Introduction

Holli Levitsky

What does it mean to read, and to teach, Jewish American and Holocaust literatures in the early twenty-first century? Have the post-millennium decades revealed new creative and critical directions toward these related fields? These are questions to which the editors of and contributors to this volume have given considerable thought, and which were first given shape in the 2004 collection that preceded this volume, *Jewish American and Holocaust Literature: Representation in the Postmodern World,* edited by Alan L. Berger and Gloria L. Cronin. Their project was to identify the nature of Jewish American and Holocaust literatures at the turning point of the new millennium. "New beginnings always occasion reflection on the past," the editors write, and, indeed, their collection examines recurring tensions between modernity and tradition, secularity and religion, formlessness and formality. The chapters look back on the twentieth century, chronicling the shifting moments in the development of Jewish American literature at a critical juncture in history.

What our book shares with the earlier volume is that Jewish American literature continues to reshape itself as it responds to the cultural, social, and political climate of a mutating American ethos. So, too, this current volume shares the premise that Jewish American writing, as we move further away from the catastrophic rupture of the Second World War, is returning to the Holocaust. How do the genres of Jewish American and Holocaust literatures intersect? How do we talk about

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

the Holocaust in the twenty-first century? What are the forms of Holocaust expression at this moment in history? The distinguished scholars included in this volume, writing in a wide range of areas of scholarly interest, have implicitly and explicitly engaged these and other pertinent questions in the field.

Those elements linking Jewish American and Holocaust literatures that were identified in the 2004 collection have become increasingly emphatic in 2018, a time that will witness the coming end of survivor testimony. The sheer number of published young Jewish American writers who are returning to the subject of the Holocaust speaks to the renewed energy in this field as well as to innovative genres and forms of representation. Jewish American and Holocaust literatures are experiencing a renewal, as was predicted in 2004. Authors are producing novels and story collections that reflect a powerful blending of deeply human, national, and historical concerns resulting from this late post-Holocaust state. Jewish American and Holocaust literatures have become increasingly intertwined. The result of our current cultural and historical context is the blending and blurring of distinctions among genres.

With the prominence of Jewish American authors writing about the Holocaust—such as Nathan Englander, Michael Chabon, Jonathan Safran Foer, Nicole Krauss, Julie Orringer, Dara Horn, and others—nontraditional forms such as the testimonial, diary, midrash, and graphic memoir are blurred in an attempt to express the traumatic impact of the past. We identify Jewish American writing as emerging both from writers who write *in* the United States and writers who write *of* the United States. Holocaust literature has become transnational—or perhaps it always was. These ways of talking about Jewish American and Holocaust literatures reflect the state of literature generally, where disciplinary fields now appear to move across continents, oceans, and regions, rather than being defined singularly by national and other categorical boundaries.

Our current thinking and discussions have been reshaped even more recently by emerging third-generation novelists and writers who focus increasingly on the Holocaust in terms of Jewish American identity. This volume uniquely emphasizes those third-generation voices, whose increased distance from the events perhaps accounts for not just their renewed interest in the subject, but also the possible pervasiveness of the topic of the Holocaust across contemporary literary works.

We have loosely divided this volume into two sections: "Reading" and "Teaching." We have done so to indicate the focus on the direc-

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

tion of the field as it reflects on the range of possibilities for thinking about American Jewish and Holocaust literatures. Of course, these directions overlap. Reflection on the teaching and reading practices in Jewish American and Holocaust literatures in the early decades of the twenty-first century offers us an opportunity to step back to an earlier time. How do we account for the continued popularity of both genres? What do we take with us into the twenty-first-century classroom? What do we create anew? This current volume speaks to a renewed interest in the direction that Jewish American and Holocaust literary expression has taken—its range, its focus, and its emphasis—which stems in part from the evolution of our own scholarship and teaching over the past several decades, but, also and even more relevant to the chapters contained in this volume, from specific concerns presented in the twenty-first-century classroom.

Discussions—scholarly and imaginative—concerning Jewish American and Holocaust literatures have, during the course of the past century, moved in largely unanticipated ways. Arguably, Jewish American literature, and thus the scholarly imprint on, might be said to reflect, if not distinct, then markedly recognizable, movements: the urban literature and landscape of the immigrant and the antinomies of loss and gain, present and past, hope and regret (the study of writers such as Anzia Yezierska, Mary Antin, Abraham Cahan, et al.); the influence of Yiddish on American culture (I. B. Singer as Yiddish literary "spokesperson"); the rise of a postwar Jewish American voice shaped by its ironic self-assessment as well as its critical gaze on a developing American ethos against the weight of Jewish history (most notably the hegemonic trio of Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, and Philip Roth, despite the obvious differences in their signature authorial styles); the evolving response to the Holocaust in the decades following the aftermath of genocide (what might be considered the "first" American Jewish Holocaust novel, *The Pawnbroker*, by Edward Lewis Wallant, for example); a scholarly move toward and awareness of a gendered Jewish American presence, and its attention to and "rediscovery" of women writers (for example, Grace Paley, Tillie Olsen, Hortense Calisher, and others); and, to be sure, periods reflecting responses to political, historical, cultural, and ideological movements and preoccupations, such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, and modernism, defining periods and points of departure and change. And while Jewish American and Holocaust writing might be said to morph from distinct periods, certainly in the later decades of the twentieth

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

century and early decades of the twenty-first, such defining markers no longer distinguish contemporary Jewish American writing. Rather, the lack of such defining markers has itself become a marker. In an era of massive global immigration and the ability to hybridize (or "hyphenate") identity, a Jewish American writer can be also Guatemalan or French; write in English and Russian; and identify racial, social, sexual, or other identity markers along with his or her Jewish identity.

The years surrounding the twenty-first century have seen new directions and new forms of expression in Jewish American literature, both in the invention of narratives and in the methodologies and discursive approaches taken toward these texts. The variations in and transformations of Jewish American and Holocaust literatures should be considered anew, especially as a measure of what has transpired in the four decades since Irving Howe's oft-recited and disquieting prediction in the 1977 introduction to his edited collection *Jewish American Stories* of the "end" of Jewish American writing. Howe's concern, shared, we suspect, by other literary critics of his generation, was that an identifiable body of literature shaped by "a distinctive sensibility and style derived from the Jewish experience in this country" was no longer viable, especially given the distance—geographical, emotional, familial, conceptual—between a Jewish past and contemporary American life (16). New generations of American Jews, Howe thus proposed, necessarily "must suffer a depletion of resources, a thinning-out of materials and memories," resulting in the absence of a consanguineous "felt life," the kind of "shared experience" that might, but for the accidents of birth, have "enable[d] a new outburst of writing about American Jews" (16). Howe's concern, all these many years later, might be thought of as parochial, insular in its limiting definition of identity, caught up, too, in diasporic fears of attenuation, of diminishing returns.

While Howe's forewarning has proven mistaken, such anxieties, however, are not to be taken lightly; contemporary Jewish American writing engages issues of Jewish history and culture. The signifier "Jewish American" has taken on an extended definition, including writers whose origins of birth were, in many instances, elsewhere. In some ways, perhaps, we are witnessing once again a literature born from the intersection of cultures, not entirely unlike the writing produced by the early twentieth-century immigrants. The early decades of the twenty-first century feature Jewish writers from around the globe who find themselves relocated in the United States, writers (from places as diverse

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

as Israel, Canada, Russia, Latvia, South Africa, and South America) who reside in North America, one of the epicenters of Jewish literary expression. As the editors of *The New Diaspora: The Changing Landscape of American Jewish Fiction* suggest, these writers "are part of a larger global movement, and their literature reflects both their commonality with other cultures and their distinctive history" (11). Set against this diasporic influx of voices, it is not surprising to find writers who come from both religious and secular backgrounds returning to ancient texts whose landscapes define new and often unpredictable possibilities. As Morris Dickstein puts it, "The vigorous renewal of Jewish-American writing today remains a genuine surprise. The very assimilation that was thought to have thinned out its material and toned down its voice has instead given impetus to new ways of being Jewish and of writing about it." For Dickstein, new generations of Jewish American writers "work out of an embarrassment of choice" (5).

Thus, the individual chapters that follow hope to suggest the ways in which our thinking and discussions have been shaped and reshaped by the literature of Jewish cultural thought and life. As creative writers have reimagined Jewish history and culture through a contemporary lens, the mingling of Jewish American and Holocaust literature emerged as a necessary reflection—or refraction—of the continued specter of the Holocaust. As suggested earlier, we are nearing a time in which survivor testimony will come to an end. Still, the Holocaust continues to surface as the persistent phantasm of Jewish history, agitating the imagination of the creative writer in new and unexpected ways. In this way, the evaluative measures, methods, and directions that have emerged provide a disciplinary barometer, gauging the value and perspectives of both new and seasoned authors and their works, as well as forecasting the interest of students, teachers, and scholars. Many of the approaches taken in these chapters originated in presentations, nascent ideas, and ruminations over the past several years at the annual disciplinary Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Symposium. Over two decades since its founding as a subsection of the American Literature Association, the symposium's participants have helped to build a scholarly field while providing the foundation for the dissemination of its most important new thinking. In its maturity, this field has much to offer to students; the insights and strategies collected over the years have given us numerous opportunities to enhance existing courses, create new courses, and develop new classroom practices. As a result, we offer here some of the

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

shared pedagogical practices developed by scholars and teachers in the field of American Jewish and Holocaust studies.

The individual chapters included in this volume examine varied and overlapping approaches to reading and teaching and suggest ways of engaging students in the classroom with cultural, religious, historical, and other aspects of Jewish American and Holocaust literatures. This rich and complex body of literature requires a diversity of views, points of departure, and points of return. These include a focus on individual authors' works, on the application of theoretically based methods for reading, on evolving patterns in Jewish American literature, and on historical and contemporary approaches to the Holocaust. The chapters contained herein present a close look at how religion, culture, history, and pedagogy interact in the classroom to help students better understand the complexity of works by the cultural groups who write them and whose lives are depicted within them. Given the space limitations, the editors of this volume were faced with many difficulties in narrowing and selecting topics and scholars to be included, not in the least because of the number of thought-provoking, challenging, and inspiring presentations given at the symposium over the course of its history. We have attempted to gather a sampling of topics that both demonstrate distinctive emphases and show their intersection, ever conscious of including topics that we thought might be of interest to those of us in the field, but also those that reflect a range of contemporary approaches to teaching Jewish American and Holocaust literatures in order to demonstrate the place of this body of literature in the twenty-first century.

Reluctantly, then, we were forced to leave out some of the important work that has enriched our field, but we hope that the chapters in this volume might themselves spark openings for further deliberation, discussion, and lively disputation. We hope, too, that this collection, in drawing on a variety of approaches, disciplines, and perspectives, will suggest the range of expression through which narratives of Jewish life in the United States as well as the complexities surrounding discussions of the Holocaust might be transmitted not only to a contemporary generation of college-aged students who are coming to this literature for the first time, but also to those for whom such familiar texts might be opened up in new and exciting ways.

In shaping the volume, two kinds of essays emerged, and we grouped them accordingly: those that address texts and issues relevant to the field of Jewish studies and those that offer approaches to teaching

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

individual texts. Thus we move from more general studies to more direct pedagogical methods. We intentionally asked our contributors, leaders in the field of Jewish studies, to define the directions they find most relevant to contemporary perspectives in Jewish American and Holocaust literatures. So, too, we hoped that we could draw on the expertise of our contributors in developing new work that might be suggestive of the future direction for the field. One of the first trends we noticed in many of our contributors' chapters was a focus on the value of teaching third-generation Holocaust literature. All the while cognizant of the complexities in teaching such challenging material, especially for an audience increasingly distanced—emotionally, intellectually, geographically, and temporally—from the Holocaust, the chapters that take on the challenge of this subject present here a wealth of possible directions in terms of genre and approach.

Unlike the earlier volume, this collection brings more recent critical approaches to the field. While many of the essays draw on cultural studies generally, the volume includes chapters that cross the terrains of literary formalism, historicism, and exegetical reading. They expose an increased emphasis on Holocaust aesthetics, a broadening of the geographical boundaries for the field, and the value of a pedagogy of "conversations" among literary works both near and disparate for twenty-first-century students. No one particular focus overrides the volume, as is the case with the discipline at large.

As a way of introducing our twin foci on Jewish American and Holocaust literatures as well as on critical approaches to such writing, we have grouped the chapters in pairs and clusters. We begin our collection with the section on reading. Chapters 1 and 2 share an emphasis on both aesthetics and history, and in their introductions to differing genre, contextual background, and approach thus lay the groundwork for the chapters that follow. We open with Eric Sundquist's important essay on Holocaust tropes, "Black Milk: A Holocaust Metaphor." Here Sundquist shows that the literary expression of the Holocaust is pervaded by figures of speech that reenact silence. In a close reading of representative texts such as Cynthia Ozick's short story "The Shawl" and Paul Celan's poem "Todesfuge" ("Deathfugue"), Sundquist makes claims for a genre of Holocaust writing in which silence is invoked through the language of trauma. Set against the backdrop of the Final Solution, Sundquist's argument shows "that only language stretched to the boundaries of meaning may be capable of rendering experiences that

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

are themselves at the limits of existence." Significantly, this chapter raises the terms and structures for our further discussion of Holocaust representation in showing the articulation of a collective voice of despair. Similarly, in chapter 2, Phyllis Lassner examines both historical and aesthetic limits in the narratives of children who survived the Holocaust. In "The American Voices of Hidden Child Survivors: Coming of Age Out of Time and Place," Lassner introduces autobiographical stories of hidden children who ultimately immigrated to the United States. Lassner suggests the ways in which such narratives of loss and survival "express the displacement from identity, language, and home" experienced by child survivors and the persistence of such anxieties and defining markers long after their relocation and reinvented lives. In framing her chapter, Lassner raises the following question crucial to the study of hidden children during the Holocaust: "How do we situate, analyze, and teach the thematic and narrative contributions of hidden child writing and art to American Jewish culture?"

The twentieth century was monumental for Jewish history, with the massive immigration from Eastern Europe and the rise of American Jewry, the European Holocaust, and the creation of the State of Israel. In the course of that century, as the Jews struggled to survive and prosper, they repeatedly had to reinvent themselves. With memory as the controlling trope, graphic novelists and illustrators, through the juxtaposition of text and image, extend the narrative of the Holocaust into the present. In re-creating moments of traumatic rupture, dislocation, and disequilibrium—the primary tropes of Holocaust representation—such graphic narratives contribute to the evolving field of Holocaust representation by establishing a visual testimony to memory. As we find in chapter 3, "Reimagining History: Joe Kubert's Graphic Novel of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," the interplay of text and image lends itself to the midrashic imperative of Holocaust testimony, giving voice to unrecoverable loss. Victoria Aarons's examination of Joe Kubert's 2003 graphic narrative of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, *Yossel, April 19, 1943*, reveals the ways in which the intersection of text and image hope to reenact the trauma of the particular historical rupture. In her chapter, Aarons shows the blurring of genres characteristic of Holocaust literature. History here, Aarons suggests, becomes narrative, an extension of the traumatic moment, thus bridging the gap between distance and proximity. Against the backdrop of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Kubert creates an alternate history, constructing a "might have been" narrative

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

in which he imagines himself as someone he might have become save for the accidents of history. The graphic novel becomes, in this instance, as Aarons shows, a meditation on loss.

As Philip Roth writes, the Jews were "created and undone a hundred times over" in the twentieth century ("Imagining Jews" 246). In chapter 4, "Alternate Jewish History: Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America and Michael Chabon's The Yiddish Policemen's Union*," Andrew Gordon examines the counterfactual novel or alternate history as a subgenre of fantasy and science fiction, a means of speculating on and reconceiving history. Both novels reimagine twentieth-century Jewish history, showing both the imaginative power of fiction and the contingent nature of history. In *The Plot Against America* (2004), Roth, imitating a memoir, tweaks the American involvement in World War II to imagine a United States sliding toward fascism and a potential American holocaust for the Jews. In *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007), Chabon, imitating the hard-boiled detective novel, invents a post-Holocaust Jewish state, not in Israel but in Alaska. In their form and content, they offer profound commentaries on the fluidity of history while highlighting the special relationship of the Jews to history, past, present, and future. "Strange times to be a Jew" is the repeated refrain of the characters in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*; the implication of both novels is that, throughout history, it has always been, and continues to be, strange times to be a Jew.

How do we extend our understanding of Jewish history, identity, and thought beyond the notion that Jews have a special relationship with history? Chapters 5, 6, and 7 all share roots in religious Judaic hermeneutic practices, returning our focus to the text. In chapter 5, "Reading the Shema through Modern Poetry: Jewish Literature as World Literature," Naomi Sokoloff engages the focus of this volume by examining the ways in which the Shema, Judaism's basic declaration of monotheistic belief, can be used as a bridge connecting ancient Jewish writing with contemporary world writing. By examining modern poems that draw on and respond to the Shema, students can learn how recent literary works revisit and reconsider traditional sources and how, in the process, writers across languages and geographical boundaries enter into a kind of conversation with one another. Sokoloff reminds us that reinterpretation has always been an integral part of Jewish thinking. In that same vein, she argues, teachers can engage students with poetry to encourage close reading, strengthen understanding of Jewish literature, and explore ways in which Jewish literature fits into the study of world literature. Jewish

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

literature is a global phenomenon, and this poetry focuses on the kind of universal themes that have an important role to fill in undergraduate education.

As a tradition of interpreting biblical narratives, midrash forms the basis of a specifically Jewish hermeneutics, one that extends the understanding of Jewish history, identity, and thought. In chapter 6, "'The Story Without an Ending': Art, Midrash and History in Dara Horn's *The World To Come*," Sandor Goodhart exposes Horn's novel as revelatory, conflating the present world and the world to come, revealing historical time as an illusion. In its coverage of five generations of characters—including the unborn—and countless narrative forms that detail their histories, Goodhart notes the book as one of the most complex and exciting on the contemporary Jewish American scene. He writes: "If the world to come is the future, then from the point of view of the past, the 'world to come' is the present." For Goodhart, Horn's novel is that world to come. Her title thus reorients readerly attention to whatever present world in which the characters function, and her book works as a midrash does: responding to a fundamental gap in a prior text in such a way that constitutes a material extension of it.

Similarly, in chapter 7, Sol Neely shows the applicability and contribution of midrashic values to his own courses on social justice. In "Midrash and Social Justice," Neely outlines midrash as a contemporary hermeneutic that extends literary, philosophic, and religious study. In discussing the course he developed at his rural institution, he shows how such an extension furthers the reach of midrash beyond exegesis, that midrashic methods "interrogate the sources of human misery in order that we might repair them and transform the world."

Goodhart and Neely share a deep interest in the ways in which the ancient rabbinic interpretive mode of midrash can be thought of as a methodology for reading contemporary Holocaust literature. When we read midrashically, we are engaging in the work of memory, accounting for the "secondariness of every text." The second part of the volume focuses on teaching, and we purposely bridge the volume through chapters on midrash as a reading, and teaching, practice. In the rabbinical tradition, midrash offers the methodological means to open up a text to deeper reading, resulting in multilayered lessons that engage with cultural and historical contexts. It also extends the practice of teaching such trauma-laden texts. In chapter 8, "The Midrashic Legacy," Monica Osborne establishes a working definition of midrash that moves beyond

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

its scriptural and rabbinic tradition. In drawing on the teachings of Goodhart, Geoffrey Hartman, and others, Osborne asks us to look at midrash not simply as an interpretive mode that fills in the gaps in our understanding, but one that extends and deepens knowledge of a prior text. Here Osborne shows midrash to be "a powerful pedagogical tool because it has the capacity to deepen students' understanding of any text and, perhaps most importantly, it allows them to begin to consider their own sense of ethical responsibility in our world."

As noted earlier, a developing trend in Holocaust studies has been the introduction of third-generation writing. The focus here on third-generation writers—recognized as the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors or those writing from a third-generation perspective that returns us to the events of the Shoah—distinguishes this volume from the earlier one. The new novelists and writers discussed in these chapters bring a renewed attention to the Holocaust through a third-generation lens, reflecting as much about the past as it does about this generation's particular understanding of the place of the Holocaust for an understanding of Jewish identity, other culturally and politically marginalized figures, and current cultural and historical contexts.

As with second-generation Holocaust writing, particular stories from third-generation writers have emerged as exemplary in terms of shaping the contours of the genre and probing the most poignant questions about the distance of memory. In chapters 9, 10, and 11, contributors Aimee Pozorski, Hilene Flanzbaum, and Jessica Lang examine such third-generation narratives that open themselves to current patterns in Holocaust literary representation. As such, these chapters offer useful dialogue with one another. Both Pozorski, in "Anne Frank, Figuration, and the Ethical Imperative," and Flanzbaum, in "Nathan Englander's 'Anne Frank' and the Future of Jewish America," return to Englander's short story as the structure for making larger claims about twenty-first-century attitudes toward Holocaust memory and the place of the Holocaust in contemporary society. Pozorski looks specifically at the ways in which the image of Anne Frank has been invoked and, like Osborne, for the ethical considerations of such literary invocations. In her discussion of Philip Roth's novel *The Ghost Writer* and Nathan Englander's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank," she focuses on the ways these authors have used the image of a historical (albeit iconic) figure to represent the Holocaust. What does Anne Frank as a metaphor mean in terms of understanding the Holocaust? Roth's

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

novel might be considered one of the first to reimagine the historical figure of Anne Frank, but Englander's construction of the image of Anne Frank as a "poster child" of the Holocaust shows the continuing preoccupation with her historical figuration. Pozorski's analysis of Englander's short story exposes the figure of Anne Frank as yet another Holocaust trope, but one that signals a writerly insecurity about the enterprise of writing about the Holocaust. The ongoing figuration of Anne Frank forces us to examine anew Adorno's now well-known injunction against poetry after Auschwitz. Does the replacement of Anne Frank from historical person to literary trope somehow dilute the singular tragedy of her life? What is lost and what is gained in terms of understanding the Holocaust when we turn a person into a metaphor? Finally, she ponders "the ethical imperative," noting that authors like Roth and Englander have used Anne Frank as a trope "in order to emphasize the ways in which we are responsible for the well-being of one another."

Flanzbaum, in chapter 10, approaches Englander's humorously ironic and cautionary story multidirectionally in an attempt both to stimulate broader conversations in the literature classroom and to address the kinds of controversial questions within Judaism that literature courses often neglect. Such intersections or tensions among literature, the act of writing, and Judaism provide the stage on which students might connect such issues as Jewish identity, intermarriage, secularism, and remembrance within the experiential context of their own lives, including such complexities as hyphenate identity, voyeurism, fundamentalism, and moral responsibility. Ultimately, this multidirectionality can have the function of breathing new life into what might be perceived as a tired subject. The narrative crisis at the center of the story raises the stakes for the characters who experience it, but the reader is similarly exposed to the question at its heart: "Would you have had the courage to hide Anne Frank?"

Jessica Lang opens her chapter with a related cautionary tale. In "Narrating the Past in a Different Language: Teaching the Holocaust through Third-Generation Fiction," Lang wonders why the clear abundance of and access to material testimony and Holocaust resources has not made it easier to teach the Holocaust. Is it that the canonical texts may no longer serve their original purpose? Have the increasing accessibility and approachability of these texts moved us away from, rather than revealed, the hard truths they attempt to teach? Even as the crises that precipitated the Holocaust are still with us in the form of racism,

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

genocide, and anti-Semitism, for Lang, it is not enough to approach it through contemporary catastrophes. Stories by third-generation writers, on the other hand, are determined to teach the inevitable direction toward which all Holocaust pedagogy must turn—its very inaccessibility. Lang illustrates a productive method for interpreting this growing and deeply complex body of writing: recognize its distance from those originary texts that bear witness while valuing the limitations of the third-generation subject-position.

Pozorski, Flanzbaum, and Lang share a third-generation focus and thus offer a "cluster" of thinking about this generational turn. The increased distance of the writers from the events accounts for not only their renewed interest in the subject, but also the possible pervasiveness of the topic of the Holocaust across contemporary literary works. Lang also emphasizes a need to identify and seek to grasp the "hard truths" of the Holocaust, even as their very inaccessibility (necessarily) eludes success. The inaccessibility is addressed differently in chapter 12, "A Complicated Curriculum: Teaching Holocaust Empathy and Distance to Nontraditional Students." Jeffrey Demsky and N. Ann Rider want to move the discussion away from a primary focus on empathic readings. Their concern is that "traditional empathy-arousing renderings" are no longer effective for the twenty-first-century learner, who has become accustomed to a complex system of pedagogical methods. As teachers, they want the contemporary classroom to provide students with a fully engaged learning experience, beyond just affective response, in order to engage them in a deeper, more thoughtful reading experience, one that draws on "authorial goals and techniques." Juxtaposing such traditional Holocaust texts as Elie Wiesel's *Night* alongside a more recent text, such as Imre Kertés's *Fatelessness*, creates a cognitive distance—rather than intimacy—that engages students more fully and becomes a forceful pedagogical tool. Such an exercise reveals the value of a pedagogy of "conversations" among literary works both contemporary and older for twenty-first-century students.

The final three chapters, considered together, forcefully highlight the broadening of geographical boundaries for the field. They make clear that the issues within Jewish American and Holocaust literatures continue to passionately inform the pedagogy of teachers in such distant places as Spain, Poland and the UK. The value in teaching the intersection of cultures becomes for each teacher a way to expose their students to the ways in which stories from one world can help them

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

understand another. In chapter 13, "Teaching Jewish American Literature in a Spanish Context," Gustavo Sánchez Canales orients the place of Jewish American literary studies in a contemporary Spanish context. How, he asks, might students be motivated to read challenging international works while maintaining the necessary and specific sort of academic rigor demanded at his university? In his investigation, Sánchez Canales draws on his own experiences in "integrating Jewish-American fiction into general courses on US literature" by introducing connections through the fiction of writers such as Saul Bellow, Chaim Potok, and Philip Roth. Drawing connections between Jewish American writers and Spanish writers, he can "facilitate a comparative analysis, thus exposing students to other writers about whom they had read little or nothing in the course of their university studies." In arguing for such a comparative study between Jewish American writers and novelists more familiar to a contemporary Spanish undergraduate audience, Sánchez Canales makes wider claims for the effectiveness of the "student-centered classroom" in general and for the value in teaching the intersection of cultures.

In chapter 14, "Teaching William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*: Understanding the Holocaust," Zygmunt Mazur explores the ways in which Styron's novel acts as a guide for teaching a number of different structural and substantive issues both in Holocaust studies and literary studies, such as emerging debates and general problems of narrative strategy. Pointing first to its controversy as a Holocaust novel written by a non-Jewish Southern American author, Mazur argues that understanding the debates about authorial identity helps students understand the ethical complexities surrounding the study of ethnic literatures. The novel can be approached by following the narrator's journey of discovery, which involves his realization of his own prejudice against Jews. Teaching this novel in a Polish university highlights the value of exposing students to the ways in which new contexts for reading and teaching broaden understanding of complex topics and enliven classroom discussion.

Finally, in chapter 15, "'A novel that dare not speak its name': Biographical Approaches to Saul Bellow," Judie Newman complicates the central questions raised by a biographical approach to literature in general and, more specifically, to Jewish studies through the instructive case of Saul Bellow. How do we locate Saul Bellow the writer, a man who emerges through biographical accounts in a variety of competing and paradoxical guises: son, father, husband, lover, playwright, novelist, essayist, thinker, political radical, conservative, analysand,

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

Jew and American? Further, how do we use such biographical details when teaching Jewish American writing? What constrains a biographical undertaking? What challenges its reliability? Newman's study of the place of biography in Jewish American literature penetrates these questions. Bellow as a character in the biographies of him complicates the reliability of biographical accounts, resisting, as Newman suggests, easy definition. This closing chapter poses broader interpretive questions that emerge out of the more focused study of Bellow. But it also offers new ways of engaging Bellow's work. Conventionally approached as a novelist of ideas, whose characters are defined, in large part, by their habitual meditative soliloquies and contemplative, existential anxieties, Bellow in Newman's reading emerges as a writer whose "intertextuality is creative, multifarious and something of a challenge to most of his readers." If, as Newman suggests, Bellow's biography is "a novel that dare not speak its name, it is a novel with a large cast." In Newman's hands, biography emerges as a means to complicate and enhance even the most thoroughly investigated text.

Before drawing to a close, I want to take a moment to return to the annual Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Symposium, whose origin and history uniquely connect this volume to the earlier collection *Jewish American and Holocaust Literature: Representation in the Postmodern World*. A gathering of scholars, writers, and artists invested in the study of these rich and vital fields, the annual symposium, now in its twenty-fourth year, began as a forum to bring together those who were committed to researching and teaching literature by and about American Jews as well as the American Jewish experience and the literary expression of the Shoah. This deeply invested group of scholars and writers, through our shared enthusiasm, formed a kind of *chavruta*, an occasion for learning together, for drawing on our collective strengths, knowledge, and experiences in what has become—over many years of lively debate, exegesis, and midrashic commentary—an extension of our individual reading, thinking, and teaching. First founded by Alan Berger, Gloria Cronin, and Dan Walden—major voices in the field of Jewish American literature—these gatherings have created open-ended occasions for inquiry and for the exploration and exchange of texts and possibilities for understanding and expanding the long tradition of Jewish literary expression. Collectively, our self-styled *chavrutot* have provided the stage for scholars of American Jewish and Holocaust literatures to enact an array of possibilities for understanding and interpreting the complex histories,

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

mythologies, and traditions that have shaped Jewish life and thought. These occasions have brought us together in the shared project of our long-standing preoccupation with the interpretive possibilities of Jewish literature both past and contemporary, its return to ancient and enduring texts and traditions, but also its mutating dialogic openings. We have discovered that our approach to teaching this extensive and engaging body of literature is fluid, wide-ranging, and unconstrained by historical period, geographies, or ideological, political, or academic fashions.

Our ongoing dialogue has taken place in recent years in the fortuitous if unlikely location overlooking the Atlantic in South Beach, Florida. Fortunately for our collective group, the historic Betsy Hotel, home base of our *beit midrash* and made available to us by the descendants of the American Jewish poet Hyam Plutzik (1911–1962), has graciously embraced our shared project and made such uninterrupted conversations possible. Our *chavruta* has flourished at the Betsy, a result of many related factors: the hospitality and vision of Deborah Plutzik Briggs, executive director of the Plutzik Goldwasser Family Foundation and vice president for philanthropy; and Jonathan Plutzik, co-president of the Plutzik Goldwasser Family Foundation and chairman and owner of the Betsy Hotel. Both have supported our extending invitations to scholars, writers, filmmakers, and artists from around the globe to promote a rich "salon" ethos through community-conference partnerships. In the hotel's "Writer's Room," the Betsy houses Hyam Plutzik's original desk, some of his books, and broadsides of his poetry—an homage to a Jewish American poet whose life was cut short on the cusp of international prominence. Visiting writers are invited to use the room as a retreat so that the spirit of this remarkably nuanced American Jewish poet continues to infuse present literary production.

Reading Thane Rosenbaum's *How Sweet It Is!*, his bittersweet novel about a family—a survivor couple and their son, Adam, in 1972 Miami Beach—reminds us of the city as a de facto landscape of Jewish literature. Rosenbaum's evocation of I. B. Singer's walks along Miami's spirited beachfront calls to mind the twentieth-century Jewish Diaspora, which brought Jews from Europe, first to New York, and then in a migration south to Florida. Indeed, the book's closing line all but predicts the work of our contemporary pilgrimage to Miami Beach—in particular those scholars who seek a kind of literary salvation in Jewish American literature. He writes: "All forsaken refugees surrender to this magical city

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

and await the arrival of the Miami Messiah, who, of course, never comes" (194). According to Deborah Dash Moore, in *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.*, "By 1960 observers estimated that roughly 80 percent of the Beach's population was Jewish" (63). In supplementing the annual symposium's academic talks with visits to exhibitions and exhibits at the Wolfson Jewish Museum, the Miami Holocaust Memorial, and other Jewish cultural sites, we have brought history and tradition in contact with our contemporary work. The triangulation of civic, social, and intellectual spaces has animated and revitalized the study of this rich body of ever-growing literature. After many years of study and a body of scholarly writing growing out of our discussions, it seemed right that we started once again to ask questions about how to use such jointly gained and mutually produced knowledge to read and teach the literature that has enriched our own lives. Some of the scholarship that has—either directly or indirectly—benefited from our gathering suggests the breadth of the field.

This volume was compiled to produce a conversation among scholars of Jewish studies about how to approach the challenges inherent in reading and teaching Jewish American and Holocaust literatures in the twenty-first-century classroom. We hope that readers might come to these essays as prompts for their own teaching as openings for further discussions. As we move through this book, we hope that it is clear how each chapter speaks to and extends both previous and subsequent chapters. If midrashic extensions are openings for moments of continuity and amplification, then this book has been an experience in midrash, in the interpretation and reinterpretation of possibilities for understanding and carrying over time the legacy of Jewish thought. The direction for Jewish studies is fluid and open to interpretive possibilities, elastic in a way that Jewish exegesis and midrash perhaps always have been. After all, the project of carrying texts into the future might be seen as a response to *zachor*, the call to remember. Thus these chapters might be seen as memory pieces, extending the text of the past, stories, as Israeli novelist David Grossman puts it, that are "filtered through the prisms of time and memory, to be refracted into the entire spectrum of colors and shades" (69). Finally, then, this volume of essays is intended to further enrich our reading, our teaching, our discussions, and ultimately our understanding of the continuing legacy of Jewish American and Holocaust literatures.

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany

References

Aarons, Victoria, Avinoam J. Patt, and Mark Shechner. *The New Diaspora: The Changing Landscape of American Jewish Fiction*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015.

Dickstein, Morris. "Promised Lands: The Boldness of Jewish-American Writing in the Post-war Years—and Its Vigorous Renewal Today." *Times Literary Supplement*, April 15, 2016, 3–5.

Grossman, David. *Writing in the Dark: Essays on Literature and Politics*. Translated by Jessica Cohen. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Howe, Irving. "Introduction." In *Jewish-American Stories*, edited by Irving Howe. New York: New American Library, 1977.

Moore, Deborah Dash. *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* Boston: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Rosenbaum, Thane. *How Sweet It Is!* Simsbury, CT: Mandel Vilar Press, 2015.

© 2019 State University of New York Press, Albany