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Kathrin M. Bower
University of Richmond, kbower@richmond.edu

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Kathrin M. Bower

Ethics and Remembrance

in the Poetry of Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer

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Introduction

Every being cries out silently to be read differently.

— Simone Weil[1]

Ire zikhroynes
her memories
will become monuments
ire zikhroynes
will cast shadows.

— Irena Klepfisz[2]

Through remembrance comes redemption; by going back one also moves toward the future. . . .

— Susan Handelman[3]

WHILE RECOGNITION OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS of poets Nelly Sachs (1891–1970) and Rose Ausländer (1901–1988) is certainly not lacking in German poetry anthologies and critical reviews of their work, there have been few extensive analyses of the body of their writings, and none in English exploring the themes, impulses, and resonance that their lives and poems clearly share. My purpose in this study is to present readings of Nelly Sachs's and Rose Ausländer's poetry in the context of the events, philosophies, and traditions that impinged upon them, not in order to fix their writings as topical artifacts, but rather to reveal their continued significance in the pursuit of what Saul Friedländer has called "probing the limits of representation."[4] The Holocaust for some, perhaps most famously Theodor Adorno, represents a limit to representation, a boundary in both a literary and an ethical sense that cannot and even should not be crossed. Adorno's oft-quoted and frequently misapplied dictum against writing poetry after Auschwitz can be seen as

[1] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills (1952; Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997), 188.

[2] From the poem "*Di rayze aheym* / The journey home," Irena Klepfisz, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue* (Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press, 1990), 224.

[3] Susan Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991), 171.

[4] See Saul Friedländer, ed. *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992).

evidence of a perceived radical disruption between aesthetics and ethics, most dramatically concentrated in the corpus of the lyric poem.[5] While Adorno was to later modify and modulate his interdiction,[6] the tone of his original statement still lingers.

Although the aesthetic and ethical power evident in the poems of Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer speaks for itself, it is prudent to consider the impact of Adorno's legacy on the reception of their poetry as well as that of other writers who have sought to give voice to the catastrophe in the medium of poetic language.[7] In an understanding of representation as a wedding of aesthetics and ethics or what Adrienne Rich refers to as "a long dialogue between art and justice,"[8] poetry has a special place. While poetry cannot redeem or repair loss, Rich argues quoting John Berger that "it defies the space which separates ... by its continual labour of reassembling what has been scattered."[9] What has been scattered are the memories of those whose lives were prematurely extinguished, and the communities and cultures that cannot be reconstructed but that have nevertheless left their traces in the collective memories of a dispersed people.

For Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer, writing itself became an act of recuperation and reflection, not only in relation to memories of the past, but also in pursuit of the integrity and continuity of the self in a morally disrupted world. As acts of remembrance, their poems are constituted by the relationship between the poetic voice and the poem. In

[5] See Theodor Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," in *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955) 31: ". . . nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch. . . ."

[6] See Adorno, "Engagement," in *Noten zur Literatur III* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965) 125–26: "Den Satz, nach Auschwitz noch Lyrik zu schreiben, sei barbarisch, möchte ich nicht mildern: negativ ist darin der Impuls ausgesprochen, der die engagierte Dichtung beseelt. (. . .) Aber wahr bleibt auch Enzensbergers Entgegnung, die Dichtung müsse eben diesem Verdikt standhalten, so also sein, daß sie nicht durch ihre bloße Existenz nach Auschwitz dem Zynismus sich überantwortete. Ihre eigene Situation ist paradox, nicht erst, wie man zu ihr sich verhält. Das Übermaß an realem Leiden duldet kein Vergessen. . . ." Here Adorno ultimately comes out on the side of remembrance, although he desires this an a form that does not rob the victims of the ethical integrity that he adamantly insists is their due.

[7] As the editor of the volume *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), Petra Kiedaisch has done a great service to scholars of Holocaust poetry. This collection of essays and excerpts brings together both Adorno's various statements on the subject and the responses to his proclamations from writers and critics beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the early 1990s.

[8] Adrienne Rich, "Defy the Space That Separates," *The Nation*, October 7, 1996, 34.

[9] Ibid., 31.

this relationship, the poetic voice assumes the role of witness, while the poem mediates between the testimony and its recipient, the implied reader. In his discussion of the interplay between testimony and witnessing, Dori Laub argues that it is in the act of testifying, of giving voice to the event, that real witnessing occurs.[10] Further, the relationship between the testifier and the listener is marked by a shared responsibility for the narrative that results from their encounter. In the absence of a listener, the testifier may resort to the construction of an "internal witness" with whom the dialogue of remembrance takes place.[11] In one form, this constructed Other or internal witness parallels the role that the poem assumes for the poet in the absence of an interlocutor with whom to share the responsibility for the poet's testimony.

My approach to the poetry discussed in the present study is not only one of interpretation; I also attempt to locate within and beyond the poems a theory of ethics that grows out of the dialogical impulses that animate them. In my use of the term "ethics" I am distinguishing it from another term that often seems to share the same semantic space but deserves a separate category.[12] In contrast to "morality," which I define as a fixed set of standards or norms determining and distinguishing "good" and "bad," ethics is a process, both interactive and negotiable, but always aimed at what a social consensus has determined to be "right" behavior. The allusion to the combination of social consensus and "right" behavior in the preceding statement is of extreme importance in distinguishing ethics and morality, for as Peter Haas points out in his provocative study *Morality after Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*, it is the system of behaviors that constitutes an ethics, not a universal standard of good and evil.[13] The ethics that emerge out

[10] See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 85–86.

[11] Felman and Laub, 87.

[12] In my distinction between "ethics" and "morality," I am following in somewhat modified form the definitions Paul Ricoeur outlines in the seventh study contained in the collection *Oneself as Another* (trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago/London: U of Chicago P, 1992), 170: ". . . I reserve the term 'ethics' for the *aim* of an accomplished life and the term 'morality' for the articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint. . . ."

[13] Thus in Haas's analysis, the Nazis too were operating under an ethics in that they had constructed a coherent system of behavior in which the concepts of "good" and "bad" had been redefined according to the precepts of Nazi ideology. Haas's *Morality after Auschwitz* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) is a daring and ambitious attempt at analyzing the Holocaust from a perspective outside of any appeal to universal standards of "good" and "evil," as he himself suggests in his opening

of Sachs's and Ausländer's writings represent a very different phenomena from what Haas observes in his study. The "ethics of remembrance" that evolve out of their works focus on the role of the poet as witness and on the fashioning of the poem not only as metaphorical testimony, but also as a kind of linguistic witness to the poet's act of transformational remembrance. This doubling of the witness role through the poet and the poem reveals a level of meta-awareness in the poetic process, whereby the act of witnessing is simultaneously filtered through the activity of self-reflection.

The necessity of dialogue in the unfolding and realization of this ethics of remembrance points to a condition of mutuality or responsibility between the I and the Thou, the Self and the Other of this discourse. In encountering this relationship in Sachs's and Ausländer's poetry, it is incumbent upon the reader to assume the role of the Thou. Lyric poetry, by virtue of its form and formulation, demands the active involvement and commitment of the reader if there is to be a production of meaning or an achievement of understanding. This condition of shared obligation further enables a shift in interpretations of the Holocaust away from the focus on morality in terms of culpability and guilt to an engagement with ethics in terms of responsibility and "right" action. In the area of post-Holocaust moral theory, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has done much to demonstrate the connections between ethical behavior and the responsibility to the "other."[14] It is part of my project here to apply aspects of his thought on the relationship between the self and the other to the interactive and ongoing process of remembrance and the processing of memory evident both in the biographies and the poetry of Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer.

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chapter (13–14): "The thesis I am developing and testing here is that any ethic, even one as brutal as the Nazis', can become dominant if it is internally consistent and can be made persuasive to a sufficiently large population. That it is the formal characteristic of an ethic that makes it viable, not its particular content, seems to be the overarching lesson of the Holocaust in Europe."

[14] In *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1987), Levinas presents his concept of responsibility in relation to the other as a condition of identity that is in a sense both answerable to and independent of historical time (111–12): "In the ethical anteriority of responsibility, for-the-other, in its priority over deliberation, there is a past irreducible to a presence that it must have been. This past is without reference to an identity naively — or naturally — assured of its right to presence, where everything must have begun. In this responsibility I am thrown back toward what has never been my fault or my deed, toward what has never been my presence, and has never come into memory. (. . .) It is the significance of a past that concerns me . . . and is 'my business' outside of all reminiscence, re-tention, re-presentation [*sic*], or reference to a remembered present."

Although they were born in different countries, Nelly Sachs in Germany and Rose Ausländer in Austria-Hungary, the two women shared a common upbringing in the German cultural tradition. As children in enlightened, bourgeois households, both Sachs and Ausländer were educated and avid readers of the classics of German literature, particularly German Romanticism, as well as of a variety of Jewish and Christian texts. Both initially attended public schools, but then received instruction from private tutors. In Sachs's case her protective and doting parents found her too fragile for public school and, after a period of home tutoring, placed her in an exclusive private school for girls. Rose Ausländer's education was largely directed by her mother, who played a significant role in inculcating her daughter with a respect and an appreciation for the German literary classics. This carefully directed yet enlightened education, particularly the early exposure to works of German Romanticism, was to have a lasting impact on both poets' views of the world.

Nelly Sachs, born in 1891 in Berlin as the only child of William and Margarete Sachs, was raised in a comfortable, bourgeois household where she intently pursued her interests in music, dance, and Romantic literature. Her earliest writings testify to her familiarity and fascination with Romanticism as well as her affinity with mysticism.[15] Her parents belonged to the Berlin Jewish community in name only, contributing financially but not attending synagogue or celebrating traditional Jewish holidays. In this home environment, Sachs developed a sense of self that was defined neither by racial nor by religious categories, so that when she was once referred to as a Jewess in her school, she was confused as to what it meant.[16] It was not until the Nazis assumed control of Germany's ideological destiny that Nelly Sachs was forced to confront her Jewish heritage and reassess her relationship to Germany and her identity as a German and a Jew. The disparity and conflict between these simultaneous identities would trouble her for the rest of her life, further complicated by her unshakeable self-understanding as a German-speaking poet.[17] Partly in response to the forced attribution of a

[15] See *Legenden und Erzählungen* (Berlin: F. W. Mayer, 1921).

[16] See Bengt Holmqvist, "Die Sprache der Sehnsucht," *Das Buch der Nelly Sachs* (1968; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 25.

[17] In contrast to Paul Celan, Nelly Sachs did not experience a conflict of loyalties as an exile writing in German. Her affinity with the German language transcended the post-Holocaust perception shared by writers such as Celan that it was a language forever tainted by Nazism. Michael Braun goes so far as to argue that for Sachs there were no "disappeared" words in the German language, she continued to use and call upon the entire spectrum of vocabulary at her disposal. See Birgit Lermen and Mi-

Jewish identity in Nazi Germany, Sachs became fascinated with Hasidic mysticism, seeing in it affinities to the mysticism of Jakob Böhme and Christian mystics she had admired before the Nazis came to power.[18] This fascination with mysticism and the mystical belief in transcendence would play a central role in her subsequent writings and survival during and after the Holocaust. Through the assistance of German friends and the support of Prince Eugen among others, Nelly Sachs was able to flee to Sweden together with her aging mother in 1940. She settled in Stockholm and managed to eke out a modest existence by translating and writing poetry. Although she applied for and was granted Swedish citizenship in 1952 and remained there until her death in 1970, she never truly felt at home in Sweden or in the Swedish language and remained loyal to her mother tongue as the medium for her poetry.

Ten years Nelly Sachs's junior, Rose Ausländer was born Rosalie Scherzer in 1901 to Sigmund and Etie Scherzer and grew up in a traditional Jewish household. Unlike Nelly Sachs, Rosalie was not an only child, and in 1906 her younger brother, Maximilian was born. She would remain close to her brother all her life, despite the hardships that pulled them apart and the geographical distances that often separated them. In the cultural melting pot of Czernowitz, the Scherzer family practiced Jewish customs and rituals but without religious dogmatism. As a girl, Rosalie was instructed in both Hebrew and Yiddish, languages that remained foreign to Nelly Sachs. Because of Sigmund Scherzer's background as a rabbinical student in Sadagora, renowned as a center for Jewish learning both orthodox and mystical, readings from the Torah as well as from the Kabbalah were a regular occurrence in the Scherzer household.[19] As a student at the university in Czernowitz, Rosalie became interested in the philosophy and teachings of Benedict Spinoza and the work of Constantin Brunner. Ethical philosophy interested her more than mysticism and her faith was one tempered with philosophical re-

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chael Braun, *Nelly Sachs "an letzter Atemspitze des Lebens"* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1998), 56.

[18] Gisela Dischner argues that Sachs's early fascination with the Christian mystical quality of German Romanticism evidenced in the writings of Novalis predisposed her toward the teachings of the Kabbalah. See Dischner's introductory essay to the volume *apropos Nelly Sachs* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1997), 27–28.

[19] In her biography of Rose Ausländer, Cilly Helfrich notes that Sadagora was a center of Hasidic mysticism since 1769. Ausländer's father was born in 1872 and studied there with the so-called "Wunderrabbi" until age seventeen, at which point he was accorded the status of a rabbi in his own right. See Helfrich, *Rose Ausländer. Biographie* (Zürich: Pendo Verlag, 1998), 34, 46–48. See also Ausländer's poem "Der Vater" (II 318).

flection rather than spiritual fervor. She saw religion as a synthesis of ideas, rather than one program for salvation within rigid bounds, and her sense of identity as a Jew was in line with this concept of synthesis. Despite her closer connections to Judaism since childhood, Rose Ausländer shared with Nelly Sachs a view of faith as a blend of different beliefs and philosophies taken from German culture, Christianity, and Judaism.

Following Sigmund Scherzer's death in 1920, young Rosalie emigrated to the United States in 1921 to take some of the financial strain off of her mother. After her emigration, Rose Ausländer began publishing poetry in German. In 1931 she returned to Czernowitz where she continued with her publication activities. Her first book-length collection of poetry, *Der Regenbogen*, was, however, also to be her last in the Czernowitz literary market. Published in a small edition of four hundred copies in 1939, *Der Regenbogen* received positive reviews in the Bukovina, Rumania, and in Switzerland, but had little hope of success in Nazi Germany. Aware of the Nazi threat that was sweeping eastward, Ausländer returned to the safe haven of New York in 1939. Deeply concerned for her mother's welfare, Ausländer was too anxious to enjoy her own safety for long and returned to Czernowitz at the end of 1939. Shortly after her return it became clear that neither she nor her mother would be able to leave Czernowitz, and after the SS occupied the city in 1941, Rose Ausländer and her mother went into hiding in the Jewish ghetto. From the uncertain refuge of the cellar that served as their hiding place, Ausländer continued to compose poetry, turning to writing as a means of coping with the extremity of her situation.[20] The poems that arose out of this experience were later grouped together in the cycle *Gettomotive* (I 151–84). It was during this period of occupation, persecution, and surreptitious literary production that Ausländer met Paul Celan, also a resident of Czernowitz and a kindred poetic spirit.[21]

Sachs and Ausländer were not alone in their openness to a variety of traditions, and the synthesis of religious and existential perspectives evident in their writings can also be found in works of other German-Jewish writers of the period. Most notable of these is perhaps Else Lasker-Schüler, who responded to the pressures of assimilation by fashioning her own brand of belief out of the elements of her Jewish

[20] For a discussion of Ausländer's ghetto experiences see Cilly Helfrich, *Rose Ausländer. Biographie*, 164–84.

[21] One of Celan's most famous images, the celebrated metaphor of the "black milk" in "Todesfuge" (~1945) can be found in a much earlier poem by Rose Ausländer, "Ins Leben" (~1938), published in *Der Regenbogen* (I 66).

and Christian heritage that appealed to her.[22] While Lasker-Schüler figured her Jewishness as one of several personæ of the other and outsider in her poetry already well before the implementation of the racial laws in 1935, the Nuremberg citizenship regulations served as a caesura in the self-understanding of many German-Jews. In her study of German-Jewish women writers, Dagmar Lorenz argues that the alleged success of Jewish assimilation in Western Europe at the turn of the century must be viewed with some skepticism. On the one hand, widespread assimilation diminished the presence of Jewish religion and culture; on the other, resurgent anti-Semitism indicated that assimilation was not achieving integration.[23]

For assimilated Jews who had generated a worldview and a moral system grounded in the tenets of European humanism and Christianity, the sudden confrontation with the Jewishness they had denied or forgotten catalyzed a crisis of identity. Some continued to stubbornly adhere to the humanistic legacy of the Enlightenment despite the obvious refutation of its ideals in the reality they confronted.[24] Under the influence of National Socialism and its policies of segregation and persecution, others, like Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer, turned more and more to Jewish traditions and teachings, in Sachs's and Ausländer's cases particularly Kabbalistic mysticism and the works of Martin Buber and other Jewish philosophers and theologians.[25]

[22] In her discussion of Else Lasker-Schüler's position as a German-Jewish writer, Dagmar Lorenz holds her up as a model of emancipation, not only as a woman, but more specifically as a German-Jewish woman. Lorenz's admiration for the poet is obvious in her portrayal of Lasker-Schüler as successful both in defying patriarchal law and in creating an intercultural space for her writing. See Dagmar Lorenz, *Keepers of the Motherland: German Texts by Jewish Women Writers* (Lincoln/London: U of Nebraska P, 1997), 69–78.

[23] See Lorenz, *Keepers of the Motherland*, 95–96.

[24] See Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Writing as Resistance: Four Women Confronting the Holocaust* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997), here esp. 8–9, 19.

[25] Sachs read widely in Gershom Scholem's writings on Jewish mysticism and his translation of the *Zohar*. She was also familiar with Franz Rosenzweig's *Stern der Erlösung* and felt a strong connection to the writings of Simone Weil. Rose Ausländer, as a student of philosophy at the University in Czernowitz, became involved with the work of Constantin Brunner and through his investigations also with that of Benedict de Spinoza. For a detailed discussion of the philosophical influences and foundations in Ausländer's work, see Gerhard Reiter, "Das Eine und das Einzelne. Zur philosophischen Struktur der Lyrik Rose Ausländers," *Rose Ausländer: Materialien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Helmut Braun (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991), 154–97.

It would be misleading, however, to imply that Sachs and Ausländer came to acknowledge their Jewish identity as a result of Nazi racial policies, or to indicate that they came to be poets only in response to the Holocaust. Like Rose Ausländer, Nelly Sachs was writing and publishing poetry well before the Nazis began to dictate the identity and fate of European Jewry. Nelly Sachs's first published poem appeared in an October 1929 issue of the *Vossische Zeitung*, and her last in Germany before her flight to safety in Sweden was in the April 1939 newsletter of the Jüdischer Kulturbund. After her father died in 1930, Nelly Sachs became actively involved with the Jüdischer Kulturbund in Berlin, where she participated in the literary life of the organization. In the company of such as Gertrud Kolmar, a German-Jewish poet whom Sachs greatly admired at the time, Nelly Sachs's poetry readings at the Kulturbund indicate that she too enjoyed a degree of recognition as a voice in the Jewish literary and cultural life of pre-war Berlin.[26]

In the atmosphere of crisis surrounding the Holocaust, Sachs and Ausländer felt compelled as poets and witnesses to search for alternative and transformed perspectives of faith in order to come to grips with the moral and psychological anomie and chaos that followed in the wake of catastrophe. In their respective quests for new or revised models of belief and representation, they looked back to their memories of a time before their worlds had forever been disrupted, to childhood remembrances where the mother was both the locus of origin and the embodiment of refuge. The act of reflection back to a time of security represented by genuine and imaginary re-collections of childhood is one strategy for working through the past, reconstructing the stability of the familiar as a perspective from which to engage the destabilizing experiences and negativity of history. The mother in these reflections is a multivalent trope: alternately and at once the finite, human mother grounded in historical time; the Shekhinah, the female aspect of God in Jewish mysticism; and the archetypal mother of cosmic time, the Great Mother whose vastness encompasses both good and evil, creation and destruction, nurturance and violence.

The Mother, however, does not become a substitute for the Father in a one-for-the-other exchange of transcendental subjects. Instead, the appeal to the maternal both suggests and enacts a synthesis of beliefs and perspectives that offer an alternative to the destabilized belief in a

[26] See Birgit Lermen and Michael Braun, *Nelly Sachs*, 25. See also *Briefe der Nelly Sachs*, ed. Ruth Dinesen and Helmut Müssener (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 31, 95 where Nelly Sachs expresses her admiration for Gertrud Kolmar (Chodziesner).

supreme and benevolent Godhead. While figurations of the mother, both biographical and metaphorical, recur in a myriad of variations in the writings of the two poets, the father himself rarely appears.[27] Sachs's and Ausländer's figurations of the paternal imago center on a Divine Father whose omnipotence and role as a benevolent protector have been called into question. Yet even as they decry this Father for His lack of intervention in the catastrophe of the Holocaust, they do not renounce their faith in the Divine. Nevertheless, the form of this Divine was dramatically molded and altered by the historical events that confronted them. In their poetic representations of the Cosmic Mother, Sachs and Ausländer, whether willfully or unconsciously, undermine the primacy of monotheism. In contrast to a monotheism based upon an exclusionary concept of belonging and redemption in which some are blessed at the expense of others,[28] Sachs and Ausländer offer a complex, pantheistic faith in a Divine power that is at once diffuse and all-encompassing. This conception of the Divine is at once inside and outside of history, beyond good and evil.

The turn to a figuration of the Cosmic Mother in bitter disappointment at the Divine Father has a parallel in the poets' turn to the mother during and after the Holocaust. Deprived of the "home" that had been destroyed forever by the events and aftermath of disaster, Sachs and Ausländer literally and figuratively turned to their mothers. Situated in spiritual as well as geographical exile, they sought refuge not only in the close familiarity of the mother/daughter relationship but also in language as an extension of the maternal realm. In the absence of the motherland, the mother tongue became a surrogate home. Tending their mothers,[29] biological and linguistic, provided a center and a purpose in their lives that had otherwise been completely disrupted. For Nelly Sachs writing in exile in Stockholm, the German lan-

[27] One isolated example is Rose Ausländer's idealizing tribute to her father and his Sadagora origins in the poem "Der Vater" (II 318) which begins with the strophe: "Am Hof des Wunderrabbi von Sadagora / lernte der Vater die schwierigen Geheimnisse / Seine Ohrlocken läuteten Legenden / in den Händen hielt er den hebräischen Wald"

[28] Cf. Regina Schwartz's discussion of the story of Cain and Abel as the originary narrative of monotheism because it is the first demonstration that the God of the Bible neither accepts nor confers multiple allegiances. *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago/London: U of Chicago P, 1997), esp. 3, 16.

[29] Both Sachs and Ausländer tended their mothers through extended periods of ill health. That this loyalty did not shy away from risk is clear from Ausländer's decision to leave her safe haven in the United States in 1939 against the protests of her friends in order to return to Czernowitz to care for her sick mother.

guage was all she had left after her forced departure from a home she would never return to and which could never be recovered. For Rose Ausländer, language became a realm in which she could shape her world according to her ideals and fantasies while simultaneously fashioning an image of herself as an agent of transformation and change.[30]

Although Sachs and Ausländer survived the persecution and psychological trauma of the Third Reich in different ways, they are connected by their suffering and their tenacious faith that redemption could be found not only in the transcendent realm of the beyond, but also within or via language as a medium for communicating memory and formulating an ethical connection between past and present. Spirituality and language were composites of the traditions that situated them. The poetic word echoed the power of the Divine Word and shared in its regenerative, transformative polyvalence. The trauma of their experiences drove both Sachs and Ausländer into an intensive dialogue or concern with the Word and its divine and poetic possibilities. For a time, they were able to mediate their trauma in and through their poetic creations while proceeding in their search for communication and dialogue with the world outside the word. Strikingly, both poets experienced a resurgence of the trauma and withdrawal that had marked their survival — the years of exile and hiding, the reclusiveness that was necessary in order to be able to live — in their latter years and both retreated more and more into a world of language, confined yet not contained by the written page.

While there are many similarities in the attitudes the two poets exhibit toward poetic language, it is important to point out the differences in their allegiance to and faith in the word. Here I am in agreement with Claudia Beil, the first scholar to engage in an extensive comparative study of Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer in German. Beil emphasizes that while both poets share a strong faith in the creative capacity of the word, this faith in language, particularly poetic language, is differently motivated. According to Beil, language and writing for Nelly Sachs are momentary manifestations of Divine Presence in the world and indicate a path to transcendence. For Ausländer, the poet is able to realize the Divine or Divine immanence via the written word — the goal and the way converge (or the means is congruent with the end).[31]

[30] For a detailed treatment of the representation of language as home and refuge in Nelly Sachs's and Rose Ausländer's works see Claudia Beil, *Sprache als Heimat: Jüdische Tradition und Exilerfahrung in der Lyrik von Nelly Sachs und Rose Ausländer* (Munich: tuduv, 1991).

[31] See Beil, *Sprache als Heimat*, esp. 412.

In their comparative analysis of Hilde Domin and Rose Ausländer, Harald Vogel and Michael Gans discuss Rose Ausländer's retreat from the world during the last decade of her life, which she spent in self-imposed seclusion as a bedridden invalid, living out her present and her past through her writings and maintaining only minimum, and strictly regulated, contact with friends and acquaintances.[32] Nelly Sachs spent her last years in emotional and psychological decline, withdrawing ever further into the melancholy wilderness of her mind, suffering from chronic depression that led to a series of institutionalizations and radical measures (including electro-shock therapy) to exorcise her anxieties. While Rose Ausländer's poetry came more and more to resemble a clipped and fragmented dialogue with the memories of a past that held more plasticity for her in the sanctuary of her bed than did the contemporary world she had shut out of her life, Nelly Sachs turned to spare and stark lyrical lines where the boundaries between perception and transcendence became increasingly blurred.

Despite the extensive parallels between Sachs's and Ausländer's biographies and works, their relationship remains largely unexplored in contemporary critical scholarship.[33] Claudia Beil's *Sprache als Heimat: Jüdische Tradition und Exilerfahrung in der Lyrik von Nelly Sachs und Rose Ausländer* mentioned above, was published in 1991 as the first book-length comparative study of the two poets. In her book, Beil examines the syntheses of German and Jewish cultural traditions in Sachs's and Ausländer's poetry. Her main focus is on the interplay of mysticism and German Romanticism evident in their writings. In addressing this aspect of their poetry, Beil bridges a gap left by earlier studies that had emphasized the primacy of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental influence on their works.

Beil's analysis privileges language as a medium of culture and as a surrogate home for both poets, although her broader project is concerned with examining Nelly Sach's and Rose Ausländer's lives and works as representative of contemporary German-Jewish identity. The outcome of her study, particularly in light of her emphasis on the influence German Romanticism had on the works of both writers, is that the articulation of German-Jewish identity in their poetry demonstrates a successful synthe-

[32] Vogel and Gans, *Rose Ausländer/Hilde Domin: Gedichtinterpretationen* (Baltmannsweiler: Verlag Schneider, 1997), 43.

[33] Annette Jael Lehmann's comparative study *Im Zeichen der Shoah: Aspekte der Dichtungs- und Sprachkrise bei Rose Ausländer und Nelly Sachs* (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 1999) is the most recent addition to Sachs and Ausländer scholarship, but appeared too late to be addressed in any detail here.

sis of German and Jewish traditions. What is left out of this conclusion, however, is a nuanced investigation of the socio-historical and ethical implications of their biographies and writings beyond the topicality of the time during which they worked and lived.

Nelly Sachs's and Rose Ausländer's poetic testimonies must be read both in the context of the historical situation in which they arose and for their continued relevance in the present, especially in light of the ongoing conflicts and the many persistent, exclusionary practices that continue to divide the world. The victims they speak for in these poems should not, however, be viewed exclusively as representations of the Jews as absolute Others, or generally as signifiers for an unspecified collective of oppressed and persecuted peoples. The victim as a term here shares the simultaneous specificity, plurality, and relativity characterizing the Other. The ethics of remembrance I am developing out of this encounter with the Other takes place at the intersection of temporal understanding and historical positioning of the Self, in this case signified by both the poet and the poetic I, and the Other, here understood as both the poem and the implied reader.

The Other in this relationship is both the "face of the other" outside oneself, a concept central to the work of Emmanuel Levinas,[34] and the "others" contained and sustained within the Self. An ethics of remembrance requires a recognition and acknowledgment of the Other as well as a sensitivity to the context of the encounter encompassing not only the moment, but also the multiplicity of events, interpretations, and identifications that stretch back into the past and forward into the future. The dialogue that must take place with the past necessitates an openness similar to the encounter with the Other. In order to be conducive to understanding, the relationship must be both compositional and particularlistic, permeable and distinctive, conscious of the past of the other as discrete from that of the self, but also aware that in discursive form as remembrance these separate histories become simultaneous.

As may already be apparent, Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer as poets and as representatives of German-Jewish responses to the Holocaust are being treated here as sisters in a common project. A degree of fusion and confusion of their independent identities as writers and social subjects is the paradoxical yet inevitable outcome of an analysis grounded in the-

[34] Levinas's concept of the "face of the other" signifies the moment of recognition of the other's existence as well as the realization of the responsibility to the other. In his choice of the term "face," Levinas is likely appealing to the Jewish tradition of referring to the "face of God" as that which is present and thus commands obligation, but which is also absent because it cannot be seen. For a discussion of Levinas's concept of the other and the relationship between the other and God see *Time and the Other.*

matic parallels and biographical similarities. While the two poets are certainly distinctive in terms of their life and work, I have consciously chosen to organize my analysis so that their resemblances are highlighted, interweaving readings of poems by both writers, rather than segregating them into discrete chapters in which the writings of each are addressed independently. In a sense, the intention of this approach is to mirror the investigation of the Self/Other relations and the dialogics and the ethics of that encounter that are the focus of my study.

In their complex poetic figurations of the Self/Other relation, Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer present conceptions of social interaction and subjectivity extending beyond the specificity of the Holocaust toward a figuration of universal humanity cognizant of the differences between and among its members. By examining Sachs's and Ausländer's works both in relation to the body of writing broadly referred to as the literature of the Holocaust and in connection to philosophical and social theories of Self/Other relations and community, I explore the implications of their writings within and beyond the Holocaust context. My approach incorporates and conjoins studies on memory and the Holocaust with an examination of the influence of Jewish mysticism and addresses issues of subject formation and social relations. Because of the consciously thematic focus of my analysis, formal aspects of the poems are specifically addressed only where they are relevant to the theme or image under discussion.[35]

Sachs's and Ausländer's poetic treatments of subjectivity and relation are localized in the context of memory. Memory in the sense I am using it refers both to real and imagined events, further distinguished as personal or collective, reflecting the experience of an individual and/or that of a group. The imagined aspect of memory refers not only to the idealization of the past in nostalgic representations of childhood as an idyll, but also reflects the cultural legacy inherited by each subject and how that subject perceives herself in relation to this heritage. In Sachs's and Ausländer's writings, the realm of inherited memory connects them with the history of the Jewish people as a cultural and spiritual entity diversely figured as primordial Israel, country, tribe, bride of God, and

[35] For a detailed formal analysis of Sachs's poetry, see Gisela Dischner, *Poetik des modernen Gedichts: Zur Lyrik von Nelly Sachs* (Bad Homburg: Gehlen, 1970), which addresses both lexical and grammatical aspects of Sachs's work. On Rose Ausländer, see Gabriele Köhl, *Die Bedeutung der Sprache in der Lyrik Rose Ausländers* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1993), which focusses on techniques and structures in Ausländer's writings. Köhl's method of comparing published and unpublished versions of specific poems, however, is more descriptive than analytical and offers little insight into the thematic aspects compelling Ausländer's work.

wandering exile. As poets in exile, Sachs and Ausländer demonstrate an allegiance to a past that is not bound to place. Like the covenant with God alluded to in Jeremiah (31:33),[36] their sense of obligation to their faith and their people is written into their hearts and thus mobile because it is internal.

In their transformations of memory into poetry, Sachs and Ausländer appealed to a Thou representing those whom they had lost forever as well as those they still hoped to reach through their words. The address to the Thou also served to reinforce the construction of an imagined Other within the context of the poem whose existence was necessary for the realization of a dialogue taking place in the absence of a concrete Other. The Thou appealed to in this dialogue is akin to the Thou in Martin Buber's conception of the I/Thou relation presented in *Ich und Du*[37] in which the Thou is necessary for the I to realize itself as a Self in relation to an Other.[38] Buber's Thou, like the Other of social theory, has both concrete and abstract aspects. Concretely, the Thou in Buber's configuration is the human other encountered in social interactions. Abstractly, it is the transcendent, absolute Other of belief, the Divine Other. These concrete and abstract aspects of the Thou cannot, however, be regarded as independent of each other. The relation of the I to the human Other, the human Thou, reflects the relation to the Divine Thou, a connection intended to promote respect and responsibility in human interactions as these influence the self not only socially and morally, but also spiritually in relation to God.[39]

The dialogical character of the I/Thou relation is inextricably connected to both being and subject formation. The I comes into subjectivity through the relationship to the Thou in an encounter that has both discursive and extra-linguistic aspects. Extra-linguistic here refers to those elements that influence and affect the encounter between the Self and the Other that are not at the level of words. These could be

[36] "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

[37] Martin Buber, *WERKE I* (Munich: Kösel, 1962).

[38] Buber, *WERKE I*, 97: "Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich."

[39] In *Standing Again at Sinai* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), Judith Plaskow adopts and adapts this view of the self-in-relation to God directly connected with the relationship to a human community in her conceptualization of a Jewish feminism which takes the relation between the spiritual and the everyday as its basis (xix): "Relationship with God is mediated through community and expresses itself in community."

emotions, gestures, facial expressions, but also the unspoken histories and memories of each individual interlocutor that position them in relation to each other. The complexity of this I/Thou relation is anticipated but not addressed by Buber's spiritual ethics of dialogue. The ethics of remembrance that I see evolving in Sachs's and Ausländer's poems moves beyond the spiritual specificity characterizing Buber's perspective towards an attitude of acceptance and an openness to the difference of the Other that has both a spiritual and a concrete socio-historical component.

In ideologies founded upon a homogeneous construct of group identity, the otherness of the Other is perceived as a threat to the artificial and precarious uniformity of the group. In the "othering" of the Jews in the ideology of Nazism, it was the "Jew" as a category who was targeted for systematic persecution and eradication. In this process of "othering," characteristics of the Other are rendered absolute. The singularity, particularity, and diversity between and among individuals are thereby consciously denied in favor of a homogenized view of the Other as enemy in a radicalization of the "Us versus Them" dichotomy that not only levels the differences inherent in "Them" and denies "Them" a shared humanity, but also reifies the ostensible differences separating "Us" from "Them."

Psycho-social theories of subject formation and the ethics of relation have variously emphasized linguistic and positional aspects of the Self/Other relation within a given social context, but often overlook the confluence of temporal levels inherent in that relationship and its implications for Self/Other interaction. The reality of social relations requires an examination of the psychological and temporal quality of the Self's encounter with the Other in order to assess ethical behavior. A viable theory of ethical social practice therefore must not only consider factors of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class, but must also address the historical and cultural inheritance that necessarily informs and positions every social subject.

Conceptualizations of ethics put forth by contemporary philosophers and social theorists have relied on differing foundational premises and emphases ranging from adherence to the Enlightenment legacy of universal reason and justice to presuppositions that human behavior is motivated by self-interest and desire for power. Lawrence Kohlberg's pioneering work on morality and his stage theory of moral development are based on a concept of universal justice that presupposes universal reason and privileges a definition of moral consciousness as

governed by principles of impartiality and "rightness."[40] Kohlberg's theory ultimately places the right and the just life ahead of the good life, or presupposes that the former will beget the latter. Carol Gilligan was one of the first theorists to criticize Kohlberg's model for its failure to include the factor of gender, and her revised moral theory emphasized what she termed an ethic of care which she claimed characterized women's social interactions.[41] Gilligan's gender critique of Kohlberg, however, is offset by the gender bias of her own study, and her neglect of other factors such as race, ethnicity, social class, and power limits the applicability of her ethical theory.[42] Jürgen Habermas, Anthony Cortese, Iris Marion Young, Seyla Benhabib, and Joan Tronto have all offered various revisions to Kohlberg's and Gilligan's ethical theories, constructing models of moral social practice that not only include the components of justice and care, but also take into account the communicative aspects inherent in social relations as well as the hierarchies of power that differentially position social subjects.[43]

These modifications and syntheses in themselves, however, are insufficient if they continue to neglect history and memory as aspects of social relations even as they strive to do justice to situational factors. The field upon which the Self/Other encounter occurs is multilevelled: discursive, psychological, political, situational, and transtemporal. In order to be adequate to the complexities of socio-historical reality, moral theory must go beyond restrictive emphases on abstract principles (justice, care, responsibility, consensus) to an examination of concrete practice, including the practice of remembrance and the preservation and transformation of memory.[44]

[40] See Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Psychology of Moral Development.* Vol. 2. *Essays on Moral Development* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984). Kohlberg has been widely and variously criticized for his privileging of justice and reason in a theory that claims to address universal morality.

[41] See Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982).

[42] Cf. Anthony Cortese's critique of Gilligan's moral theory in *Ethnic Ethics: The Restructuring of Moral Theory* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1990).

[43] See Jürgen Habermas, *Moralbewußtsein und kommunikatives Handeln* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983); Cortese, *Ethnic Ethics: The Restructuring of Moral Theory*; Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990); Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York/London: Routledge, 1993).

[44] Here I am taking these principal categories from ethical theories postulated by Lawrence Kohlberg (justice); Carol Gilligan (care); Emmanuel Levinas (responsibil-

Because of their multiple positions as German, Jewish, women, poets, survivors, and exiles, Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer were constantly confronted with the boundaries and borders that separate and divide identities. The plurality of subject positions they held are inscribed in their lyrical concerns with memory, identity, faith, and history, while the search for the Other in their writings resonates with their efforts to give voice to the multiplicity of their identifications, loyalties, and experiences. As conscientious efforts at representing the diversity of individual and collective suffering that goes beyond the specificity of "Jewish" experience to that of humanity as a whole, Sachs's and Ausländer's poems evidence a dialogue of remembrance and mourning at once historical and redemptive, subjective and ethical, conscious of the connections and divisions informing the social relations in which memory is enacted, preserved, and transformed.

In her essay on the metaphorical power of memory, Aleida Assmann distinguishes memory from remembrance using architectonic metaphors. She compares memory with a library preserving knowledge of the past, while remembrance is likened to a temple for the future.[45] In a striking parallel to the image Irene Klepfisz chooses in the poem that serves as an epigraph for this Introduction, Assmann expands her architectonic metaphor for remembrance to include its figuration as a commemorative monument for coming generations.[46] In a sense, the study before you represents my affirmation that both Sachs's and Ausländer's testimonials to the dead and to the living not only merit reading and re-reading, but that preserved in the compelling language of their poetry, their remembrances have also become monuments.

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ity); and Jürgen Habermas (consensus).

[45] See Aleida Assmann, "Zur Metaphorik der Erinnerung," in *Mnemosyne: Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Dietrich Harth (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991), 14–18. The terms in German that Assmann distinguishes here are Gedächtnis (memory) and Erinnerung (remembrance).

[46] See Assmann, 18: "Den einen Modus der Erinnerung assoziieren wir mit dem Denkmal, den anderen mit dem Archiv."