However, Delbo’s prose illustrates how this relatable, “everyday” sensation was taken to the extreme by the Nazis and induced significant, horrific trauma. Similar to her method in the

⁴¹ Scholar Erin M. Clark, in her dissertation “Bodies in Transit,” marks the perversion of the “everyday” immediately in the experience of the prisoners on the railway: “if everyday objects become instruments of inflicted pain, the railways ‘the first of many shocks’ for victims...” (106).

⁴² For more on the idea of “extreme” experience as trauma, see the volume that this Rothberg’s essay resides in, *Extremities* edited by Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw.

poem “o you who know,” yet more directly in this instance, Delbo’s argument specifically addresses how the reader cannot relate to the experience of the depravation and extremity in the camps. She states, “I’d been thirsty...to the point of losing my mind, to the point of being unable to eat since there was no saliva in my mouth, so thirsty I couldn’t speak, because you’re unable to speak when there’s saliva in your mouth” (Delbo 142). Later, Delbo again calls attention to the reader’s ignorance through her informative statement “your eyes burn when the lacrymal glands dry up” (145). Delbo continues by turning to graphic metaphor in order to call upon the reader’s imagination to interpret the level of thirst’s torturous capacities: “my tongue [was] a piece of wood. My swollen gums and tongue kept me from closing my mouth, which stayed open like that of a mad woman with dilated pupils in her haggard eyes” (142). Finally, when Delbo is given a pail of water by one of her inmates, who traded a piece of bread for it, she equates herself drinking it with an animal: “I drank and drank some more. Like a horse, no, like a dog. A dog laps water with its agile tongue. It hollows out its tongue in the shape of a spoon to hold the liquid. A horse merely drinks” (144). Delbo closes with a brief and ironic statement: “there are people who say, ‘I’m thirsty.’ They step into a café and order a beer” (145).

Such dramatic perversions are precisely the moments where Rothberg locates trauma within: “[trauma resides in] the familiar and the radically foreign” (62). Delbo explicitly makes this contrast in her text by following her description of deprivation with the ridiculous analogy of a normal person’s pathetic understanding of what “thirst” means. This literary location, however, is informed by Rothberg’s

reading of Caruth. He recalls Caruth's insight that trauma is a "structure of experience" and explains that in Klüger's work "the traumatic nature of the experience results not so much from a confusion of inside and outside, but rather from the narrator's location in the face of an unsurpassable coexistence of inside and outside, subject and world" (63). This is also the case in Delbo's writing. These two opposites of understanding, Rothberg clarifies, create a place for trauma "because its coincidence of opposites overwhelms the everyday structures of understanding, which nevertheless remain present" (63). Moreover, as Delbo's use of language to describe her extreme thirst to the reader reveals, the method of contrast and the perversion of the "everyday" both allow for an articulation of trauma through imagery, metaphor and analogy.

Rothberg adds a crucial explanation to Caruth's theory by arguing that when trauma defies comprehension, it does not entail "simply annihilat[ing] comprehension, but rather [it] *displaces* it. This displacement...derives from the fact that trauma involves both 'encounters with death' and 'the ongoing experience of having survived it'" (63). Therefore, this reading proposes another method of perceiving the unique mark of trauma in Delbo's writing. Since Delbo discloses in the trilogy that she "died" in Auschwitz, the reader can interpret this statement, and her discussion of a divided self, as another creative illustration of trauma's existence.

How does poetry, as a particular form of expression,⁴³ figure in the realm of traumatic narration? Michael Rosenfeld argues that, after the Holocaust, the genre of poetry had to change in order to “register new circumstances” within its tradition (82). Rosenfeld is quick to specify that it was not the concept of mortality itself that forced the genre to adapt; as he explains, “we know from centuries of literature that have been occasioned by [death], [that it] is among the most powerful inducements to affective language” (83). However, the Holocaust created new circumstances of death that had to be accounted for in poetic language⁴⁴ and Rosenfeld’s study argues that such representations could not be made within the old genre: “death as a willed de-creation- a savage and systematic undoing of the human species- is not of the same order of dying at all and cannot be embraced within any concepts of poetry known to us thus far”(83).

Holocaust theory has dealt with this conflict profusely and, in the words of Wernick, this tension is typically accompanied by the literary explanation that “historical horror undermines the ‘exchange between language and experience’” (88). Wernick’s point of view has been addressed in this thesis in multiple ways already. However, in the specific instance of Holocaust poetry, the literature specialist Susan Gubar argues that many of the more famous poems often feature

⁴³ In the preface to *Women’s Lives/Women’s Times*, editors Trev Lynn Broughton and Linda R. Anderson argue that women’s autobiographical writings create a challenge by weaving metaphor with literality. I see this thought mirrored in Delbo’s metaphor rich poetry that seeks to account for the existence of her trauma. Broughton and Anderson’s recognition that these two forces pose a challenge is mirrored in the juxtaposition of trauma and poetry in this thesis.

⁴⁴ The perspective that witnessing and writing were altered by the event of the Holocaust is a viewpoint that has been summarized from the collection *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* and edited by the literary critic Shoshana Felman and the psychoanalyst Dori Laub.

series of “false analogies,” “stutters,” “abrupt transitions and authorial hesitation[s]” (*Poetry After Auschwitz* 24). For Gubar, such devices are meant to do away with the hope of closure or finality. The unique styling of such works is meant to display, instead, a “forceful act[] of remembering because they are belated, partial, flawed, and yet necessary” (24).

In Fridman Hamaoui, she argues that the pauses in Delbo’s narratives, of which there are many, “[are] not [] device[s], not [] clever form[s] of ‘telling but not telling,’ but a lingering in narrative time upon the violent fact itself and the conjunction of real and unreal that occurs with it” (“Art and Testimony” 42). The pauses are so frequent in Delbo’s poems that they create echoes, extending from the preceding verses, and thus reverberate within the mind of reader. These echoes often hang so long on the page that they inevitably fall into the blank space as silence. Delbo powerfully explores this technique in a passage about how the dehumanizing techniques of the Nazis perforated the relation between child and mother through the equation of shame with forced nakedness:

my mother
 she was hands, a face
 They made our mothers strip in front of us

Here mothers are no longer mothers to their children. (Delbo 12)

Delbo’s mother, since Delbo herself was there only as a political prisoner, was not in the camps. However, by introducing this experience of her inmates, whose mothers were in the camps, Delbo sets up an intimate and personal context for her dramatic

use of space. She follows the idea of a mother being forced, as an instrument of shame, to reveal her naked body publicly with enough physical space on the page that the reader is forced to deeply consider what this experience may have felt like. The statement is thus emphasized by the use of empty space. The voice that follows takes on a hollow tone, by virtue of its brevity, after the reader considers such an embarrassing and painful image. Though the narrator dispenses with emotion, especially in her final words, the reader cannot. Every reader knows that “my mother,” whom the reader must interpret as anyone’s mother, could never be just “hands, a face.” Therefore, the experience and imagination of the reader work to fill in the blank space, and factual voice of the narrator, in order to forge a connection with the past that is based on compassion.

Marking Trauma in Creative Methods of Parallel and Contrast

In “None of Us Will Return,” Delbo describes mistaking a woman for a small boy directly after recounting the death of a fellow inmate who attempted to escape. She writes that the woman was:

Standing, wrapped in a blanket, a child, a little boy. A tiny, shaven head, a face with jutting jaws and a salient superciliary arch. Barefoot, he jumps up and down ceaselessly with a frenzy like that of some barbaric dance. He also waves his arms to keep warm. The blanket slips open. It’s a woman. A female skeleton. She is naked. Her ribs and pelvic bones are clearly visible. She pulls the blanket up to her shoulders while continuing to dance. The dance of an

automaton. A dancing female skeleton. Her feet are small, gaunt, bare in the snow. There are living skeletons that dance. (Delbo 26)

These short, choppy sentences are juxtaposed with the immediate following sentence: “presently I am writing this story in a café- it is turning into a story” (26). There is no parallel between the two and the contrast that they create is so great that it is absurd. Considered on its own, Delbo’s description of the dehumanized woman is remarkably curious. Had Delbo not grown accustomed to seeing such starvation in the camps? Why was she so confused by the woman’s frame that she could not immediately identify her gender? Whatever the case, the woman’s genderless body, and Delbo’s detailed description, both work together to depict the camp’s drastic and fanatical mutilation of its victims. By doing so, Delbo forces the reader to reimagine, and reidentify, the limits of their understanding.

Delbo’s following sentence, the relative luxury of the infamous trope of the Parisian café, is a jarring change of subject to say the least. The contrast has various effects. Namely, it emphasizes the vast chasm of difference between concentration camp life and post-war realities. The closeness of their comparison in the text also renders both instances as absurd- it is ridiculous to imagine such horror in the landscape of Paris in the same way it would have been ludicrous to dream of a croissant and cappuccino in the barracks of Auschwitz. Both realities are incompatible and as such they represent another calculated move on behalf of Delbo to remind her readers that they can never relate, never fully comprehend, and never know what transpired behind the gates of the concentration camps or within the mind of a survivor.

Marking Trauma in the Collapse of Time

Holocaust scholar Arun Kumar Pokhrel has commented that across the examples of survivor literature, and through what they have related to their readers about camp experience, a constant feature is that “the sense of time is deeply embedded in the survivor’s consciousness” (1). Such awareness must mean that such contrasts, as the one between Delbo’s café and the skeletal woman, are constantly in the forefront of the survivor’s consciousness. To hold such incomprehensible comparisons together, in the mind at the same time, must constitute an unparalleled level of mental disturbance. In the “Measure of Our Days,” Delbo nuances the theme of temporal distance from her past by describing the complexity of time and return:

Whether you return from war or from elsewhere

When it’s an elsewhere

unimaginable to others

it is hard to come back

.....

for everything in the house

has grown foreign

while we were in the elsewhere

... when it’s an elsewhere

where you conversed with death

it is hard to come back

and speak again to the living.

... it is hard to relearn

looking at the dull eyes

of the living. (256)

The sort of distance that survival, moving into and out of experiences in the wake of the camps, and their memories, must create in the frame of the present is explicit in this excerpt. The reader cannot grasp precisely *where* the “elsewhere” truly entails. Aside from the normative explanations of why the reader cannot grasp the traumatic content of “elsewhere,” the vagueness that Delbo constructs through her choice of this specific word dramatizes the imagined physical distance that it connotes. This reconstitutes the chasm of difference between the survivor and the reader. Moreover, her poem points to the fact that “elsewhere” signifies a past that is still present for the survivor. This truth allows the reader to understand the survivor in a crucial way as it illustrates how traumatic memory continues to invade the survivor’s life. By regarding the specter of “elsewhere” as a haunting reality for the survivor, the reader is provoked by Delbo’s prose into a state of genuine sympathy.

Poetry’s Capacity to Reference Trauma Through Abstraction

Baer argues that poetry possesses the ability to impart “knowledge” in a non-traditional manner: “in a poem knowledge may also be transmitted through its enactment- in the shift from a *c* to a *C*, for instance- rather than communicated”

(149). This capacity of poetry allows Delbo to do two things. Firstly, poetry allows Delbo the freedom to reference an experience for her reader that normally would resist an explanation that they could grasp. Secondly, poetry allows for minute gestures, and abstract phrases or ideas, to take on meaning and signify truths that Delbo herself may not fully be able to identify with or adequately be able to put into language. For example, in this poem, Delbo deals with the fundamental idea of transmitting knowledge and points to this issue, not by verbalizing it in a common or conversational structure, but through the form of abstraction and in her poem's breakdown:

Do not say they cannot hear us
 they hear us
 they want to understand
 obstinately
 meticulously
 the edge of their being wishes to understand
 a sensitive border at their edge
 but their deepest self
 their inner truth
 remains remote
 flees as we think we're catching it
 retracts contracts escapes
 do they withdraw and fall back
 because they hurt

where we no longer hurt... (Delbo 269)

This poem is from the final book of Delbo's trilogy and chronologically takes place after her return into normal society. Up to this point, we have only explored how the survivor feels the pressure to share their experience. This poem points to the listener and their desire to know of the victim's pain. What Delbo's listeners and readers cannot hear or understand is the full force, the raw impact, of the persecution and death that went on just past many of their doorsteps. Instead of "writing" this experience, Delbo mirrors their ignorance through the frame of the poem and yet still clearly illustrates their desire to know. The structure of the poem enacts traumatic fragmentation with its short, or one-word "sentences," and by its lack of grammatical markings. The poem's content follows suit by dissolving into abstraction and a vagueness that relies on moments, like the line "retracts contracts escapes," to create movement that act out a meaning that words cannot.

Baer argues that in instances of poetry, such as this example from Delbo, "[the] sense of enactment" versus the "direct[] communicat[ion] [of] its truth" reveals how "poetry registers the type of experience that an individual, after suffering a trauma, may feel compelled to reenact but cannot recall at will" (149). In such a way, Delbo once again takes up the possibilities of poetry to create powerful gestures where words alone do not suffice. By doing so, the reader is placed into relation with her experience after the camps as a survivor.

In such examples, Delbo places a great deal of responsibility on the reader. The onus of receiving language, in whatever form, is given over to their interpretive capacities. By engaging with Delbo's poetry, the reader opens up a two-way

exchange of communication. Still, whatever the form or method, Delbo still insists on the sanctity of her, and her fellow victim's claim to trauma:

You'd like to know
ask questions
but you don't know what questions
and you don't know how to ask them
so you inquire
about simple things
hunger
fear
death
and we don't know how to answer
not with the words you use
our own words
you can't understand
so you ask simpler things
tell us for example
how a day was spent
a day goes by slowly
you'd run out of patience listening
but if we gave you an answer
you still don't know how a day was spent
and assume we don't know how to answer. (Delbo 275)

However simple or small the request, Delbo's poem reminds the reader that despite her effort to communicate, language has the capacity to reach a limit and fail to overcome it. The final line, where Delbo relates that the listener may "assume we don't know how to answer," suggests that this may, at times, be intentional on the behalf of the survivor. As Baer explains, testimony is not just a personal act of speech; rather, it possesses an "actualizing dimension" as a "speech act" (203). Such a perspective, Baer argues, must prevent testimonial poetry from "being read as a part of a case study, or as an exclusively personal, subjective concern" (204). This is perhaps why Delbo includes that the listener might "assume," which implies they are incorrect in their assumption, that she is not capable of framing her experience in a language that they can comprehend.

This refrain suggests another ethical move on the part of Delbo. As an ethical writer, she would certainly have desired that her trilogy not be read as just a "case study." Therefore, her poetry must be inflected with reminders to the reader to approach her words with their crucial nature in mind—as a testimony. By relying on the imagination, as an ethical tool, the reader can attempt to "see" in the appropriate way. Thus Delbo's focus on sensory experience, that draws the reader out of the confines of a bare-knowledge structure, requires that their imagination be activated appropriately. Still, this mode of reading is undertaken with the awareness that the post-Holocaust world no longer allows for the reader to possess the facts of a narrative in the same way. This truth places Delbo's readers into constant reference

with a loss that must be maintained in all of its vital, unbearable, intensity.⁴⁵ When this new posture is accepted, Delbo's trilogy will have truly stood the test of time.

⁴⁵ The idea of approaching testimonies in a constantly vital manner, despite the post-post context of the Holocaust today, is, in part, motivated by my reading of the opening thoughts of the scholar Susan Rubin Suleiman in her essay "War Memories: On Autobiographical Reading."

Conclusion

Delbo's writing is informed by an ethical desire to show her readers her traumatic experience. She acts on this dictum paradoxically by denying, in the same moment, that her readers can ever understand such a traumatic reality. From Caruth's study, her conversation with van der Hart, and the various literary theories explored throughout this thesis, we can understand that there are many obstacles in the way of any onlooker or reader ever truly understanding or knowing what transpired in the camps. However, Delbo offers a work that attempts to overcome these barriers by addressing them outright and radically rethinking traditional categories of knowledge, communication and the possibilities of literature and poetry in her trilogy. This innovative endeavor demands that the reader also respond by doing away with their conventional modes of engagement with a text. By understanding Delbo's ethical impulses, and the ethical theories of Levinas' work that highlight how a reader ought to approach her writing, Delbo's work requires and can construct an ethical reader. With traditional expectations, and thus restrictions, abolished, the reader is forced to approach the trilogy as a work of testimony. As such, they are placed in constant reference to the loss that any Holocaust work attempts to account for as the embodiment of the dead's memory. The result is a dynamic process of reading that allows Delbo a context to creatively represent trauma without mitigating its force. Trauma's powerful illustration, in Delbo's prose and poetry, speaks directly to the heart of the reader and stir their compassion. This response necessitates a reader who ethically approaches, with compassion and

tolerance, the important experiences of Delbo and her inmates. Ethical engagement constructs a reader who is willing to take up the weight of Holocaust remembrance in the present and fulfill Delbo's ethical imperative to not allow the future to forget the Holocaust.

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