To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Julia Allison Hope Weems entitled "Illuminating *les Années noires* through the Testimonial Voices of Irène Némirovsky, Marguerite Duras, and Charlotte Delbo." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Modern Foreign Languages.

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John B. Romeiser, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

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Les Essif

_____
Benjamin Lee

_____
Dan Magilow

Accepted for the Council:

_____
Carolyn R. Hodges
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Illuminating *les Années noires* through the Testimonial Voices of Irène Némirovsky, Marguerite Duras, and Charlotte Delbo

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Julia Allison Hope Weems
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Dedication

To my husband, Jeff, I am grateful for your unconditional love, constant encouragement, and unabated patience. To my parents, John and Lynne, I thank you above all for your love, but also for instilling in me the desire to follow my dreams and to take pride in all that I do. To Dr. John B. Romeiser, the gift of your time and constant support is one for which I shall be forever thankful.

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Abstract

The imprint that the Second World War has left on our global civilization is one that we are still trying to decipher. *Les Années noires* (The Dark Years or the Nazi Occupation) are still a murky part of France's national history as well as the history of the Second World War. Women's voices have often been left out of a traditionally male dominated body of wartime writings, though their experiences are an integral part of that history and merit further study. Focusing on the discourses found in women's testimonial voices found in French texts about *les Années noires* will help illuminate our perceptions of this historical period.

Irène Némirovsky, Marguerite Duras and Charlotte Delbo bear witness to some of the tragedies of their epoque and their testimonial voices help to elucidate this shadowy past by revealing often overlooked and unnoticed particularities of women's experiences. Literature concretizes these women's experiences, rendering them forever accessible to readers who, in essence, are implicated in the witnessing process.

The project presents a five chapter study beginning with an introduction that sets forth the theoretical framework. The second chapter focuses on a fictional novel by Irène Némirovsky, Suite française, which provides an eyewitness account of the Exodus from Paris in June 1940. Her novel exposes the deep social and political divisions in French society at that time and offers a cold-hearted yet truthful depiction of the beginning of life under the Occupation. The third chapter will look into journal/mémoire writing as seen in La Douleur by Marguerite Duras, whose narrative voice testifies about collaboration, resistance, deportation, victimization, reintegration and the profound psychological pain of *les Années noires.* The following chapter explores Charlotte Delbo's Mesure de nos jours, in which the author captures the struggle to 'return' to life that she and others experienced. Delbo's realistic and frank writing style limits the extermination camp experience and life after it to what it was, unthinkable and inexplicable. The final chapter focuses on the implications these voices carry for our current and future lives. This study is important to projecting these often unheard voices for if we continue not to hear them, the "Dark years" will remain forever grey.

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Chapter 1---Introduction to Illuminating *les Années noires*

"La grandeur de l'homme est dans sa décision d'être plus fort que sa condition." –Albert Camus

Remembering the Second World War

The Second World War continues to fascinate. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub assert, the history of World War II is "essentially not over" because it is a history "whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent [. . .] in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively *evolving* [. . .] in today's political, historical, cultural and artistic scene."[1] Practically everyday, we encounter new accounts emerging from a multiplicity of perspectives, and we hear voices of war veterans, survivors of the Holocaust, ordinary citizen-survivors, and many others who have decided to share their stories. A quick glance at American popular culture supports this claim, for we see movies like Flags of Our Fathers, Pearl Harbor, Letters from Iwo Jima, television interviews of Holocaust survivors like Eli Wiesel, who appeared in 2006 on Oprah, efforts to record the voices of our war veterans, like Ken Burn's recent documentary The War, which was broadcast on PBS in 2007. These are stories that not only reopen the past, but also challenge us to question currently held perceptions and beliefs. If we are to reach new understandings about our past, we must "apprehend [. . .] the ways in which our cultural frames of reference and our preexisting categories which delimit and determine our perception of reality have failed, essentially, both to contain and to account for the scale of what has happened in contemporary history."[2]

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[1] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, foreword, Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992) xiv.

[2] Felman and Laub, foreword, xv.

A quick glance at the ways World War II has been remembered at home and abroad will be helpful. France is not the only country that has experienced a conflation of historical and symbolic realities. The way in which we remember World War II in America is striking, for it is often with great pride as we reminisce about the bravery and courage of the men and women who served our country at home and abroad. We talk about Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima, Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge, and various other critical moments of the war while, to a certain extent, glossing over the less heroic events like Japanese internment camps, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. In large part, our nation was unified at home and on the front lines, as is evidenced through the many sacrifices our men and women, now referred to as the Greatest Generation, made to defend our freedoms. Often, it is in an over-celebrated and seemingly over-glorified way that we remember these people, places and events and their "greatness" as it relates to our national history. Recently, the U.S. government erected a World War II monument in Washington, D.C., and within the last decade and a half opened the National Holocaust Museum. This does not take into account the countless films and books on this historical period that surface each year.

In stark contrast to this notion of our country having been saved by the Greatest Generation, in France accounts of World War II most often leave one of two impressions—the first of a country that shamelessly submitted itself to Nazi forces and willingly collaborated with them, and the second of a country that overcame extreme adversity thanks to the heroes of the Resistance. Over the years, new light has been shed on the complexities of both assumptions while adding a host of new explanations seeking to stretch perceptions of France under the Occupation far beyond this dichotomy. While it is no longer correct, if it ever was, to say that

France was a nation of Resisters or Collaborators, it is fair to say, however, that World War II proved to be an event that ravaged and divided a nation and wounded France's national identity.

For the French, some of whom find this subject still to be disquieting, there is sometimes discomfort discussing the ambiguities of the Occupation period; consequently, many remain silent or adopt a story based on one of the mythical narratives inscribed in the *discursive habitus* (or cultural practices) of the country. The term *habitus* as employed here can best be defined as a bodily disposition or behavior that "encodes a certain cultural understanding," or as Pierre Bourdieu describes, an "unconscious internalization of objective social structures which appear spontaneous and natural, but which are in fact socially conditioned."[3] In relationship to the present study, the term *discursive habitus* signifies the way in which the dominant discourses about the Occupation emerged and became part of the dispositions and behaviors, seated in the unconscious minds of many French, that led them to act like their nation had miraculously recovered from the trauma of *les Années noires.* In the aftermath of the war, memories were "socially conditioned" and became part of the collective memory rooted in a fabricated national identity of a unified France.

The shadowy events of this era locate their source in the years following the Liberation when many willingly accepted the politically, socially, culturally, and historically created myths concerning the events which had just taken place. France, recognizing what it wanted to be rather than what it had been, was linked initially to the Provisional French government, and those who followed, exercising their powers to restore France to its pre-war 'glory.' Those efforts to build

[3] David Macey, Dictionary of Critical Theory (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 175; Michel Foucault, "The Archaeology of Knowledge," in Literary Theory: An Anthology by Julie Rivken and Michael Ryan, eds. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 90-96. Foucault points out that human reality is governed by discursive practices "that systematically form the objects of which they speak." (Rivkin, 96).

up the morale of a country ravaged by death, destruction, privation, and profound loss of dignity became a part of the cultural practices inscribed in artistic places of memory. After the Liberation, de Gaulle, the leader of the Free-France movement set myth-making in motion when he formally admitted that the French Republic did not need to be restored because it had, at least in his mind, never ceased to exist. Julian Jackson points out that this was the very "legal fiction" that laid the groundwork for a "heroic reinterpretation of the Dark Years."[4] These myths served to mask the reality of the times, and as Henry Rousso suggests, between the end of the war and the beginning of the 1970s, there existed a tendency in France to recreate the memory of a unified nation that had resisted the Occupation by "repressing" certain painful events from the past. The major catalyst in dispelling many of the myths was the release in 1970 of the documentary film by Marcel Ophuls, The Sorrow and the Pity, but not shown on public television until 1981. This film helped "break the mirror" and reverse the practice of selecting and promoting certain memories while ignoring others. It was during this reawakening that many came to realize that efforts to restore France's national honor, dignity, and glory had done nothing more than fracture an already fragile nation, further prolonging its reconciliation to its past.[5] André Malraux echoed this sentiment when he wrote in Antimémoires, "Dans la Résistance, la France reconnaissait ce qu'elle aurait voulu être, plus que ce qu'elle avait été."

While it may not be possible to explain precisely why *les Années noires* remain grey and ambiguous, it is possible to work toward clarifying some of the answers we have been given. These years are indeed infinitely complex, but that has not deterred some scholars from tackling

[4] Julian Jackson, introduction, France: The Dark Years 1940-1944 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 1.

[5] Henry Rousso, Le Syndrome de Vichy (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1990) 13-20.

the many myths and "inconvenient realities" surrounding this era in an attempt to write a new history of France during the Occupation.[6] In 2001, Julian Jackson's history was regarded as the first comprehensive study published since Jean-Pierre Azema's general history of the Occupation appeared in 1973. In spite of the breadth and depth of his research, even Jackson's history is fragmentary in that it says very little about the repatriation of deportees. I suppose this could be explained by the fact that for historical purposes, *les Années noires* ended with the Liberation of Paris; yet I find this to be perplexing because the repercussions and consequences of these years did not magically disappear one glorious day in August 1944.

Since the publication of Jackson's history, there have been even more developments surrounding this time period, stories like the inquiry and investigation into the massacres that took place in Maillé on August 25, 1944, and the resuscitation of several memorial sites including the museum at the holding camps of Rivesaltes (currently in progress) and Royallieu (which opened in February 2008) and the opening of le Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris in January 2005.[7] What has happened on the literary scene that might contribute to a better understanding of the Occupation? One event worthy of mentioning is the publication of Suite française in 2004. Charlotte Delbo has also been the subject of efforts to commemorate and memorialize the shadowy events of the country's past. Most recently in 2008, Delbo joined the ranks of other notable women whose pictures adorned the entrance of the Panthéon for a commemoration of International Women's Day. While these examples do not constitute a comprehensive list of actualities, we find in them evidence of persistent preoccupations about *les Années noires.*

[6] Jackson, introduction, 2.

[7] See the following articles: Elise Vincent, "Enquête sur un crime de guerre oublié, " Le Monde 26 juin 2008; Catherine Sabbah, "Un musée-mémorial pour ressusciter le camp de Rivesaltes," Le Monde 12 avril 2008.

Némirovsky, Delbo, and even Duras have all been objects of recent public attention. What does this suggest about the power of these writers' voices? Is this a suggestion that we have not fully accessed their literary legacies?

Like America, France is not immune to the omnipresence of World War II commemoration; yet, as some scholars have argued, the French seem not to have "faced up to their wartime past in any sustained and systematic way."[8] Others, like Julian Jackson, suggest that, given the number of French historians dedicated to the topic, it is not fair to claim that the French are still "unwilling" to confront their past.[9] Given that some consider the period between the Exodus of June 1940 and the Liberation of August 1944 the single, most dramatic episode in France's modern history, it is easy to understand the ongoing fascination with and discoveries about *les Années noires* (the Dark Years or the Nazi occupation of France from June 1940-August 1944).[10] As this study will show, the Dark Years did not dissipate with France's liberation. Among all that has been written about these years, no one seems to have devoted much attention to women's lives and experiences. As Jackson and others assert, if we are to understand fully this portion of the world's history, it must be "conceived as a whole."[11]

Women and war

What role did, and have, women played in "facing up" to the shadowy past *les Années noires* ? Can some of the vagaries surrounding this period be explained by the absence of their

[8] Robert Gildea, Marianne in Chains (London: Macmillan, 2002) 4.

[9] Julian Jackson, preface, France: The Dark Years 1940-1944 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) vii.

[10] For a nice overview of myths and counter-myths about the Occupation, see Stanley Hoffman, foreword, The Vichy Syndrome, by Henri Rousso, trans. Artuhr Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[11] Jackson, introduction, 20.

voices in the dominant discourses on the subject ? While France's confrontation with its past may seem sporadic and unsystematic, we do find a willingness to testify (or to "face up") to the past in certain women writers' voices. The question is, have we heard these voices?

When considering women's voices and war, one often finds historically that they have been marginalized, silenced, and forgotten. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth emphasize the relative lack of attention devoted to women's Holocaust experiences.[12] While the scope of the present study focuses on three women who lived during *les Anneés noires,* all of whom have a connection to the Holocaust, Rittner and Roth's assertion is paradigmatic of the lack of attention paid to all women's wartime experiences. As Sayre P. Sheldon suggests, war, by its very nature, has always been a topic reserved for men, thus leaving women's voices muffled and of secondary importance:

> The reason is one of definition: war literature is traditionally about being *in war, more* precisely about being *in combat.* [. . .] By limiting war literature to actual combat, men have claimed war as their subject. The claim is no longer valid, if it ever has been. The twentieth century has redefined the meaning of combat and expanded the territory of war to include women in larger numbers than ever before. [. . .] Women took an active part in war whether or not by choice. [. . .] As women moved into occupations previously closed to them, they began to describe in writing all those areas that had traditionally been off-limits. Women covered wars for their newspapers, wrote war propaganda for their governments, published their wartime diaries, described fighting alongside men. They used their wartime experiences for their fiction and poetry, choosing the right to *imagine* war, just as men for centuries had written about war without actually experiencing it. Their determination to write about it has produced a women's war literature that can no longer be ignored or marginalized.[13]

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[12] Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., preface, Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust (New York: Paragon House, 1993) xii. The authors stress that "much of the best witness literature by women, the autobiographical accounts of those who survived the Holocaust, is out of print or not easily accessible. Much of the most widely read scholarship-historical, sociopolitical, philosophical, and religious-treats the Holocaust as if sexual and gender differences did not make a difference. A lot of significant detail has gone unmentioned if not unnoticed. Thus the particularities of women's experiences and reflections have been submerged and ignored."

[13] Sayre P. Sheldon, ed., preface, Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write About War (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) x-xii.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to consider that women living in France during the Occupation were deeply affected by the absence of men. France had suffered devastating blows to its male population from the First World War, in which nearly 1.4 million soldiers died. Of those 7.5 million who left for war, about 4.2 million returned wounded. France's male population was further diminished during the war between September 1939 and June 1940, when nearly 200,000 more Frenchmen were killed and 900,000 taken as prisoners of war. These numbers are significant not only in explaining the altered conditions of the male population at the outset of the Second World War, but also in explaining the changing roles women played during the war. Némirovsky, Delbo, and Duras also felt the effects of war and experienced certain degrees of separation from the men in their lives, a topic I will address in subsequent chapters.

Women and men remember in different ways, and the records they have left reflect these differences and merit further emphasis and exploration. The emphasis on the necessity of hearing women's voices stems not from any superior clarity or quality of a woman's voice, but simply from its different tone and enriching abilities. Carol Ritner and John K. Roth assert that the memory and scholarship of the Holocaust has been most often "shaped" and "influenced" by men like Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi. Women survivors like Charlotte Delbo and Ida Fink are not as well-known; yet, as they stress, "Remembering the Holocaust is an incomplete act . . . if

the voices heard, and the silences commemorated, are predominately male."[14] The fates of men and women were not exactly the same as both "biology" and "socialization" played a part in shaping their destinies. Ritner and Roth explain:

> Women who survived the Holocaust and Auschwitz in particular, have left a record for future generations that should not be overlooked but instead explored and emphasized. The exploration and emphasis should occur not because women's voices are necessarily clearer or better than men's---though in many individual cases they are---but because they are women's voices reflecting their own particular experiences in ways no one else can do for them. [. . .] Of equal, if not greater importance is the need for them to be heard.[15]

Having recently crossed the threshold into the twenty-first century, we have a responsibility to break longstanding silences by bringing women's voices to the forefront. Françoise Lionnet poignantly reveals this necessity by focusing on the diversity of cultural and social circumstances of women writers. We must learn to listen to a "plurality of voices from various corners of the planet and across centuries" in order to "strengthen our ability to resist demeaning power structures." [16]

> Women's voices do not and will never constitute *a* [sic.] "minority discourse." Our voices have existed in a state of greater or lesser tension with other points of view in all historical eras and geographical areas. Always present everywhere but rarely heard, let alone recorded, women's voices have not been a dominant mode of expression or a legitimate and acceptable alternative to such dominant modes. [. . .] Our voices have always been there, but it is only recently that academic and political institutions have begun to take them seriously. [17]

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[14] Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust (New York: Paragon House, 1993) 38.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Françoise Lionnet, preface, Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) xi.

[17] Ibid.

In part, this study is an attempt to respond to these scholars' calls to explore, examine, and emphasize women's voices for the diversity of perspectives, interpretations, and ideas they present in an effort to continue the process of according them the recognition they have always merited, that is, of being a "dominant mode of expression." It does so by probing the salient voices of Irène Némirovsky, Marguerite Duras, and Charlotte Delbo, three women of very different cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds living in France during the Second World War. Despite their diverse circumstances, these writers share a common ground and history, France and the Second World War. By promoting certain visions and truths about the past while ignoring others, dominant political, social, and cultural forces have sheltered us from these women's testimonial voices that bear witness to the shadowy past of *les Années noires.* These voices need to be taken seriously if they are to ascend to their rightful status as "alternative dominant mode(s) of expression" both "legitimate" and "acceptable."[18]

To explain my choice of female writers in this particular context, I must first stress my ongoing interest in the Second World War and my own country's fascination with it. As a result of my educational endeavors, my curiosity with the era has crossed cultural lines and extended from America to France. As a female student of twentieth-century French literature, I am struck by just how infinitely complex the war years were (and still are) for France (and America). On both sides of the Atlantic, so many voices continue to surface from the Second World War; yet, it seems there are a number of them pertaining to women's roles, experiences, and thoughts during these years.

[18] Ibid.

Why, one might ask, are these stories still emerging? One potential response lies within what many scholars have suggested about the extreme difficulties and pain of remembering, and of testifying to one's traumatic story in an effort to bear witness to it. As Michael Levine suggests, bearing witness to the tragedies one has suffered is often extremely difficult, and many survivors are unable to access and to express the stories that lie deep within them. Levine examines the complexities that exist "between narration and survival, between a desire to survive in order to tell and the equally intense need to tell--and to be heard--in order to survive," of which traces appear in the testimonial voices under scrutiny here.[19] While Levine focuses on Holocaust survivors, other scholars, like Ross Chambers and Susan Rubin Suleiman, have made more general references to the difficulties of sharing one's story as it relates to historical trauma.[20] For Chambers, "It is never over, there is no end to the business of waking and reawakening; just as (and perhaps because) trauma is the hurt that never heals."[21] Suleiman, in a similar vein, explains that the task of testimonial writing for the survivor-witness is "impossible and inexhaustible."[22] Regardless of a survivor's desire or ability to speak about trauma, many find themselves trapped between past and present, between life and death, and struggle to live free from the recurring effects of traumatic experiences. These explanations are helpful when considering Delbo and Duras. While Némirovsky cannot be called a survivor-witness of the war

[19] Michael G. Levine, The Belated Witness: Literature, Testimony, and the Question of Holocaust Survival (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 1.

[20] Ross Chambers, Untimely Interventions: Aids Writing, Testimonial and the Rhetoric of Haunting (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Susan Rubin Suleiman, Crises of Memory and the Second World War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[21] Chambers, preface, x.

[22] Suleiman, 158.

years, she did endure some of the most polemical times in France's history, the inter-war years, the Debacle, the Exodus, and the onset of the Occupation. Through her writing, I hope to articulate the struggles she felt to leave behind an unhappy familial past while embracing the many uncertainties the war presented. For now, it suffices to know that all three of these writers were traumatized in their own right by the war years, and they have all left behind literary traces of the pains they endured.

Unfortunately, dominant political, cultural, and social institutions, like governments, schools, publishers, and filmmakers, seeking to maintain certain truths and ideological positions, have silenced some of the witnesses who have spoken and kept others from testifying. The inconvenient realities their voices portrayed were not consistent with the leading ideologies and discourses of their times. Delbo felt such an intense moral obligation to tell her friends' stories that she wrote in spite of the unpopularity of her message and society's inability or unwillingness to hear it. For Delbo and those like her, forgetting was not an option, nor was remembering a matter of volition, it was the only way to attempt to go on living. Delbo's words provide a clear example of the true "atrocity," forgetting.

In the aftermath of the Second World War and *les Années noires*, ignoring those untimely realities capable of provoking unwanted controversies was (and frequently still is) easier than facing the truth. As some witnesses have stated, they withheld publishing their testimonial accounts because no one really wanted to hear what they had to say. Delbo seemed to know that the public was not ready (or perhaps willing) to confront the atrocities of life in Auschwitz, so even though she completed the first two volumes of the trilogy Auschwitz et après in 1946 and 1947, it was only when she felt her testimonial text had withstood the test of time that she

released it to the public in 1965.[23] For Delbo, like many witnesses who captured their wartime experiences in writing, publishing in the immediate aftermath of the war would have only caused a great political, social, cultural, and historical disturbance. What Delbo, and so many like her, had to say about the realities she had lived, unfortunately, was not what people wanted to hear, and it certainly did not aid the healing process underway in France. To the same end, and as others have espoused, had Némirovsky survived the war, we can also be sure that Suite française would not have made its way to the bookshelves of the late 1940s or 1950s France.[24] While Duras claims to have rediscovered the notebooks containing La Douleur nearly forty years after the war, she also admits publishing portions of the work years before the final version made its way to the bookshelves.[25] Perhaps she just conveniently forgot about them until the right moment to publish presented itself. It appears as though timing might have also played a part, especially for women writing about war. When we see that Robert Antelme and others published their memoires practically right after returning, we cannot help but wonder why most women did not do the same.

Memory and history, testimonial literature as "lieu de mémoire"

The memories resuscitated by Némirovsky's, Delbo's, and Duras' narrative voices provide testimonies from the Occupation, a time period in which all of the writers lived and which two survived. There are numerous ways of remembering the past, but consulting historical documents alone is not sufficient. As Nora has suggested, we need to examine the *lieux de*

[23] Charlotte Delbo, Auschwitz et après, 3 vols. (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970-1971). The three volumes that comprise this trilogy are Aucun de nous ne reviendra, Une Connaissance inutile, and Mesure de nos jours.

[24] Irène Némirovsky, Suite française (Paris: Editions Denoël, 2004); Charlotte Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1971).

[25] Marguerite Duras, La Douleur (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

memoire (artistic places of memory), which perpetuate social, cultural, and national beliefs and serve political and ideological goals leading us to remember parts of history and to forget others. Pierre Nora defines a *lieu de mémoire* as a "polyreferential" entity that touches upon a multiplicity of cultural myths appropriated for different political and ideological goals. In the introduction to Les Lieux de mémoire, Nora explains that one can find memory (*la mémoire*) in various sites like a geographic location, an historical figure, a monument, a statue, a work of art, an emblem, a commemorative ceremony, to name a few. All of these potential memory sites encode and represent an historical consciousness and intersect in such a way as to offer multiple dimensions of the past encompassing the historical, ethnographic, psychological, political, and literary.[26] The allure of Nora's approach to history is that it does not rely on traditional historical narrative as the only means of revisiting past, but teaches us, instead, to identify the traces of memory in symbolic representations, thus enabling us to "read the signs of culture in places, objects, and images that are marked by vestiges of the past, and remembered in the vicissitudes of contemporary consciousness."[27]

Nora's seminal work indeed offers a viable, scholarly explanation of the various ways in which societies remember. In the still nebulous context of *les Années noires,* studying *lieux de mémoire* can be particularly useful in diminishing the shadows of history. While literature also offers glimpses into these historical sectors of the past, interestingly, Nora bemoans the loss of "good" twentieth-century writing claiming that it is an epoch devoid of any real novels.

[26] Pierre Nora, présentation, Les Lieux de mémoire, vol. 1. (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) 15-16. Future references to this work will be denoted by Nora, présentation LM, followed by the page number cited. All other references will follow this pattern.

[27] Lawrence D. Kritzman, "Identity Crises: France, Culture and the Idea of the Nation," French Cultural Studies: Criticism at the Crossroads, eds. Marie-Pierre Le Hir and Dana Strand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 21.

Ironically, he believes literary memory to be one of only two legitimate forms of memory, the other being historical memory: "La mémoire, en effet, n'a jamais connu que deux formes de légitimité: historique ou littéraire."[28] Mourning the loss of literature, he relegates history to our substitute for imagination, a mere stand-in for failing fictions, or as he deems it, "notre imaginaire de remplacement." He clarifies his position on the loss of literature when he writes:

> Histoire, profondeur d'une époque arrachée à sa profondeur, roman vrai d'une époque sans vrai roman. Mémoire promue au centre de l'histoire: c'est le deuil éclatant de la literature. [29]

Could this be true? Are we currently lamenting the loss of literature? The wartime writings under scrutiny do in fact provide examples of "good" historical literature able to expose, contest, and enrich longstanding, overshadowed social, political, cultural, and historical truths.

If testimonial literature offers a way of illustrating and concretizing memory, it should be considered a viable *lieu de mémoire*. Why does Nora refute the value of twentieth-century literature as a memory site if witnesses' voices contained therein can lead to new interpretations of historical, philosophical, and psychoanalytic dimensions of memory? Nora describes his project on the history of France as follows:

> Pas tout à fait une histoire de France, mais, entre mémoire et histoire, l'exploration sélective et savante de notre héritage collectif, qui tire sa justification la plus vraie de l'émotion qu'éveille encore en chacun d'entre nous un reste d'identification vue à ces symboles à demi effacés. Une histoire des représentations, profondément différente [. . .] du siècle dernier, dont elle retrouve pourtant les centres d'intérêt, et de l'histoire des mentalités, dont elle hérite, mais au-delà ou à côté de laquelle elle s'installe dans une vérité purement symbolique. [30]

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[28] Pierre Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire," Les Lieux de mémoire, vol. 1. (Gallimard: Paris, 1997) 43.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Nora, présentation LM, vol. 1, 20.

If Nora's study of *lieux de mémoire* offers a new way of looking at memory, and is not exactly a history of France but somewhere between history and memory, then his failure to see the historical and cultural values of testimonial literature is inexplicable and unjustifiable. Nora's attempt to push beyond historical realities in order to discover symbolic ones and the memories that perpetuate them is conducted in vain if he fails to account for literature's potential influence (especially the works in question here) over France's national identity. Nora leaves us wondering if his approach to remembering via *lieux de mémoire* will leave him forever lost in fragmented memories of a past he views as "definitively dead" and in a present devoid of all memory.[31]

In 2009, it is now high time to scrutinize the cultural beliefs, perceptions, and practices that give order and security to our lives. We must ask ourselves to examine the cultural, historical, and social conditions that have not only created truths we hold but have also sustained them. Over sixty years removed, we still have a moral obligation to raise questions about what might (or might not) have been said or written about the Second World War era. Like it our not, we are forever connected to our past, and we must not adopt fearful or apathetic attitudes when approaching it. The facile moralism of selective memory is a dangerous practice, an atrocious one as Delbo has said. *Les Années noires* provide a prime illustration of the practice of selective memory because the controversies and ambiguities surrounding these wartime years have been widely documented and studied. These shadowy years have left us with the impression that we still have much to uncover and illuminate from its past. I will discuss *les Années noires*, but for now, in choosing the term "illuminating" in reference to them, I mean to suggest that there are

[31] Nora, présentation LM, vol. 1, 23. He writes: "On ne parle tant de mémoire que parce qu'il n'y en a plus."

portions of this era's history that have been understudied and misinterpreted and consequently stand to be clarified.

It is naïve to think that one can find 'the truth' in the past, for as John Fiske writes, "Truth must always be understood in terms of how it is made, for whom, and at what time it is 'true.' Consciousness is never the product of truth or reality but rather of culture, society and history." [32] Yet, it is equally naïve, and furthermore irresponsible, to accept culturally, socially, and historically created truths about our past. It is necessary to search for a deeper understanding of our past in order to better navigate our present and our future. One avenue open to this exploration is that of women's wartime writing, especially that in which we encounter eyewitness accounts written by the author, which I will refer to as testimonial.

What potential verities might one find in literary texts written about the wartime experiences of certain eyewitnesses? If one discovers any truth in what they have written, it is important to ask how that particular truth was "made" and "for whom," as well as when it was made. What were the cultural, social, and historical circumstances that contributed to the writer's creation of her own truth? How did these particular cultural, social, and historical positions contribute to her "consciousness" which often manifested itself through authorial intention, and what suggestions of it does one find in the text? These are questions I will address in subsequent chapters. For the moment, let us consider why I consider that Irène Némirovsky, Charlotte Delbo, and Marguerite Duras are in fact witnesses to a shadowy-past who, through their life

[32] John Fiske, "Culture, Ideology, Interpellation." Literary Theory: An Anthology, eds. Julie Rivken and Michael Ryan, 2nd ed. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 1268-73. This particular quote comes from page 1269.

experiences and literary voices, have imparted to us an illuminating legacy of writings about the Second World War.

Autobiographical, witness, and testimonial texts---an explanation of terms

To lend more precision to the texts' autobiographical natures, all of these writers' life journeys led them through *les Années noires,* and their experiences have become the subject of the narratives currently under consideration. Lionnet tells us that "to read a narrative that depicts the journey of a female self striving to be the subject of her own discourse, the narrator of her own story, is to witness the unfolding of an autobiographical project."[33] It is this definition of autobiography that informs my study. While they have not produced formal autobiographies, these women's personal stories are implicit in their autobiographical texts. Delbo's and Duras's texts are written mainly in a first person narration, so the inscription of self is clear. On the other hand, Némirovsky wrote in the third person. Some critics claim that a third person narration does not formally exist because even if a writer, like Némirovsky for instance, writes (and speaks) through a third person narrator, the writer's self is not completely removed. Némirovsky is, in fact, the observer who sees and the informant who conceives what her narrator will say. By studying narrative moments where one encounters the concealed first person, one can examine closely the status of this person and explore the varying degrees of its presence. In the context of this study, it is important to consider that these writers both witnessed and wrote; in their texts, they were both characters and witnesses, and as such, there are moments in their texts when one senses that the primary message is carried not by an objective character or narrator detached

[33] Françoise Lionnet, Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 91.

from the writer, but by the witness herself. For these reasons, I consider them not only literary texts, but also autobiographical accounts.

To explain the use of the terms "witness" and "testimonial," let me begin with the first. Margaret-Anne Hutton's work Testimony from the Nazi Camps: French Women's Voices, has been most enlightening in terms of helping clarify who witnesses are. For her, witnesses are those who "saw" or "lived" an event, in other words, an eyewitness. Those eyewitnesses who have written personal accounts about actual lived events have produced what can be called "testimonial" or "witness" texts. Her claim that writers engage in a sort of legal form of witnessing by taking the oath to "tell the truth" through authorial intentions, often recognizable in metatextual and prefatory comments, highlights that writers of these works perceive them as being "true."[34] Furthermore, her assertion makes clear the connection between text and voice, for the voice is the primary medium through which a testimony manifests itself.

Commonly, a witness is one who upon being subpoenaed takes an oath to tell the truth before an investigator or a court of law. So, if a witness is never asked to testify, he or she might choose, as many have, to withhold his or her testimony. How then, can one rightfully call those who were not summoned to take the witness stand a witness? As Felman so poignantly reveals, one need not raise his or her hand while swearing to tell the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" to be considered a witness. For her, entering into an oath to tell the truth does not require that the witness be present in an actual court of law. She points out that witnessing can take place in other metaphorical courtrooms, including that of history and that of the future. She writes:

[34] Margaret-Anne Hutton, Testimony from the Nazi Camps: French Women's Voices (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2005) 12.

> To bear witness is to take responsibility for truth: to speak, implicitly, from within the legal pledge and the juridical imperative of the witness's oath. To testify---before a court of law or before the court of history and of the future; to testify, likewise, before an audience of readers or spectators---is more than simply to report a fact or an event or to relate what has been lived, recorded and remembered. Memory is conjured here essentially in order to address another, to impress upon a listener, to *appeal* to a community. To testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness stand, or to take the position of the witness insofar as the narrative account of the witness is at once engaged in an appeal and bound by an oath. To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: *to take responsibility*---in speech---for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences.[35]

Felman's words provide a clear justification for calling Némirovsky, Delbo, and Duras witnesses and for calling their texts testimonial. The texts these writers produced did not simply retell, record, or remember their wartime experiences, but also made an appeal before listeners in the "court of history" and the "court of the future." What I will illustrate in the following chapters is that these texts stretch far beyond simple narratives because these women have taken an oath of responsibility to tell the truth about history by committing themselves and their writing to us and to future generations. The judicial oath they have taken reveals itself in various ways, and elucidating these metatextual elements will also be one of the focuses of the subsequent chapters devoted to each writer. In spite of the fact that none of these writers are still alive, we hear their testimonial voices, which are very much still alive and evocative. These writers show us that a literary voice is immortal but requires the presence of readers as their sounding board, a point to which I will return.

[35] Felman and Laub, 204-5.

Testimonial voices: veracity, authenticity, and credibility

Not only do Némirovsky, Duras, and Delbo write about the Second World War, but they also, through narrative voice, inscribe themselves in their texts that concretize certain historical events of *les Années noires* to which they fell victim. Duras and Delbo survived the Occupation; Némirovsky did not. All three women adopted the Occupation period as primary subject matter; taken individually, their voices recount fragments of the period. Examined together, these texts recount the major events of the Occupation beginning with the Exodus from Paris and ending with life after the Liberation. Their responses to individual lived experiences certainly come to us through different voices and discourses, but their writings are fundamentally autobiographical and testimonial in that they are bound up in artistic representations that testify to personal memories.

Generally, these texts fall into the broader category of historical literature because their content reflects actual events that these writers experienced first-hand. Whereas literary writing relies on artistic devices to create a story, traditional historical writing focuses on factual dates, names, places, and events. One cannot, however, be absolutely certain of even the most established historical facts because individuals who produce histories are constrained by the very limited human knowledge with which they write. Because of their literary nature and reliance on artistic devices, these testimonial texts could also be considered fictional, which seems contradictory. Nonetheless, these writers offer specific versions of historical realities that are, in fact, compatible with other documented facts about the time period. Even if we do not doubt the occurrence of the events these texts embody, there is something different about the discourses in these writings that merits our attention. By focusing on the autobiographical, testimonial, and

literary characteristics of these writings, I hope to enumerate the singular nature of these discourses.

Because it is not always possible to find a witness who lived through historical events, we are left with mediated historical representations or incomplete memoirs. Sometimes, even if there are actual witnesses, their stories might not have been recorded until years later leaving us to wonder about the effects of memory lapses. In many instances, one must also take into consideration the use of literary devices, like the inclusion of reader's notes and manuscript notes—or what are often referred to as metatextual elements and their subsequent influence over the reader's reception. Due to gaps in the witness's memory, the writer is obligated to render an account based on an occurrence that did exist, but to which he/she no longer has immediate access. It is precisely the ontological character of something that did actually occur that allows one to distinguish between the historical and imaginary past. In spite of the inability to recreate the past in its "absolute" truth, historical representations do offer valid and credible accounts of the past. Suleiman explains:

> The ontological status of something that "once was" distinguishes the historical past from an imagined or fictional past. Even though we can never recapture the historical past in its absolute "truth," the fact that it *once was* confers a special status on the historian's representation of a past event. It follows that for the historian, the value of a written or recorded testimony---a first-person narrative that purports to tell what the narrator actually lived through---is determined abour all, and essentially, by its veracity.[36]

Herrnstein Smith's distinction between natural and fictive discourse is beneficial in lending more precision to the credibility of these writer's voices. She defines natural discourse as "all utterances that are performed as historical acts and taken as historical events," while

[36] Suleiman, 51.

asserting that fictive discourse is made up of verbal structures that are "neither historical acts nor historical events, but rather *representations* of them."[37] The discourses found in theses women's testimonial voices come to us in various forms, including mémoire, epistolary, narrative prose, and poetry. As Foucault suggests, it is by examining the complexity of discourses that we will be able to "drive out from the darkness" those "forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with another," thus emphasizing their singular natures.[38]

La Douleur offers a prime example of the blurred lines that exist between fictive and natural discourse, as well as journalistic, mémoire, autobiographical, and testimonial writing. Per the author's prefatory note at the beginning of the work, Duras found this "journal" about the war stored in a drawer in a vacation home, but oddly, has no recollection of having written it. At best, one is left to question the origins of this text in which she writes about the war, its influence on her life, and her profound pain over the many cultural and political decisions made in its aftermath. While much of what she writes is highly subjective due to the individualized nature of her accounts, it is also confirmable through historical documents and other individual testimonies, a point I will revisit in chapter three.

What these testimonial voices present are truthful, historically verifiable accounts of past realities. The first volume in Charlotte Delbo's trilogy Auschwitz et après opens with the

[37] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, On the Margins of Discourse: The Relation of Literature to Language (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) 54.

[38] Foucault, 91. He writes, "There is the notion of "spirit," [. . .] which allows the sovereignty of collective consciousness to emerge as the principle of unity and explanation. We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset. We must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign. And instead of according them unqualified, spontaneous value, we must accept, in the name of methodological rigor, that, in the first instance, they concern only a population of dispersed events."

following words: "Aujourd'hui, je ne suis pas sûre que ce que j'ai écrit soit vrai. Je suis sûre que c'est véridique."[39] She admits her uncertainty about the truth (*verité)* of what she has written, but vows that it is truthful (*véridique).* Delbo's admission suggests that there is most certainly a conflation of memory, history, and reality in testimonial writing, but that does not weaken literature's transformative powers. There is a fine line between what is true, and what is truthful; both, however, should be considered. From a literary perspective, "truthful" can best be explained by looking at the French definition. According to Le Petit Robert, *véridique* means "qui dit la vérité, qui rapporte quelque chose avec exactitude," and also that which is "conforme à la vérité, à ce qui a été éprouvé, fait, constaté." The word *véridique* also connotes elements of sincerity, credibility, and authenticity. Specifically, as it relates to testimony, it means "qui présente un caractère de vérité" or "qui ne trompe pas."[40] Due to the trauma of Auschwitz and its constant, recurring presence in her life, remembering with exactitude is impossible for Delbo and others like her, but this does not dissuade her from testifying. The same is true for Duras who suffered from profound and relentless *douleur* after the war.

Careful critique is required in determining the veracity of a testimonial account; however, one should extend credibility to those testimonial voices that can be confirmed by other documents, coherence of the narrative, and personal reliability of the witness.[41] Delbo, Duras, and Némirovsky's testimonial voices are thus confirmable, and subsequently truthful.

[39] Charlotte Delbo, Aucun de nous ne reviendra (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1970) 7.

[40] These definitions come from Le Nouveau petit Robert, Eds. Josette Rey-Debove et Alain Rey (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1993) 2373.

[41] Suleiman, 51.

Fragmentary and incomplete nature of testimony

While testimonies do have the power to enhance our understanding of culture, several scholars of testimony have highlighted its fragmentary and incomplete nature, for there are always multiple sides to every story. Suleiman explains it best saying:

> Of course, no two people experience the same event in exactly the same way. Collective historical trauma is experienced by individuals one at a time, and this fact has important consequences for the concept of testimony. Every testimony is unique; it reports what the speaker has personally witnessed or lived through.[42]

She goes on to say that "testimony is always of necessity individual, but if it refers to a collective historical trauma, it will, also of necessity, be about more than the experience of a single person."[43] She also goes on to write about how one testimony "stands for" that of the collectivity because the individual witness who witnesses to his or her personal experience also bears witness for all who, like him or her, were at the same place in the same time.[44] We see this play out in these writer's testimonies.

Testimonies, albeit individual and fragmentary in nature, can lead to fruitful discoveries. Testimonial writing offers a "crucial mode of our relation to events of our times" and of "our relation to the traumas of contemporary history: The Second World War, the Holocaust, the nuclear bomb, and other war atrocities."[45] Each time one reads a testimonial text, one receives an invitation to take part in it, to become a witness. Because of this, artistically rendered testimonies

[42] Suleiman, 133.

[43] Suleiman, 134.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Felman and Laub, 5.

have transformative powers that other public discourses do not.[46] Felman and Laub stress that the unresolved crises of history are approachable through testimonial literature, which possesses powers to witness to the crises within history.

Commemoration often becomes a precarious act, because we do not wish to defame the memory of those who died, served, suffered, or were imprisoned during the war; consequently, aspects we cannot fully understand or properly commemorate, we often choose to forget.[47] This is exactly why it is important to re-assemble the fragments of the testimonies we have inherited before arriving at a more profound, comprehensive understanding of the implications of past events on our lives today. While one cannot pretend to know just exactly how to share in the responsibility of bearing witness to such disturbing stories, one should feel the urgency of the task of reexamining what one chooses to remember and, subsequently, to "forget." Writers and readers both have a responsibility to confront inconvenient and uncomfortable past realities often lost in the divide between history and memory.

Testimony and discursive practice

Suite française, La Douleur, and Mesure de nos jours are texts, which, by their testimonial natures, fit into the conflicted, contradictory space between history and memory. If, as Felman and Laub suggest, "testimony [. . .] is a discursive practice," then to better navigate this space, it is important to revisit Michel Foucault's seminal essay, "The Archeology of Knowledge," which introduces the notion of discursive formations. For him, the study of the history of knowledge is not about a traditional analysis, excavation, or reconstruction. Instead, he

[46] Felman and Laub, foreword, xviii.

[47] For a very good discussion of this phenomenon in America, see Edward T. Linenthal, introduction, Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum (New York: Penguin Books, 1995) 1-16.

focuses on figuring out the events which gave rise to the particular discourse by emphasizing the role that language played in the formation of conceptual cadres, or *épistèmes*, used throughout history to understand and give order to the world. Since words provide a road map allowing societies to order nature, they provide the impetus for discursive formations. These groups of suppositions manifest themselves through words and linguistic practices expressing the beliefs of a particular social group and articulate the rules and ideologies that govern individual behaviors. The most interesting part of Foucault's essay focuses on the idea that the world is shaped as much by language as it is by beliefs and perceptions, and it is precisely language that trumps both, creating the perceptions one holds of it. Symbolic realities are often transformed into physical ones simply because language is responsible for maintaining certain cultural suppositions; thus, language provides a tool which not only helps to order the world, but also to construct it. But when it comes to accepting one discourse's superiority or validity over another, he warns that we should not readily accept "those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar." Foucault espouses that we should guard against buying into "those ready-made syntheses [and] groupings that we normally accept before any examination." When he writes of ousting and driving "out from darkness" those "forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another," he challenges us to question the divisions we accord to different types of discourse, be it historical, literary, political, etc.[48] Just as language furnishes a tool for constructing the world, it can also provide the tool necessary for "re-constructing" our perceptions of it. The point of his essay, which other scholars previously

[48] Foucault, 91.

cited in this study have echoed, is to underscore the need to question traditions maintained by dominant discourses without "according [. . .] unqualified, spontaneous value."[49]

In certain respects, Philippe Lejeune echoes Foucault in Le Pacte autobiographique by pointing out the pitfalls of limiting oneself to studying a particular literary genre: "Il risque de s'enfermer dans une définition artificielle, simplifiée et statique; de s'absorber dans l'analyse de quleques chefs-d'oeuvre, choisis dans une même variété du genre, où il croira voir son 'essence.'"[50] In keeping with this goal not to limit my inquiry by placing parameters around the genres under examination, I have chosen works whose genres are ambiguous in order to explore the different discourses in these texts, which are loosely bound by their historical and social contexts as well as by their autobiographical and testamentary content. One could apply a number of terms to the writings under examination here (literary testimony, fictional autobiography, historical fiction, mémoire), but the label is not crucially important. Lejeune suggests that regardless of the form, and might I add *label*, of an autobiographical text, "ces formes s'échangent, et nous *informent*," and the ways in which these writings inform us should be the critical focus. Lejeune tells us that "fonctions et formes de la perspective biographique ne sont pas images de la vie 'réelle', mais des constructions qui révèlent la civilisation qui les produit," and these literary constructions lead us to discoveries about the past.[51]

[49] Ibid.

[50] Phillipe Lejeune, avant-propos, Je est un autre: L'autobiographie, de la literature aux medias (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980) 8.

[51] Lejeune, avant-propos, 9.

The transformative power of art

The combination of genres and discourses that manifest themselves in the works of Némirovsky, Delbo, and Duras generate more powerful and compelling voices than a traditional historical text or testimony would. The power comes from art's ability to transcend time and space. These works offer more than a simple slate of facts, but have been artistically and stylistically transformed into powerful testimonies through the individual writer's discourse. While the point of this study is not to classify by genres the works in question, examining them is paramount in attempting to elucidate this *métissage* of discourses and the manner in which they intermingle. By examining these intersections, one begins to see how literary testimonial voices gain strength and authority in a new space formed among history, memory, and fiction, and it is in this space where one discovers a new discourse, one that is, at the same time, literary and historical. The end result illustrates that literature can be even more enlightening as history and therefore is worthy of attention for its historical and testimonial value. In The Era of the Witness, Annette Wieviorka claims that historians have a difficult time accepting this:

> Testimony appeals to the heart and not to the mind. It elicits compassion, pity, indignation, even rebellion. The one who testifies signs a "compassionate pact" with the one who receives the testimony [. . .]. This vision troubles historians. This is not because historians are insensitive to suffering, [. . .] this uneasiness stems from the sense that this juxtaposition of stories is not a historical narrative, and that, in some sense, it annuls historical narrative. For how can a coherent historical discourse be constructed if it is constantly countered by another truth, the truth of individual memory?[52]

As it relates to the act of remembering, art plays a crucial role, for, as Suleiman discusses, works of art have a lasting power and an ability to "take precedence [not only] over public

[52] Annette Wieviorka, The Era of the Witness, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) 143-44.

discourse, [but also] even over the illustrious dead who produce them."[53] That art has the power to "take precedence" over dominant public discourse illustrates that literature can (and does) play a role in disrupting longstanding political, social, and cultural perceptions. Némirovsky's, Duras' and Delbo's dissenting voices possess subversive qualities that do indeed challenge forces seeking to maintain, and at the same time limit, political, social, cultural, and historical views of the past. This will be a topic upon which I expound in subsequent chapters. When examined for their differences, their voices "can ultimately unite as a powerful force of resistance against [some] repressive systems of ideology."[54]

The necessity of receptive readers in carrying the legacy of testimonial voices

Through their testimonial voices, Charlotte Delbo, Marguerite Duras, and Irène Némirovsky all wrestled with making sense of their wartime experiences. Cathy Caruth explains that "the story of trauma (. . .) as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life."[55] Even though Némirovsky's narrative was not written belatedly, it is still appropriate to call her wartime experience "traumatic." Through these writers' texts, we encounter the "endless impact on a life" that manifests itself through voices that call out still today. In spite of the challenges of facing their personal histories and of defying demeaning power structures, they found strength and courage to become witnesses for past, present, and future generations. They impel us to take an active role in carrying their words.

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[53] Suleiman, 76.

[54] Lionnet, préface, xi. I have substituted the word "some" for the original word "all."

[55] Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996) 7.

For some witnesses, testifying about the past has still proven to be a difficult task because not all of those who have shared their testimonies have been heard. There have been no juries (or readers) to hear their cases. As Hutton so poignantly states, "Only a receptive community of listeners---or in this case readers—can make the witness a witness."[56] We readers, therefore, become the last critical piece of the puzzle necessary to access and to share the legacy of these testimonial voices. For reasons previously alluded to, like apathy, discomfort, ignorance, etc., as readers we have often neglected our role as "receptive listeners" as it applies to testimonial literature about the Second World War. Consequently, we still have many discoveries to make about the inheritance these writers have willed to us.

The gift of the testimonial voices with which we have been left provides invaluable historical, social, political, and cultural testimony. While it is speculative and difficult to understand the personal motivations underlying the writings of these women, the very nature of the autobiographical and testimonial impulses found in their voices leads one to believe that they wrote because they had an important story to share. Perhaps they wrote to preserve their own sanity. Or, perhaps they used their artistic talents to speak out for what they perceived to be injustice, inhumanity, and what Chambers calls cultural failure. Some like Chambers and Felman also suggest that testimonial writing is a legacy of twentieth-century literature and calls for a shared responsibility.[57] The responsibility is of a moral nature. Chambers writes:

> What witnessing texts [. . .] therefore work to require us to acknowledge is that the "alien" scene, the "other" context, is *also* part of culture, and thus relevant to the very context in which the form of communication we call witnessing arises. Witnessing is, in that sense, an ethical practice [. . .] that seeks to inculcate a

[56] Hutton, 14.

[57] Chambers, preface, xiv-xv; Felman and Laub, foreword, xx.

> sense of shared (because cultural) responsibility that it is only too easy—for other cultural reasons—to deny. And it is because of the facility with which relevance, responsibility, and involvement can be denied—because of the ready availability of cultural Dalmane—that witnessing, like a wake-up call, take the form of seeking to cause some *disturbance* in well-established cultural regularities and routines: routines of thought (or its absence), regularities of discursive habitus.[58]

To strengthen our cultural awareness and our sensitivity to others whom we might view as different or "alien," it is imperative that we recognize witnessing, as Chambers has, as an "ethical practice." Due to their cultural natures, witnessing texts call us to action; yet, it is still all too easy to feign not hearing the call of the testimonial voices that emerge from such texts. The testimonies in question here threaten to disturb our comfortable beliefs, or "our regular routines of thought;" consequently, they challenge us to move away from our apathetic attitudes. All too often, we suffer from the influences of "cultural Dalmane", a drug-like phenomenon that numbs our feelings and sensitivities while permitting us to shirk our "responsibilities" and "involvement" in recognizing the relevance of "the 'other' context [that] is *also* part of [our] culture." For the sake of those who have gone before us and those who are yet to come, we cannot allow ourselves and others to remain under the influence of "cultural Dalmane." While the discordant notes with which these disturbing voices have resonated may be troubling, we must acknowledge that we have now inherited their legacy and must choose a course of action. Are they voices that we, too, will decide to ignore, or will we allow them to summon us to awaken to our responsibilities as heirs of their words? Even if the events of the Second World War were not, and furthermore, are not, traumatic for everyone, it still does not mean that we should deny them or fall under the spell of "cultural Dalmane" and ignore these women's

[58] Chambers, preface, xix-xv.

vantage points that offer different, yet credible, perspectives on a still-shadowy historical period. In fact, we should embrace the fact that our "cultural regularities" have been disrupted by their stories, and we should feel compelled to rethink our perceptions of the world.

Originality of the study

By exploring the interconnectedness and the individualities of the writers, their narrative voices, and the resulting literary testimonies left by Suite française, La Douleur and Mesure de nos jours, my study will be guided by an investigation into the ways in which women's wartime literature through its various testimonial voices illuminates history, thereby beckoning the reader to question currently held notions often perpetuated by dominant forces ruling over political, cultural, and social arenas. Another guiding principle will be how women's testimonial voices emerge from their writings challenging longstanding politically, culturally, and socially created truths. More precisely, the present study, through individual case studies of selected texts by Némirovsky, Delbo, and Duras, will seek to respond to the following critical questions:

1. In what ways do these very distinct and individual women's voices respond and testify to the wartime experiences and trauma of *les Années noires*? What do their voices do and by what means? Why are these voices different, and why do they merit attention?

2. How do the various testimonial voices represented by these writers summon readers, informing and awakening them to suppressed, forgotten, or overlooked historical realities?

3. How do the lives of these women write themselves into our future, and what bearing does this have on our lives? How do we, as readers, assume their role in the act of witnessing?

There have been previous studies that fit into rubrics such as autobiographical voices and literature, women's life writing and catastrophe, women's Holocaust survival writing, women's writings and wars of the twentieth century, testimonial writing and the Holocaust and others

which are in some way, at least loosely related to my project's subject.[59] While there have been previous studies on Némirovsky, Delbo, and Duras, I have yet to encounter any that position them in relationship to or in tension with one another. When examined together, their testimonial voices offer a dynamic rubric of their own; therefore, my study will be original not only in its scope, but also in its choice and combination of writers. I chose to study these female voices together not only due to the diversity of their educational, political, social, and cultural backgrounds, but also for their strikingly similar tones, tones of outrage, anguish, disappointment, fear, and sometimes, tones of hope.

Némirovsky was a Jewish, non-native writer of French literature who, in her earlier career had written anti-Semitic texts like David Golder. During the war, she continued to try to publish her texts, but eventually fell prey to imposing statutes limiting the professional activities of Jewish writers. Duras, like Némirovsky, was an immigrant to France, but had come from Indochina. Unlike her, Duras was not Jewish, and during the war found herself caught between acts of resistance and collaboration. Both Duras and Némirovsky had just seemed to locate their literary voices and experience the successes of publishing when the outbreak of war put a damper on future projects. Delbo, on the other hand, was the only native French woman of the three and began writing after her return from Auschwitz. What is striking about all of these women is that they used their abilities to write to help deal with the impact they all felt from the war.

[59] See Lionnet, Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender and Self-Portraiture; Miriam Fuchs, The Text is Myself: Women's Life Writing and Catastrophe (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Rittner andRoth, eds. Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust; Sheldon, ed., Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write About War (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); Levine, The Belated Witness : Literature, Testimony, and the Question of Holocaust Survival; Hutton, Testimony from the Nazi Camps: French Women's Voices.

In the second chapter of this study, I will address the first of three writers, Irène Némirovsky. She was a Russian-born Jew who immigrated to France in 1919 but who, despite her ardent desires and persistent efforts, never officially became a French citizen. Némirovsky's text, Suite française, is historical fiction in the form of a two-part, unfinished novel, coupled with an intimate personal narrative, published posthumously that boldly tells the story of the Exodus from Paris in June 1940 and of life under the Occupation. While it is considered fiction, we know that Némirovsky composed the manuscript and her notes for it *sur le vif* of the Occupation and while living in exile with her family in Issy-l'Évêque; therefore, it can also be read as an historical account given by an eyewitness. Through this text, the writer presents a series of vignettes that poignantly reveal the state of disbelief and fear of the French at the onset of the Occupation. As her story progresses, she continues to rip open the profound wounds of the past from the point of view of class, arrogance, and egoism at all levels. Némirovsky, despite an acute awareness of her frightening, suffocating and imminent fate as a Jewish woman, as evidenced by the interdictions placed on Jews in France, continued to write and even found some sort of solace in her efforts.[60] Tragically, Némirovsky was arrested by French police on July 13, 1942, and imprisoned at Pithiviers. On July 17, 1942, she was deported on convoy number six to Auschwitz where she died, at the young age of thirty-nine, on August 19, 1942.[61]

Before her arrest, she entrusted her two young daughters, Elisabeth and Denise, with a suitcase containing the manuscript of her novel. Forced to flee Issy-l'Évêque themselves, the

[60] Jonathon Weiss, introduction, Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) xiii. He states, "The care that Némirovsky took in composing *Suite Francaise* allowed her to escape, briefly, the anguish and hardship of her existence in occupied France." See also pages 152-54.

[61] Weiss, 156-57.

girls protected their mother's last written work but did not have the strength, will, nor courage to read it until many years later. In the late 1990s, Irène's daughters decided to give their mother's remaining notes, manuscripts and letters to the *Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine* (IMEC).[62] Finally, in 2004, Denise Epstein, Irène's daughter, after having painfully and lovingly transcribed her mother's hand-written manuscript several times, turned over the manuscript for Suite française to the Denoël publishing house.[63] The novel was an immediate success in France and abroad.

Chapter three will lead to a discussion of a text by Marguerite Duras, La Douleur. This text comes to us in the form of a journal or personal mémoire that she began writing in the midst of the Occupation. It is a work that she herself did not want to call literature. Identifying the genre of this text is equally challenging, for in it, we find a mixture including historical fiction, mémoire, and autobiography. Duras wrote the first of six episodes in this work about her husband Robert Antelme, taken by the Gestapo as a non-Jewish, political prisoner in the summer of 1944 and eventually sent on to Buchenwald, where he remained until the camp's liberation by the allies in April, 1945. In her *avertissement aux lecteurs*, Duras admits not remembering writing La Douleur but states that it is nevertheless "(l') une des choses les plus importantes de [ma] vie."[64] What her text presents is a mixture of personal experiences and sentiments with lucid and highly-polarized commentaries about the events of her time. She writes of the extreme

[62] Weiss, introduction, xii.

[63] Weiss, introduction, x.

[64] Duras, La Douleur, 12.

physical and psychological pain that she suffered, a *douleur* which is also emblematic of that surely suffered by some of her contemporaries, a *douleur* which profoundly altered her life.

The fourth chapter will concentrate on Mesure de nos jours, the third volume of Auschwitz et après, a trilogy of prose and poetry about the concentration camp experience of a non-Jewish, political prisoner, Charlotte Delbo. The writer was born in August 1913, in Vigneux-sur-Seine on the outskirts of Paris. In 1934, she married George Dudach, who went on to become active in the Resistance movement serving as Louis Aragon's courier. Delbo was out of the country touring with Louis Jouvet's theatrical troupe, but in 1941, she returned from Buenos Aires to team up with her husband, whom she assisted in the distribution of anti-Nazi pamphlets and the publication of Lettres françaises, an underground journal. Unfortunately, the couple was arrested and taken political prisoner on March 2, 1942. Dudach never made it to a concentration camp because he was shot on May 23, 1942. Charlotte, on the other hand, was held in a transit camp until January 23, 1943, at which time she was deported to Auschwitz. Delbo wrote Le Convoi du 24 janvier about this convoy, the only one of non-Jewish French women to be sent to this camp. Tragically, of the 230 women deported, only 49 survived; Delbo was one of them.[65]

In the three texts which comprise Auschwitz et après, Delbo paints a candid, comprehensive, yet at the same time, fragmented picture of her personal struggles of living through and after the Holocaust. Her narrative voice vacillates between first person and third person as she testifies for herself and others. She bears witness in a way that, perhaps, no other

[65] Lawrence L. Langer, introduction, Auschwitz and After, by Charlotte Delbo, trans. Rose C. Lamont (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) ix-x. Future references to this text will be denoted by Langer, introduction to AA, followed by the page number referenced.

writer has, recounting in a gruesomely frank and barebones fashion, collective struggles to survive Hitler's most infamous extermination camp. Her voice forces us not only to confront these past agonies but also to feel their lingering presence. Delbo's voice originates from a place we will never understand and resounds with a hurt that will never heal.

Through the testimonial voices of Némirovsky, Duras, and Delbo we encounter a juxtaposition of personal memories with historical facts that combine in a powerful way to shed light upon the past. These voices concretize the thoughts, fears, and emotions that so many people of their time must have lived and felt, as well as those still felt today throughout the world. Today, they call upon us to take part not only in sharing their words, but also in allowing their messages to serve as a model for our present human condition.

The idea of using literary, testimonial voices to illuminate current perceptions about historical time periods is not a new idea; yet, testimonies are inextricably linked to the individual and his/her circumstances. There are still countless witnesses to history who have not yet spoken, hence not yet been heard, but there are also so many who have spoken, but whom we have not yet taken the interest or time to hear. Delbo was translated into English in 1995, and Némirovsky rarely spoken of until 2006 when Suite française soared to the top of the New York Times Best Seller's list. Duras, perhaps, is more recognizable in our country, but only among a small group of intellectuals. In response to Felman and Laub's assertion that "as readers, we are witnesses precisely to these questions we do not own and do not yet understand, but which summon us from within the literary texts," we are summoned to explore the complexities of these writers' voices and the questions they evoke.[66] Furthermore, we are challenged to apply what we learn

[66] Felman and Laub, foreword, xiii. The authors articulate the critical questions they will attempt to explore, which. include the following: "What is the relationship between literature and testimony, between the writer and the

from them to our present and future lives. Perhaps some might think it futile for an American born over thirty years after the end of the war to question why certain issues about France's history from *les Années noires* remain vague. This project is my attempt to hear these voices that cry out to humanity, beckoning us to become complicit in the act of witnessing. We must take on the responsibility, as Chambers has said, of bearing the ashes.[67] In order to bear them, we must continue to follow new developments, to hear new voices, and to examine the truths giving rise to our knowledge.

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witness? What is the relationship between the act of witnessing and testifying, and the acts of writing and reading, particularly in our era? What is, furthermore, this book will ask, the relation between narrative and history, between art and memory, between speech and survival? Through an alternation of a literary and a clinical perspective, the present study strives to grasp and to articulate the obscure relation between witnessing, events and evidence, as what defines at once the common ground between literature and ethics, and the meeting point between violence and culture, the very moment when precisely, the phenomenon of violence and the phenomenon of culture come to clash—and yet to mingle—in contemporary history."

[67] Chambers, preface, ix. Chambers speaks of the cycle of awakening and reawakening to pain and gives the example of a girl who receives a dreaded, yet expected, wake-up call about the death of a friend with AIDS. Upon learning that someone will end up with the ashes from the cremation, she suddenly realizes that she will never fall back asleep because with the necessity of keeping the ashes comes more responsibility.

Conclusion

Before 1995, no French president had ever directly admitted the country's complicity in the *Rafle du Vélodrome d'hiver,* the July 1942 roundup of what some report to be nearly 13,000 Jews in Paris. François Mitterrand formerly denied national complicity in this particular event by issuing a statement that Vichy was not the Republic, which, in the minds of many, had ceased to exist once the armistice was signed in June 1940. At a commemorative ceremony on July 16, 1995, Jacques Chirac, however, finally admitted the country's participation in the "dark hours" which had taken place 53 years ago saying:

> Il est, dans la vie d'une nation, des moments qui blessent la mémoire, et l'idée que l'on se fait de son pays. Il est difficile de les évoquer, aussi, parce que ces heures noires souillent à jamais notre histoire, et sont une injure à notre passé et à nos traditions. Oui, la folie criminelle de l'occupant a été secondée par des Français, par l'Etat français. [. .] La France, patrie des Lumières et des Droits de l'Homme, terre d'accueil et d'asile, la France, ce jour-là, accomplissait l'irréparable. Manquant à sa parole, elle livrait ses protégés à leurs bourreaux. [. . .] Suivront d'autres rafles, d'autres arrestations. A Paris et en province. Soixante-quatorze trains partiront vers Auschwitz. Soixante-seize mille déportés juifs de France n'en reviendront pas. Nous conservons à leur égard une dette imprescriptible.[68]

Through his speech, Chirac not only admitted the country's complicity in the arrest and deportation of 76,000 Jews, but urged for a shared, collective responsibility in such actions. He called for the French to admit past mistakes, including those committed by the State, and most importantly, he asked that nothing be hidden about the country's past, not even its darkest hours. In sum, Chirac outlined a new type of complicity in the constant combat against

[68] Jacques Chirac, "Allocution de M. Jacques CHIRAC," Commemorative Ceremony of the Round-ups of July 16 and 17, 1942. Paris, France. 16 July 1995. 10 Oct. 2008 <http://elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/discours_et_declarations/1995>.

"obscure forces" threatening the very foundation upon which the nation was built by encouraging his countrymen to take responsibility for their past and engage in the act of testimony. In the context of the current study, Chirac's address provides a striking example of continuing efforts to remember the past as it really was, as opposed to how we would like to remember it. He spoke about transmitting the memory of those the country had persecuted saying:

> Transmettre la mémoire du peuple juif, des souffrances et des camps. Témoigner encore et encore. Reconnaître les fautes du passé, et les fautes commises par l'Etat. Ne rien occulter des heures sombres de notre Histoire, c'est tout simplement défendre une idée de l'Homme, de sa liberté et de sa dignité. C'est lutter contre les forces obscures, sans cesse à l'œuvre. Cet incessant combat est le mien autant qu'il est le vôtre.[69]

What his speech fails to account for is how one is to go about transmitting this memory. It goes without saying that entering into political, social, cultural, and historical dialogue is a very good starting point. Fortunately, by heightening our awareness of past realities, testimonial literature provides a catalyst for such discussions.

In relation to my study, these present-day examples are important because they not only underline the fact that we continue to seek clarity on the past, but they also indirectly point to the necessity of keeping our ears open to testimonial voices that continue to surface. When others participate in testimony, we reach new understandings of the past and are able to update

[69] Ibid.

and revise historical accounts.[70] In our quest for justice and peace in the world, these examples will encourage further inquiry into ambiguities from *les Années noires*. Because we find ourselves still grappling with the search for understanding and illumination of the events of the Second World War, we must seek out responses where they are accessible. While individual testimonies, archives, documentaries and chronicles allow us access to the past, so too does a certain body of existing literature. We need only to become more attentive listeners and have faith in the witnesses in order to access these testimonies.

[70] Suleiman, 151.

Chapter 2---Suite française, Irène Némirovsky

"Survivor stories are always compelling, and Némirovsky's *Suite Française* is no exception, though the survivor here is the manuscript—not the author."[71]

A voice from the past, Introduction to Irène Némirovsky

Until Sandra Smith translated her last novel Suite française into English in 2006, virtually no one in America had heard of Irène Némirovsky, a Russian-born writer who began publishing in France during the 1930s. Suite française has become the crowning achievement of a talented, young writer whose voice was silenced by the atrocities of the Holocaust. Before her death at Auschwitz, the writer only had time to write two novellas, *Tempête en juin* and *Dolce*, of a projected five-part, 1,600-page novel. What we encounter in these two novellas, published under the comprehensive title of Suite française, is an historically accurate portrayal of life in France during *les Années noires.* This portrait is reinforced through the ancillary apparatus of manuscript notes and personal correspondence that has been published with the text. For the purpose of this study, I will examine the ways in which these two distinct narratives serve to inform one another and how they illustrate that Némirovsky was actively engaged in the process of witnessing, thus, now serving as a posthumous witness to history. When we read Suite française today, we hear the voice of a woman whose particular historical, cultural, and social perceptions force us to confront our own.

Exactly who was Irène Némirovsky? This is a question of current debates, and given that we are left with only fragments of her life, it is challenging to know. Némirovsky was no

[71] Alice Kaplan, "Love in the Ruins," The Nation 11 May 2006, 3 Oct. 2008 <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060529/kaplan/single>.

stranger to the French literary scene during the inter-war years. In 1929, she published her first successful novel, David Golder, with Bernard Grasset, and quickly became the talk of literary circles in Paris. Fearing rejection when submitting the manuscript to Grasset, she did not include her name but signed it simply "M. Epstein." After a favorable reading, on October 25, 1929, she signed a contract with Grasset giving him the option to publish her next three novels. With the appearance of several favorable reviews in publications like Le Temps, Grignoire, La Nouvelle Revue française, and with the making of Julien Duvivier's filmic adaptation of David Golder, Némirovsky's literary future looked increasingly bright.[72] However, the outbreak of the Second World War deprived her of the success she had experienced up until 1938. At this moment, she began grappling with the agonies of being a stateless Jewish woman. With the capitulation of France to the Nazis and the onset of the Occupation in June 1940, these concerns became more serious as daily life itself grew gradually more challenging, which is a topic to be continued.

Némirovsky was not a stranger to political turmoil, as she was a refugee of the Bolshevik regime in Russia. The Némirovsky family found liberty in Paris in the spring of 1919. Prior to her arrival, the young Irène had already developed a love of writing. Myriam Anissimov tells us that she began to write at age fourteen in part to deal with a mother whom she vehemently disliked, and to seek refuge from a life that displeased her.[73] Having grown up with a French governess and spent many summers in France, Némirovsky preferred the French language and culture to her Russian origins. In his biography, Jonathan Weiss has suggested that

[72] For a thorough discussion of the publication of David Golder, see Weiss, Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works 43-8. See also Patrick Lienhardt and Olivier Philipponnat, La Vie d'Irène Némirovsky (Paris: Grasset; Paris: Denoel, 2007) 175-216.

[73] Myriam Anissimov, préface, Suite française, by Irène Némirovsky (Paris: Denoël, 2004) 13.

her family, including Némirovsky herself, did not view themselves as typical immigrants, nor did their ideologies seem to rival those of other white Russians or Jewish immigrants.[74] In examining the influence that Némirovsky's cultural and social background had on her literary works, these are relevant considerations.

As Weiss suggests, "The freedom that France offered Irène was not political or economic; it was personal. It was a freedom to write in the language she preferred and, finally, to become a published author."[75] Her impressive literary output from 1931 to 1942 reveals that Némirovsky exercised this newfound right, publishing over thirty short stories, and at least nine novels, but not without difficulty.[76] After exhausting all options to become French, even a conversion to Christianity on February 2, 1939 in l'Abbaye Sainte Marie de Paris, she still sought solace in her pen.[77] After October 1940 and the imposition of Vichy and Nazi laws targeting Jews, it became increasingly difficult for her to find publishers. Even though she had some success publishing with Albin Michel and an anti-Semitic newspaper, Gringoire under the pseudonyms Pierre Nérey and Charles Blancat, Némirovsky's "freedom to write" was attenuated

[74] Weiss, 24. He writes, " Just as the Némirovsky's lived quite differently from most of the Jews in Kiev, the also had little in common with the majority of Jewish immigrants in Paris. These were for the most part workers whose political leanings were decidedly leftist; Socialists and Communists indulged in violent verbal disputes in Yiddish newspapers. France, the country of human rights and, even more important, the country that gave the Jews their emancipation in 1791 represented for them 'a model of inspiration on which the hopes of new revolutionaries could be based.' [. . .]. Irène's personal situation fits neither that of Jewish immigrants nor of White Russians. Hers was a case apart; indeed, she was hardly an immigrant at all. [. . .]. Nor did Irène or her family share the state of poverty that refugees [. . .] experienced upon arrival in France."

[75] Weiss, 21-3.

[76] Weiss, 63. For a bibliography of Irène Némirovsky's works, see Weiss, 198-200. It is also worth noting that several of the works published during her lifetime appeared either anonymously or under the pseudonyms of Pierre Nerey, Pierre Neyret, Charles Blanchat, and Denise Méraude. There have also been five posthumous novels, including Suite française, and one biography published since her death.

[77] Weiss, 91.

by mounting anti-Jewish tensions. Nevertheless, she seemed to find hope in the mythical character, Sisyphus. A year prior to her arrest in July 1942, she wrote the following in her notebook:

> Pour soulever un poids si lourd Sisyphe,
> il faudrait ton courage.
> Je ne maque pas de coeur à l'ouvrage
> Mais le but est long et le temps est court.[78]

While one cannot be certain how Némirovsky conceived of the life-threatening danger in which she found herself, through these simple words, we hear a plea for more time . . . more time to live, more time to write. For her, survival meant writing; it was her lifeline. By her own admission, Némirovsky did not lack the "courage" or the "heart" needed to confront the problems of her time. She was a fighter. Intent, as she wrote in her notebook, on capturing the history of a world confronting danger, between the time of France's declaration of war in September 1939, and June 1940, Némirovsky did not sit idly by with a passive pen. As a stateless Jew, would it not have been "seemingly safer" to remain silent during these tumultuous times? We can only speculate as to what might have been the right course of action for Némirovsky. But as the above lines suggest, she, like Sisyphus, was determined to keep rolling the rock to the top of the mountain, even in spite of the futility of the task.

As Albert Camus illustrated in La Peste (1947), one has to confront the absurdity of the world by fighting against injustices that threaten human existence. Dr. Rieux, the principal character in Camus' novel, struggles to stymie the contagion of the plague that posed a grave menace to the citizens of Oran. Although he, like Sisyphus, and in this case, Némirovsky, feels as if he is fighting a losing battle, in the end he realizes that he will never be more than the sum

[78] Némirovsky, SF, 522.

of his acts, and thus is resolved to do everything he can to give meaning to his life while still alive. La Peste can be read as an allegory of *les Années noires* and more specifically of the perfidious behaviors of all those who committed or contributed to crimes against humanity. Camus wrote La Peste during the same time as Némirovsky was writing Suite française, and their predilection for the same myth might just be sheer irony. Or, perhaps it can best be explained by the morally conscientious positions from which they wrote. In an article that appeared in Toute l'édition in 1939, Némirovsky speaks about being a dedicated writer while making a meaningful contribution to a war-torn country:

> J'ai cherché ce que je pouvais faire de mieux, et quelle offrande d'activité il m'était permis de faire [. . .]. Il m'est apparu que le mieux était de se cantonner dans sa spécialité. Or ce que je sais faire, c'est écrire . . . J'ai donc écrit pour la presse étrangère [. . .] des articles qui font connaitre le moral magnifique de la France, qui peignent la décision tranquille des combattants, le calme courage des femmes. J'ai essayé par des traits recueillis chaque jour, de montrer la simplicité, la vaillance françaises. Je dois aussi donner des conférences à la radio—émissions de la vie féminine. Elles seront consacrées à des biographies d'héroïnes polonaises ou anglaises, de femmes qui sont dévouées à la cause de leur pays. J'attends de pouvoir faire mieux.[79]

Némirovsky simply did what she knew how to do best---she wrote. In the above citation, she tells us that she spoke of writing for the foreign press so that they might know the "magnificent morale of France," the resolve of its combatants, and "the calm courage of French women." By promoting such a message, she demonstrated her faith in what she considered to be her homeland as well as a commitment to the international community. Some have referred to her seeming naivety about the French as "aveugle reconnaissance," and perhaps that was the case in 1939.[80] But, the striking part of this quote also reveals that Némirovsky was interested in capturing

[79] Y. Moustiers, "Les femmes des lettres et de la guerre," Toute l'édition [Paris], Dec. 1939: is. 483

[80] Phillipponnat and Lienhardt, 335.

women's wartime experiences, of giving voice to "la vie féminine" during the war. Apparently, she dedicated her time to capturing women's experiences so often overlooked when wars erupt, a subject very close to her heart. She speaks of plans to conduct radio interviews with women, notably female heroines from Poland or England, so that they too might be able to share their life stories, or "biographies." Her sensitivities to women also appear in the opening lines of Suite française when women's reactions to an air raid occupy the central place in the narrative. While the men are still sleeping, the mothers and other women are already "plus nerveuses, plus vives . . . debout."[81] In both cases, Némirovsky approached her work from a female perspective, which is a topic to which I intend to return later in this chapter.

One of the important points Weiss makes is that we should look at her literary oeuvre in two periods with the turning point being 1937. He writes:

> While prior to 1937, she tried to separate herself as much as possible from her origins, seeing materialism in Jewish culture that seemed incompatible with the values of French society, she now recognized the complexity of the Jewish predicament, and saw the danger that threatened Jews in Europe. [. . .]. Even as she found herself spiritually a Christian, she seemed to become particularly sensitive to her Jewish roots.[82]

There are a number of factors contributing to her seemingly different perspectives of the world post 1937 including the responsibilities of motherhood, the growing difficulty to publish under collaborative anti-Jewish laws of October 1940 and June 1941, a mounting disillusionment with the French, and a growing uneasiness about her own destiny. Weiss' insight is based on information from one of her writer's notebooks, which serves as a reminder that such documents are valuable to those trying to understand the complexities of this, or any, writer. These facts are

[81] Némirovsky, SF, 33.

[82] Weiss, 99.

analogous to the present analysis because they underscore the necessity of not judging Némirovsky for what she had written prior to the eruption of the Second World War, but of opening our objective ears to hear her testimony without precondition or bias. In our modern day courts of law, any juror who has prior knowledge of a case is barred from assignment. We must approach her text with neutrality and let her words speak for themselves.

In the March of 1940 during a visit to Issy l'Évêque, a village that was to become her home after France's capitulation to the Germans, she sketched out detailed plot and character plans, as was a customary practice, before beginning composition of a "vast meditation on the ages of life."[83] She addressed what was to be her last major preoccupation as a writer, the struggle between humankind and destiny. In describing her novel, Les Biens de ce monde, from the Hôtel des Voyageurs in Issy l'Évêque on March 1, 1940, Némirovsky wrote:

> Il y a un sujet dans le roman, un seul. C'est le sujet par excellence, et surtout le sujet de notre temps: la lutte entre l'homme et son destin. Entre l'individu et la société, [. . .], entre le désir de l'individu de vivre pour lui-même et le destin qui le pétrit, qui le broie pour ses fins à lui.[84]

In this novel, Némirovsky deems humankind's will to live for itself and the destiny that moulds, defines, and limits it to be the ultimate subject of her era. Reflecting the very real struggle in which she was engaged, these words illustrate how Némirovsky struggled at times to come to

[83] Lienhardt and Philipponnat, 335, 337. They write, "Sans abandonner l'idée d'une vaste meditation sur les âges de la vie, elle voudrait en faire un 'drame français', la couleur dans l'histoire de l'entre-deux-guerres et montrer l'interminable abnégation qui a fait des enfants de la Belle Époque les dupes de 1940, ayant sacrifié au travail, à la famille, à la patrie leur désir frustré des plaisirs terrestres, sans cesse différés par le devoir sacré." Némirovsky began work on this novel in April 1940. The provisional title was Jeunes et Vieux, which later became Les Biens de ce monde.

[84] Philipponnat and Lienhardt, 336. The novel was published anonymously in installments in Gringoire in 1941, but not as a complete novel until 1947 by Albin Michel.

terms with her own life, her Jewish origins, and the unsolicited, undesired positions to which she was relegated in occupied France.

Just a few short weeks later, in the margins of a short story, "Départ pour la fête," on March 26, Némirovsky noted:

> Je crois que désormais je n'écrirai plus qu'une chose : ce que nous devenons. [. . .] Ces histoires de guerre, de paix, de vie, d'amour, de mort, vu à cette lumière. Je l'ai déjà fait [. . .]. Mais c'est une chose qu'on doit refaire sans cesse.[85]

Here, the verb *doit* sheds light on the obligations she sought to fulfill through her vocation. Writing a vast meditation on the ages did not stem from her volition, but from the responsibility she felt to bring to light the topic of mankind's fate. As a morally conscious writer, she recognized the importance of continually exposing the ambiguities of the pressing and compelling themes of war and peace, life and death, and courage and fear. This, she felt, was her *devoir*. She carried out this imperative effectively through "cette lumière," or what we now understand as her indirect style of filtering personal observations and thoughts through characters.

In the spring of 1940, although she was unaware that she had less than two years to live, she anticipated having enough time left to write one more work. In her last years, she consecrated herself to the central issue of destiny, or as she wrote, "ce que nous devenons." The important point to retain from these examples is the resolve and calm courage with which Némirovsky continued to write under the Occupation. Like Sisyphus, she never relinquished the stone; she never stopped pushing it toward the crest of the hill, even though the odds were stacked against her.

[85] Philipponnat and Lienhardt, 335.

In the very first chapter of Suite française, the writer makes clear her intentions to expose that which seems to be hidden and shadowy. Under the cover of total darkness, an air raid sounds triggering the confusion and disbelief of the Parisians. Ironically, it is this dark setting itself that reveals the transparency with which Némirovsky wrote:

> Toutes les lampes s'éteignaient, mais sous ce ciel de juin doré et transparent, chaque maison, chaque rue était visible. Quant à la Seine, elle semblait concentrer en elle toutes les lueurs éparses et les réfléchir au centuple comme un miroir à facettes. [. . .] Les fenêtres insuffisamment camouflées, les toits qui miroitaient dans l'ombre légère, les ferrures des portes dont chaque saillie brillait faiblement, [. . .] la Seine les attirait, les captait et les faisait jouer dans ses flots.[86]

Némirovsky's self is often implicit in the narrator's voice, as is the case here. The juxtaposition of lightness and darkness creates a space in which all words and deeds become transparent. Even though all of the lamps are extinguished, the June sky illuminates every house and every street not just from the exterior, but also from the interior. Paris has always been considered the intellectual and cultural heart of France, with the Seine being the main artery for transporting people, goods, and ideas. Here, this symbolic source of life of the city serves as a multi-faceted mirror absorbing every reflection of light and recasting it into the night sky. Although residents thought they had sufficiently blacked out their windows so that no one from the outside would see into their homes and lives, the narrator very quickly reveals that this was not the case. It is in this transparent atmosphere that Némirovsky sets the tone for the actions to come in which she will carefully weave personal observations into her fiction to create a powerful, lucid testimony.

[86] Némirovsky, SF, 34.

As in previous works, Némirovsky was determined to tell what she believed to be the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In 1941, in her notebook on the situation in France and her plans for Suite française, she wrote:

> Mon Dieu! Que me fait ce pays? Puisqu'il me rejette, considérons-le froidement, regardons-le perdre son honneur et sa vie. Et les autres, que me sont-ils? Les Empires meurent. Rien n'a d'importance. Si on le regarde du point de vue mystique ou du point de vue personnel, c'est tout une. Conservons une tête froide. Durcissons-nous le cœur. Attendons.[87]

At first glance, this is a perplexing statement because it seems that it was driven strictly by emotions of having been rejected by the country she felt was her home. At second glance, these words reveal that her "aveugle reconnaissance" toward France was dissipating, as she now realized that the country did nothing to help her escape persecution. Because of this, her positive attitude and perceptions of the country seemed to be diminishing. Just as she had done in previous novels focusing on Jewish characters, she disassociated herself from a familiar milieu, the France she idealized, in order to consider it "froidement."

This particular adjective, "froidement", generally translated as "coldly," could be misunderstood had she not gone on to write that it was also necessary to keep a cool head and a hardened heart while weathering the storm of historical events transpiring before her very eyes. Some might take this cold-hearted approach to mean that she was angrily dismissing France. Others might see her cool head as an attribute helping her to remain calm during a very stormy period. A cold heart and a cool head can be quite different from one another, and we should be careful to see that both reflect a certain stoicism and calmness on the part of the writer, but also an ambivalence about her true feelings. Perhaps the fact that Némirovsky approached her life and

[87] Némirovsky, SF, 521.

text calmly meant that she was earnest in her efforts to be impartial toward casting with words her perceptions of the truth.

In comparing the opening lines of the novel and the first quotation included in the manuscript notes, we see Némirovsky's conviction and commitment to writing the truth. This conviction grew not out of malicious revenge toward that a country that pushed her away, as some have suggested, but out of the personal responsibility she felt to depict people as they really were. Contrary to what many have suggested, she does not condemn the French, she merely sheds light on the complexities of human behavior under the Occupation.

Despite the claim that Les Biens de ce monde and Les Feux de l'automne, two novels written during the Occupation, "show a point of view that fits in well with the Vichy regime" and consequently "do not really reveal Irène's attitude at the time," we should not see these projects as contradictory to her hopes and desires for a happy life in the provinces.[88] The point is that, at least until the war erupted, she praised the country because she loved everything about France and ardently desired to live a simple, happy life there. As was the case for so many of her contemporaries, war shattered those dreams.

It also is noteworthy that earlier in his book, Weiss himself attributes Némirovsky's ideals about French life to her relationship with Madeline Avot, a friend she met in 1921 whose family was the very "antithesis" of her own and whose influence made a formidable impression on the eighteen-year old Irène.[89] As Weiss suggests, this friendship with Madeleine sheds much

[88] Weiss, 132-3. For a broader discussion of these two novels, see Weiss, 128-34. Both of these works were published posthumously by Albin Michel, Les Biens de ce monde in 1947 and Les Feux de l'automne in 1957.

[89] Weiss, 33. For more on Madeleine Avot and her relationship with Némirovsky, including portions of their correspondence, see Weiss, 26-37.

light on Némirovsky's desires to become French, for it provided the very foundation upon which many of her notions of "Frenchness" were formed. Perhaps she was simply clinging to the hope of being safe and welcome in a nation she, at one point, had loved. Of course, there is a tremendous amount of irony in her valorization of idyllic French life, at least in Suite française, and we must ask what this implies about her so-called love of France. Was it genuine? Or, was it just a last ditch-effort to find refuge from Jewish persecution? These are questions I will explore later in this chapter. For now, what is important about this anecdote is that we can find residue of her moral consciousness in many of her writings.

Just as Némirovsky seemed to be coming into her own right as a *femme de lettres*, many still could not move past her previous anti-Semitic works; consequently, many discredited the power of Némirovsky's voice . . . some still do. In another of her novels, Les Chiens et les loups, Weiss addresses the very important issue of allowing her writing to speak for itself. Hoping to avert any misunderstandings of what could have been (and in fact was) perceived as an anti-Semitic tendency, Némirovsky wrote this about Les Chiens et les loups:

> Ce roman est une histoire de Juifs. [. . .] Naturellement, tous les Juifs ne sont pas semblables à mes héros : la variété d'une race humaine est infinie. [. . .] Je ne l'ai pas écrite sans crainte. [. . .] Je crains davantage, toutefois, l'objection des Juifs eux-mêmes [. . .] A cela je répondrai qu'il n'est pas de sujet « tabou » en littérature. Pourquoi un peuple refuserait-il d'être vu tel qu'il est, avec ses qualités et ses défauts? Je pense que certains Juifs se reconnaîtront dans mes personnages. Peut-être m'en voudront-ils? Mais je sais que je dis la vérité.[90]

After its publication in 1940, this work attracted much critical attention as being anti-Semitic. What Weiss is quick to point out is that this work was misunderstood in 1940s France

[90] Philipponnat and Lienhardt, 338.

and does in fact offer "an appeal to tolerance and an invitation to understanding."[91] What critics who berate her anti-Semitic tone fail to recognize is the fact that her voice was changing and maturing. Jonathan Weiss devotes an entire chapter of his biography to the complexities of Némirovsky's religious orientation and the definition it gave to her later works, including some of the ones evoked here.

While it is difficult to be certain of Némirovsky's true feelings toward France and her own Jewish people, in the lines above, it is clear that she was no bigot for she admits that "the variety of any human race is infinitely diverse." For this very reason, she avows that one member of a race does not represent its entirety; the same is true of the French. Fearing that she might be chastised for having written such a work, she preemptively responds, "nothing is taboo in literature." Clearly, she had no qualms about giving her testimony.

In courts of law, no information is to be withheld, no testimony forbidden. On the contrary, keeping what one knows to be true from those who are trying to make a judgment is the only unjust course of action. As her voice reveals, Némirovsky understood this, and we can confidently call her text a work of testimonial literature because she inscribes herself into her narrative voice that concretizes real-life experiences that she endured during some of the most polemical times in France's history---the inter-war years, the Debacle, the Exodus, and the onset of the Occupation. Through her writing, she has left traces of the pains she endured and the verities she observed, as well as indications of the particular cultural, social, and historical positions in which she found herself during the war. As I point out in the first chapter, testimonial literature is characterized by writers who bear witness by taking "responsibility for

[91] Weiss, 103.

truth: to speak, implicitly, from within the legal pledge and the juridical imperative of the witness's oath."[92]

In light of Némirovsky's seemingly-harsh, ironic, and personally-detached approach to painting the French in Suite française, it is tempting to say that this work reveals the least about the life of the writer, and perhaps when pitted against her previous work, it does. However, the circumstances in which she found herself during *les Années noires* must be taken into consideration when analyzing works written during that time. Clearly, the ongoing war and Occupation drastically altered her feelings toward the French. Yet in spite of what might appear to be contempt for a nation that rejected her, we still hear her cries for tolerance in Suite française. If we pay close attention to the underlying discourse in this text, we discover the centrality of the issue of humankind's desire to live a fulfilling life in a tolerant world.

It is fitting that Némirovsky should be a part of this study because she knew all too well the challenges of bringing women's voices to the forefront, starting with her own. In order to share her voice with others, she first had to find it, and this working through of identity manifests itself in her writing.[93] It is unfair to judge Némirovsky or her works if we have any preconceptions, which all too often are misconceptions, about who she was. If we are to assume our role in the witnessing process, we must learn to be objective listeners. Many of her literary

[92] Felman and Laub, 204-5.

[93] Weiss, 61. Here, he writes, "What merits attention in the life and works of Irène Némirovsky is not then any experimentation with literary form or the creation of a new style; it is rather the relationship between the act of writing and her search for identity as an author. These two elements are inseparable in Irène's work; if she chose to write David Golder [. . .] it is because she wished to be recognized as a Jewish author who could cast a critical eye on her own community. Later in her career, when she chose to abandon Russian-Jewish subjects and write the conventionally French Les Feux de l'automne (Autumn Fires), it is because she then wanted to be indentified with certain values that she saw as eternally French. That she was torn between these two identities is the heart of the drama that was her life. [. . .] But Irène would never be content to rest on the laurels of her precocious start. Her ambition was to build a literary career for herself as a French, rather than a Russian or Jewish, author. "

projects between 1940 and 1942 testify to the writer's focus on recording what she perceived to be the truths of her times. Let us now focus on Suite française.

Critical reception of Suite française

Having already gained much critical attention in France with its prestigious status as the 2004 *Prix Renaudot* selection and in Germany with its success at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the English version of Suite française hit bookshelves in England, Canada, and the United States with an impressive hailstorm of publicity.[94] It did not take readers long to discover the lucidity of Némirovsky's voice that revealed so much about the murky past from which it emerged, nor did it take them long to learn of the miraculous survival of the text or the tragic fate of its author. As evidenced by the polarized debates it ignited, this novel made quite an impression on critics.

Shortly after the translation debuted, American critics engaged in a debate about the literary value of the novel and the impact of its tragic context on reader reception. In January of 2008, Ruth Franklin published "Scandale française [*sic*]" in The New Republic in which she diminishes the significance and value of Irène Némirovsky's literary genius as portrayed in Suite française. While the critic admits that the novel is "charmingly written" with moments of "gentle humor [. . .] balanced by sharp ironies" and "expertly sketched" characters, Franklin berates Némirovsky's work saying that "had it not been for the tumultuous origins, by the narrowing circumstances of its composition, it is hard to imagine that it would have been published at all."[95] She does not refrain from making further speculative comments and criticizes the novel's "handsome editorial apparatus" including the manuscript notes and personal correspondence

[94] Weiss, preface, x.

[95] Ruth Franklin, "Scandale Française[*sic*]: The Nasty Truth about a New Literary Heroine," The New Republic 30 January, 2008, 19 Jan. 2008 <http://www.tnr.com>.

included in the text. Franklin is not the first to speculate about the novel's context and its subsequent influence on reader reception. While Franklin and those who share her views have derided Némirovsky's text, others have acclaimed it as living fiction, social history, and factual, life narrative.

From quite a different perspective than Franklin, Patrick Marnham, alluding to the "exceptional biographical context" of the work, asserts that part of Némirovsky's literary achievement in Suite française is that she provides "a valuable fragment of social history as well as a living fiction."[96] Similarly, in his review for The New York Times, Paul Gray suggests that Némirovsky's novel is comprised of two narratives, "one fictional and the other a fragmentary, factual account of how the fiction came into being."[97] Marion Halligan shares this view highlighting that "the appendices to the book . . . form another narrative, that of Némirovsky's life," and she goes on to point out that "the reader has to play a considerable role in constructing this, but that only makes it [the life narrative] more powerful."[98] Clearly, the appendices to the novel, which include personal letters, historical observations, and manuscript notes, were not created by the text's editors, but are authentic documents intertwined with Némirovsky's life and novel that were intentionally incorporated into its published form. Appalled by such measures, Franklin responds:

> The implication is clear: *Suite Française*, aside from its literary value, is to be regarded as an authentic, even numinous document miraculously salvaged from

[96] Patrick Marnham, "The Grim Face of Defeat," Spectator 300.9266, 11 Mar. 2006:43, 15 Jan. 2008 <http://go.galegroup.com >.

[97] Paul Gray, "As France Burned," The New York Times Book Review 9 Apr. 2006, 15 Jan. 2008 <http://go.galegroup.com >.

[98] Marion Halligan, "Love actually: Marion Halligan Describes the Processes by which Novelists Give Truth to the Emotions they Convey," Meanjin. 66.1, Mar. 2007: 209, 15 Jan. 2008 <http://go.galegroup.com >.

> the ashes of the great catastrophe, as poignant and as prophetic as the diary of Anne Frank, to which it has been frequently, and nonsensically, compared. In the words of one reporter, the novel is "a classic Holocaust story by an author who would not live to see her work published."
>
> The truth is, this was spin. Worse, it was a fraud. The fraud could be perpetrated because very few readers in our day know anything about Irène Némirovsky.

It seems that Franklin's charges are slightly off track. First, if one compares the lives of Frank and Némirovsky and their texts, there are indeed some strikingly similar characteristics. Both of these women were forced into exile by the suffocating Jewish statues imposed by Nazi Germany and its cohorts. While they lived exiled lives in different manners, Frank in hiding in an Amsterdam apartment and Némirovsky in the open in the provincial village of Issy, both of them recognized their innate gift of writing. In spite of the tumultuous circumstances, which limited their activities, these writers' texts provide two different eyewitness testimonial accounts. Both of them, knowingly or not, took an oath to record in writing the truths they observed and lived. While their individual worlds crumbled, Frank and Némirovsky continued to take responsibility for what they perceived to be the truth of their respective situations. Through their texts, they did not just report facts but recorded their own living histories in such a way as to continue to witness courts of history, courts of readers, and courts of the future.[99]

In spite of the fact that both of the writers' voices were silenced by the atrocities of the Second World War, the texts share the same fate in having transcended the deaths of their creators. For both women, art provides a pathway to salvation, and this is one of the strong links between Frank and Némirovsky. While Némirovsky had taken measures to entrust her notebooks and manuscripts to her daughters, she feared that they too might suffer the same fate of

[99] Felman and Laub, 204-5. This reference goes back to Chapter 1 where I speak about the "judicial oath" of responsibility writers of testimony take when committing their writing to others.

deportation and death. Frank did not have the opportunity to place her diary in secure hands before being arrested; fortunately, Miep Gies, a friend who lived in hiding with the Franks, escaped persecution and discovered the diary upon returning to Amsterdam. Some call it fate that these works ever made it to print; others call it irony. Some equate it to a miracle. For reasons beyond explanation, we have been granted the privilege of reading these works today. More importantly, through the testimonial voices of these women, we have been given the imperative to move beyond petty criticism in an effort to hear and to share these salient, evocative testimonies.

Although Franklin would not agree to admit it, at the heart of the matter is the fact that these women's voices open a window into two texts that *were* "miraculously salvaged from the ashes of the great catastrophe." It is virtually impossible not to think of the horrific fates of either of these writers, which some insist provide the impetus of their literary success. On this point, Alice Kaplan suggests:

> The editorial apparatus [. . .] insists that we read *Suite française* through the lens of Némirovsky's found manuscript and the tragedy of the Holocaust. It's impossible not to think of the miracle of Némirovsky's surviving last words when you're reading, and this context gives the book an importance, a shimmering sense of surplus value.[100]

Even though Kaplan is addressing Némirovsky's work, the same could be said of Frank's diary. Perhaps the reason why it has been the most widely read Holocaust story is largely due to the untimely death of its writer and the circumstances surrounding the journals whose survival does indeed seem miraculous. Beyond that though, perhaps it is the responsibility with which Frank and Némirovsky engaged in writing, in testifying, and in committing their narratives to us that their texts take on "a shimmering sense of surplus value."

[100] Kaplan, "Love in the Ruins."

There is, however, one point upon which some would agree with Franklin's assertions, that is that Suite française has perhaps been misunderstood or misrepresented as classic "Holocaust" story. For that matter, some have said the same about Anne Frank's diary. Neither of these texts resembles the writing we have come to recognize as Holocaust literature as written by Eli Wiesel, Robert Antelme, Charlotte Delbo and other survivors. Perhaps therein lies the basic confusion, for neither Némirovsky nor Frank survived. In both cases, the survivor was the text containing only the testimonial voice of its deceased writer.

Melissa Müller's biography of Anne Frank sheds new light upon what she feels is a growing misconception of the symbolism behind the diary. So many have regarded Frank as the representative of over six million humans who lost their lives during the Holocaust, but Gies, who returned the diary to Otto Frank, is quick to note that Frank's life story was her own, and it just so happens that her fate was also shared by millions of others. We must not forget that Némirovsky was one of those individuals. Gies asserted, "Anne cannot, and should not, stand for the many individuals whom the Nazis robbed of their lives . . . But her fate helps us grasp the immense loss the world suffered because of the Holocaust."[101] In our own search to understand the complexities of life, readers must be sensitive to the particularities of each witness's cultural position relative to his or her testimony.

While it is true that Némirovsky's novel is not a classic Holocaust story, as anyone who has actually read it would agree, its comparison with Anne Frank's diary is anything but "nonsensical." It is true that Némirovsky makes only two subtle mentions of Jews in Suite française. However, the accompanying documents and letters published with the novel do reveal

[101] Melissa Müller, Anne Frank: The Biography, trans. Rita and Robert Kimber (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998) 305.

the struggles the writer experienced as a stateless Jew during the Occupation. Beyond questions of religious orientation, Némirovsky's text facilitates our understanding of the human behaviors and actions that led many to perpetrate immoral acts linked to some of the world's most heinous crimes against humanity. How then is reading them as "authentic" and "numinous" documents really a crime, or as Franklin suggests, "fraud"? For Franklin to have lambasted the publication of Suite française as fraudulent and its comparison to Anne Frank's diary as non-sensical is simply inaccurate and faulty. Eli Wiesel has often stated, "Not to transmit an experience is to betray it." Frank and Némirovsky both transmitted their messages, messages that now rest in our hands and on our hearts. Our failure to recognize the historical, cultural, and social values of Suite française could lead us to write it off, as it seems Franklin has done. What we must ask ourselves is the question that will not go away: Will we allow such a betrayal? Even if Suite française had been written by a non-Jew or someone who had actually survived the Second World War, it would be of no less value today.

In the end, what Anne Frank and Irène Némirovsky share other than a catastrophic fate is extraordinary ability to write. Through their voices, they testify. These testimonies serve as a reminder of the irreplaceable value of human life and our inalienable right to live free from terror and destruction. While the voices of Anne Frank and Irène Némirovsky can never replace those silenced by the Holocaust, they can speak for the dead, and more importantly, they can speak to us and to future generations. Through Némirovsky's text, we have access to another "prophetic" voice from history capable of illuminating the past, present, and future. What we discover in Suite française is precisely the interweaving of a what I will call metatext, which include all ancillary documents of the novel itself including writer's notes and correspondence, and text,

which I consider to be the two-part novel itself, *Tempête en juin* and *Dolce.* The resulting artwork testifies to the author's tragic personal story through a carefully researched, fictionalized historical account that is based largely on factual information from the era.[102] At the same time poignant and prophetic, Némirovsky's voice has miraculously resurfaced from the Dark Years.

To devalue the importance of the manuscript notes and other metatextual elements published with Suite française is to ignore insightful, informative historical documents. To those who claim that it was for effect that the publishers decided to include writer's notes and personal correspondence in the metatext, let them consider that studying these types of documents while at the same time reading a literary work is an age-old practice still valid today. It is rare to find a person who has not studied a writer's life in depth before trying to conduct a more informed analysis of a literary work. The fact is the entire story of the composition and publication of Suite française is unique, and this should be brought to light. In this case in particular, disregarding these metatextual elements would be a grave error, for they protect the integrity of Némirovsky's voice. It is extremely important to remember that this was a posthumous, incomplete novel, so to have published it without the manuscript notes would have perhaps been a grave injustice to the writer. Since it was a work in progress, the manuscript and writer's notes are vital to today's reader experiencing a more authentic voyage with the text.

After reading the selected manuscript notes extracted from Némirovsky's notebook, it becomes clear that she was engaged in more than just writing to escape the daily woes of a non-native Jewish woman in occupied France. Clearly, the writer had another purpose, to record history as it occurred practically before her very eyes. To this end, she wrote, "Ce qui

[102] For a thorough discussion of this claim, see Lienhardt and Philipponnat, 357-415.

m'intéresse ici c'est l'histoire du monde."[103] Her notes and correspondence are an integral part of her personal story, and we must not forget that the collective history of the world is comprised of individual stories like hers.

When examining the content of Némirovsky's novel, one finds that it does not focus on the military combats that took place in the battlefields of France, or the endless stream of convoys en route to one of Nazi Germany's infamous extermination camps. It is not directly about being Jewish and struggling to survive, and again, it is not a Holocaust novel. Franklin asserts that it is "unjust and illogical" that Némirovsky "should now be lionized as a significant writer of the Holocaust." While some agree that Némirovsky should not be granted this posthumous celebrity status, others disagree. Perhaps these critics are too caught up in semantics to see that Némirovsky's novel serves as a vivid metaphor for some very real problems the world faces today. Alice Kaplan offers this view of the novel:

> Most of her stories turn around the central theme of finding shelter in wartime. For all of her characters, asylum fails in one way or another. Those who give shelter are unrewarded or punished; those who take it are disappointed or destroyed. Many others refuse to give asylum when it is needed most. So while her novel is not immediately autobiographical, in its constant attention to the host-guest relationship, Némirovsky expressed with great emotional precision her understanding of the country that betrayed her.[104]

Némirovsky writes about basic human desires: shelter, nourishment, happiness, and love, desires she had for her own life and family. Kaplan is justified in stressing how Némirovsky used her talents and art as a way to craft a precise and insightful expression of her own thoughts and emotions. Bound up in this fictional account, we do indeed hear her voice. Indirectly, she seems to be showing us how easy and convenient it is to compromise ones morals, while at the same

[103] Némirovsky, SF, 527.
[104] Kaplan, "Love in the Ruins."

time asking questions about how we would act in times of need and crisis. The majority of the characters in Némirovsky's novel paint a dramatic canvas of people who compromised their convictions and readily denied it. Némirovsky, on the other hand, held on to her convictions that one could not hide from the fate that awaited.

On July 11, 1942, just two days before her arrest she observed the "feuilles pourries et trempées par l'orage" (rotten leaves soaked by the storm) and noted her legs "repliées sur moi" (bent around her). Even the bees that buzzed had a "profond et grave" ring, as did the birds chirping which she found quite annoying.[105] These simple comments in her notebook poignantly reveal and symbolize the defeated spirit and position to which she was relegated; yet, her actions as a writer show that she was courageous. In a letter addressed to André Sabatier on the same day, she wrote, "J'ai beaucoup écrit, ces derniers temps . . . Je suppose que ce seront des œuvres posthumes mais cela fait toujours passer le temps."[106] Indeed, her suppositions were correct about publishing posthumously, but what she could not know in 1942 was that time would not pass her by without recognizing the historical, social, and cultural value of her testimonial voice. It has taken us back to an uncertain era in history so that we might finally move forward to the future. Let us not get caught up in the debate about the publication of this work, rather let us focus our attention on the text itself. Perhaps Ms. Franklin should have read Paul Gray's review of the novel in which he so eloquently wrote:

> From a purely aesthetic standpoint, the back story of "Suite Française" is irrelevant to the true business of criticism. But most readers don't view books from such Olympian heights, and neither, for that matter, do most critics. If they did, publishers' lists wouldn't be so crowded with literary histories and

[105] Lienhardt and Philipponnat, 414.

[106] Lienhardt and Philipponnat, 415.

> biographies, those chronicles of messy facts from which enduring art sometimes springs. In truth, "Suite Française" can stand up to the most rigorous and objective analysis, while a knowledge of its history heightens the wonder and awe of reading it. If that's a crime, let's just plead guilty and forge ahead.[107]

Be it fate, editorial influence, or Denise Epstein and Elisabth Gille's sense of moral responsibility, the reasons why we are reading Suite française today should not be the central issue of analysis or criticism. As Gray has suggested, let us focus on the work itself, the manuscript notes, and personal correspondence which inform our efforts to better understand one of the most perplexing periods in our world's history. This is not and should not be considered a crime. On the contrary, it is the only pathway to assuming our role, as readers, in the witnessing process. By probing deeper into the particularities of Némirovsky's writing, both in the two novellas, *Tempête en juin* and *Dolce*, and in the metatext, I hope to illuminate not only the writer's personal past, but also that of *les Années noires*. Before analyzing specific examples from her writing, it would be beneficial to turn our attention to the distinctiveness of the genre of Némirovsky's text.

Genre and Suite française

Just as Némirovsky has been mislabeled a "significant writer of the Holocaust," so too has the genre of Suite française been misunderstood. In the introduction to his biography of Némirovsky, Jonathan Weiss wrote that this text "is no memoir; [but] self-consciously a work of fiction. [. . .] it is one of the works that least reveals the author's life and thoughts."[108] In stark contrast, Weiss wrote just one page previously "in the absence of intimate, personal correspondence or notes, it was the fiction itself and the author's notebooks that gave me insights

[107] Gray, "As France Burned."

[108] Weiss, introduction xiii.

into the ambiguities that characterized her public persona."[109] Weiss himself seems a bit tentative in his treatment of the genre, for his two statements seem to contradict one another because the author's notebooks are filled with writings about both her life and thoughts. Ruth Kluger also calls Suite française an "extraordinary work of fiction," but distinguishes her assessment from Weiss' by continuing that it "is embedded in a real story as gripping and complex as the invented one." Kluger appreciates the value of the appendix, which she finds "illuminates the circumstances of [the novel's] origin and the author's plan for its completion.[110] Similarly, Alice Kaplan calls the work "fiction plus a 'true story' chaser," and calls attention to the question of the text's content and context. She writes:

> *Suite Française* raises fascinating questions about what matters in the experience of reading: content or context. The context of *Suite Française* is endlessly fascinating—the recovered manuscript, the deported writer, the ambiguity of her choices and the cruelty of her father. Then there is the novel itself. Is it a masterpiece or [. . .] a "society novel," less interesting than the writer's notes?

The question of the valorization of content or context is pertinent. Given the incomparable nature of this particular text, the bond between the two is so strong that it is difficult to separate one from the other. Reading with knowledge of the context only adds to the power of the content. While it is possible to read the novel without knowledge of Némirovsky's story, doing so diminishes its historical and artistic value. Regarded in its entirety, it certainly is unjust to say that this work reveals the least about Némirovsky, for it does unveil many hidden passages from her life.

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[109] Weiss, introduction, xii.

[110] Ruth Kluger, "Bearing Witness," The Washington Post, 14 May 2006, 3 October 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/11/AR2006051101325_pf.html>.

Another point on which Weiss leaves us a bit perplexed is his assertion that this text is not a "memoir." Traditionally, a memoir has a certain retrospective point of view. It is true that Némirovsky did not allow much time to elapse between the occurrence of the historical events and her writing about them. Some suggest she even wrote "sur le vif" or during the events. In the strictest sense of the term Suite française is not a memoir; however, the text is endowed with some of the characteristics one finds in memoir writing. A clarification of the term 'memoir' in English and in French will be helpful. According to its most basic English definition, a memoir is an historical account written from personal knowledge or special sources. In English, what we refer to as memoirs, in the plural, are considered written autobiographical accounts that recount at least a portion of the person's life and memories. In French, however, the definition of 'mémoire' changes according to its gender and number. Accordingly, *la mémoire* is what we would simply refer to as memory or the mental faculty to recall certain events, people and places; or, it could also be a memory or a souvenir. On the other hand, *le mémoire* is a written account of what one has experienced. Given the definitions provided, it seems to be a question of linguistics or perhaps translation, but Weiss' claim that this is "no memoir" is not entirely accurate.

Considering that the text Némirovsky produced *is* a carefully researched eyewitness account of the Occupation, coupled with an accompanying historical, personal narrative, one could identify parts of her text as 'memoir' writing. Susan Rubin Suleiman claims that "if novels can look and feel textually like memoirs, the converse is also true and more paradoxical: literary memoirs can look like novels yet lay claim to a bedrock of historical fact".[111] Was

[111] Suleiman, 161.

Némirovsky writing a personal memoir disguised by novelistic form, or was she simply composing a novel largely informed by personal observations? These are questions to which there have been multiple answers, none of which form a consensus. Among the dissenting opinions about this text, perhaps Ruth Kluger has made the most sensible statement writing:

> Still, this is an incomparable book, in some ways *sui generis*. While diaries give us a day-to-day record, their very inclusiveness can lead to tedium; memoirs, on the other hand, written at a later date, search for highlights that illuminate the past from the vantage point of the present. In Némirovsky's *Suite Française* we have the perfect mixture: a gifted novelist's account of a foreign occupation, written while it was taking place, with history and imagination jointly evoking a bitter time, correcting and enriching our memory.[112]

Identifying this text as strictly fiction, memoir, autobiography, etc. is simply impossible. To echo Kluger, it is truly "*sui generis*," and an artwork that deserves to be read and examined in all of its complexity. The braiding of historical fact with the writer's imagination creates the artistic power behind the testimonial nature of this text. Sharon Dilworth makes another significant observation about the artistic power of this text asserting that "the staggering power of *Suite Française* is that it affirms the idea that art can offer a path to salvation [. . .]." She continues, "In the end, art might be the only thing worth saving, for it is here where our humanity is given form, celebrated and reaffirmed." Obviously moved by what she has read, Dilworth concludes her review by saying this text "is a testament to the role art can play in the most unendurable of circumstances."[113] Némirovsky herself recognized the vital role writing played in her life, especially once war erupted in Europe. Kaplan offers similar view and writes, "Was work on her novel a necessary dissociation from her reality---a way to pass the time---or a

[112] Kluger, "Bearing Witness."

[113] Sharon Dilworth, "Suite Francaise by Irène Némirovsky," The Pittsburg Post-Gazette 30 Apr. 2006, 3 Oct. 2008 <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/06120/685692-148.stm>.

final coming to terms? Not knowing is part of what makes *Suite Française*, with its jigsaw of fiction and nonfiction, so gripping." Was writing an escape, therapy, or an adieu? While we cannot be certain why she wrote, one of the fundamental reasons must have simply been that she had a story to tell. Like most who walk the earth, perhaps Némirovsky was just trying to make a living while making a positive impact in the world. Triumphantly, she has made a difference through an artistic oeuvre that helps shape, celebrate and reaffirm our humanity. Perhaps Denise Epstein and Elisabeth Gille recognized these possibilities, those of opening a pathway to salvation and initiating a reaffirmation of our humanity, upon reading their mother's words for the first time.

In order to bring to a close to the discussion of genre, there is one last critical element that merits attention: the way in which Epstein chose to dedicate this novel. On the third page of the novel, the following dedication appears:

> Sur les traces de ma mère et de mon père, pour ma soeur Elisabeth Gille, pour mes enfants et petits-enfants, cette Mémoire à transmettre, et pour tous ceux qui ont connu et connaissent encore aujourd'hui le drame de l'intolérance.

The phrases "sur les traces" and "cette Mémoire à transmettre," are loaded with symbolism. Epstein addresses the fundamental reasons why she handed this manuscript over to be published: to remember her mother and to fight against intolerance. Her decision arose not out of desires for fame or fortune, but out of a fervent desire to come to know her mother's last words of which this text (and metatext) provided the only traces. Epstein's use of a capital M is quite significant for it suggests that this text is not only part of Némirovsky's literary corpus but also of her *corps*, or body, itself. But there are non-personal overtones in the phrase that should allow us to see Némirovsky's personal story as a metaphor for all those who lost their lives in a similar way. In

this case, it is clear that Epstein saw this particular *Mémoire*, Suite française, not only as an all-too distant and painful memory, but an equally present and hopeful one. Epstein was just a teenager when her mother died, and this manuscript was the last piece of a priceless inheritance. While it would have been easier to have kept the manuscripts private, Epstein decided to carry on the battle that her mother had begun, a battle against hatred, cruelty, and intolerance. She dedicates her mother's work to those, past, present, and future who suffer from these (and other) injustices of the world, for they are the very battles against which Némirovsky fought.

The suitcase containing the manuscripts that Némirovsky handed over before being arrested would be the last memory that her daughters would have of their mother. In this sense, the text takes on a sacred and precious value. As any conscientious bearer of a masterpiece would do, Epstein and Gille have shared her mother's voice so that generations of readers might be touched by her art. While the original text has found its final resting place IMEC in France, thousands of copies have made their way into the hands of readers all over the world. Némirovsky's memory now penetrates our hearts. We sense that Epstein personifies her mother as a Memory to be shared with the world. There are so many layers to this term 'Mémoire,' and while pinpointing the exact implication behind Epstein's words may not be evident, it is clear that Némirovsky's daughter felt a responsibility to transmit her mother's last testimonial words. Thanks to unending love, and daunting courage, her daughters have initiated the process of witnessing in which we are all called to participate.

In the end, those closest to her have helped us resolve the question of what to call this text. Interestingly enough, Sandra Smith's translation of the dedication does not account for the phrase "sur les traces" or the capital M, which are crucial words that have been eliminated in the

English version. Smith writes, "I dedicate this novel to the memory of my mother . . ." which simply does not carry the same weight as the French "Sur les traces de ma mère . . ." Something was lost in the translation here, and perhaps we can attribute critics' perplexing questions of genre to this oversight. Yet, in the original French, it is clear, this is a "Mémoire à transmettre." Before we are able to transmit this Memory, we must decode it. As evidence suggests, nothing about the nature of Suite française or its author is simple or transparent. For all of the texts under examination in this study, classifying and analyzing by specific genre only distracts from discovering the profound messages these women's voices carry.

Némirovsky's authorial intentions

Even though what Némirovsky wrote may not appear to some as a 'testimonial account', it is in fact an invaluable eyewitness testimony of the war years written by a woman struggling to combat the evils of the world. If one reads Irène Némirovsky's manuscript notes to Suite française, there are indications of her authorial intentions to provide a testimony for all the ages. As a writer, she felt compelled to write a text that would not only withstand the test of time, but also serve as a testament to future generations. To this end, on June 2, 1942, exactly one year after the second round of Jewish statutes had been imposed in France, she wrote the following entry in her notebook:

> Ne jamais oublier que la guerre passera et que tout la partie historique pâlira. Tâcher de faire le plus possible de choses, de débats . . . qui peuvent intéresser les gens en 1952 ou 2052.[114]

Némirovsky, in making this written entry, clearly suggests her intentions to leave behind a legacy capable of revealing as much as possible about not only the situation in which she found herself, but also that which so many like her had experienced. Less than six weeks before her

[114] Némirovsky, SF, 531.

actual arrest and subsequent deportation, she was still actively engaged in creating a novel that would "interest people in 1952 or 2052." In any society, debate provides a vehicle for much needed understanding and tolerance. The writer's intentions suggest her hopes of creating a work that would incite debates and lead to a more charitable world. In spite of the imminent fate that awaited her, Némirovsky left this world knowing that the "war would pass" and that the historical part, or aspects, would soon "fade." What she, unfortunately, did not have the satisfaction of knowing is that she was in the process of composing a work that would resurface many years later only to fulfill one of her last wishes as a writer, that her art still be of interest today. Given all of the critical attention devoted to the author and to her work, it is clear that her intentions have withstood the test of time. Némirovsky would be satisfied in knowing that her work is still of interest today and may still be forty-three years from now in 2052.

In a similar entry on the same day, Némirovsky wrote of her worries of finishing the novel:

> Commencer à me préoccuper de la forme qu'aura ce roman terminé! Considérer que je n'ai pas encore fini la 2e partie, que je vois la 3e? Mais que la 4e et la 5e sont dans les limbes et quelles limbes! C'est vraiment sur les genoux des dieux pusique ça depend de ce que se passera. Et les dieux peuvent s'amuser à mettre 100 ans d'intervalle ou 1 000 ans comme c'est à la mode de dire: et moi je serai loin. Mais les dieux ne me feront pas ça. Je compte aussi beaucoup sur la prophétie de Nostradamus. 1944 Oh! God"[115]

Here, Némirovsky again demonstrates diligence as a writer by focusing not only on the content of her novel, but also its form. Furthermore, it is clear that she was very aware of the

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[115] Némirovsky, SF, 531-32.

precariousness of her social and political status in France. In spite of the crumbling world around her, we sense her knowing that she needed to continue writing. It appears that she chose to concentrate on the form her novel would take not only to meet the aesthetic end she sought to achieve, but also to "preoccupy" her mind in an effort to pass what must have been some terrifying days, what we now know to have been her last ones. Her sixth sense indicated that she would have no control over what happened to her novel as she knew its completion and destiny rested "on the knees of the gods." As fate would have it, the gods overseeing the survival of Némirovsky's work would not delight in placing 1,000 years between her writing the work and its publication, nor would they even take 60, let alone 100. Némirovsky is "far away," but only in her physical presence, for her lucid 'testimonial' voice has been forever immortalized in Suite française.

Discourse in Suite française

It is important to reiterate what Marion Halligan suggests about the appendixes of the text forming "another narrative, that of Némirovsky's life," and the role readers play in assembling the pieces of the puzzle.[116] Essentially what her text offers is a mixture of natural and fictive discourse. At the same time she writes about actual historical events in her notebooks, Némirovsky also represents these historical acts and events in the novelistic portion of the text. Indeed, the lines are blurred between these two types of discourse, and it is precisely from this space between natural and fictive discourse that her evocative testimony emerges. The writer's voice is transformed artistically and stylistically to create a powerful confirmation of past

[116] Halligan, "Love actually."

realities. Némirovsky's text subverts once fabricated, dominant discourse about *les Années noires.*

Foucault is instrumental in helping us to see that if language is capable of creating perceptions about the world, it is also capable of transforming them. He encourages us to question those ready-made notions that pervade our thoughts and give shape and form to our perceptions of the world. To reach new understandings, we must first recognize the inadequacies and breakdowns of our own cultural frames of reference. We must recognize and acknowledge our misconceptions and oversights about ourselves and others, and literature offers a means of doing so. Certainly in reference to *les Années noires,* there is no one more capable of helping us to reformulate our perceptions than Némirovsky. But beyond that, the fictional (textual) and personal (metatextual) narratives of her text challenge us to apprehend the ways we think about our very own past, present, and future.

At the same time that Némirovsky offers us a historically accurate account of daily life during *les Années noires,* she also offers glimpses into the life of the person behind the narration. Némirovsky wrote from a third person point of view yet, as discussed in the first chapter of this study, a third person narrative, especially one written in *style indirect libre,* is not always devoid of autobiographical influences. To this end, Alan Cheuse commented, "I don't know of a more striking recent case in which biography and artistic accomplishment are so intertwined."[117] Némirovsky's life story during *les Années noires* provides the context for this unusual twofold narrative. Just because one part of the narrative is fictional, that is no grounds for suppressing the subtle, powerful, and omnipresent testimonial voice of the author.

[117] Alan Cheuse, "Review of Suite Française by Irène Némirovsky" World Literature Today. 80.6, Nov.-Dec. 2006, 15 Jan. 2008<http://go.galegroup.com >.

There are moments in *Tempête en juin* and *Dolce*, when the narrative voice undergoes a transformation from *personnage* to *témoin*, from narrator's to writer's voice. The reader is left with the impression that Némirovsky herself is speaking vicariously through the narrator or character who subtly reveals the hidden voice of the author –-a voice most certainly colored by the political, historical, cultural, and social positions from which she wrote. These instances where Némirovsky seems to commandeer the narrator's voice appear quite subtly in the text allowing her to become at the same time a character and a witness in her own novel. It is precisely here that we encounter the writer herself, and it is through such instances that Némirovsky delivers a message directly to her readers. Even though she tried to guard against inserting personal thoughts into her writing, she was unsuccessful, which she overtly admitted. Sketching out the form the novel would take, she commented, "Mon idée est que cela se déroule comme un film, mais la tentation est grande par moments, et j'y ai cédé en paroles brèves ou bien dans l'épisode qui suit la séance à l'école libre en donnant mon propre point de vue."[118] In speaking about the cinematic quality of her text, she overtly admits having previously given into the temptation of inserting her personal point of view. This is clear evidence that Némirovsky, the witness, lends her voice to the narrator, as well as to other characters.

As the storyline of *Tempête en juin* unfolds, we begin to hear hints of the writer's voice, and the varying degrees of its presence. It is first exposed through Gabriel Corte, a rich writer, who in fact is not a double of Némirovsky. Nonetheless, we learn that he hated war because it posed an obstacle to his profession, and consequently, to his happiness. Némirovsky writes: "Il haïssait la guerre, elle menaçait bien plus que sa vie ou son bien-être; elle détruisait à chaque

[118] Némirovsky, SF, 527.

instant l'univers de la fiction, le seul où il se sentît heureux [. . .]."[119] The editorial apparatus of the novel shows these thoughts to be reflective of the writer's. Anissimov tells us that Irène was "extremêment malheureuse et solitaire" as a child and that she sought refuge from her "désespoir" in reading and writing.[120] Furthermore, in the manuscript notes, we find that Némirovsky found it increasingly difficult to stay focused on her writing as the war continued to rage. On October 13, 1941, she wrote the following in a letter addressed to Robert Esménard, the director of Albin Michel: "Comme vous vous en doutez, la vie ici est bien triste, et s'il n'y avait le travail . . . Ce travail lui-même devient pénible quand on n'est pas sûr du lendemain . . .".[121] Work on her novel seemed to provide the only relief from the torment of daily life in Issy l'Évêque, but even that became painful when faced with the prospect of a very uncertain future. The very next day, she sent a similar message to André Sabatier, the literary director at Albin Michel. Expressing her growing disquietude, she wrote:

> J'ai montré jusqu'ici autant de patience et de courage qu'il m'a été possible d'en fournir. Mais, que voulez-vous, il y a des moments très durs. Les faits sont là: impossibilité de travailler et nécessité d'assurer l'existence de 4 personnes. À cela s'ajoutent des vexations stupides—je ne peux pas aller à Paris; je ne peux pas faire venir ici les choses les plus indispensables à la vie, telles que couvertures, lits pour les enfants, etc., ni mes livres. [. . .]. Je ne vous raconte pas cela pour vous apitoyer, mais pour vous expliquer que mes pensées ne peuvent être que noires (. . .).[122]

Like the character in her novel, Gabriel Corte, Némirovsky despised the war because it posed an obstacle to living as a writer. Unlike Corte who was attached to frivolous things, she wanted only

[119] Némirovsky, SF, 53.

[120] Annissimov, préface, 13.

[121] Némirovsky, SF, 547.

[122] Némirovsky, SF, 547.

that which was necessary for survival. For both of them, however, war destroyed not only the universe of fiction in which she was able to seek refuge, at least for short periods of time, but it also shattered her real life. Added to her desperation were the stupid vexations, incapabilities of obtaining life's necessities. Stripped of even these humble privileges, Némirovsky's thoughts turned black. Of course, she was not alone in her sentiments, and that is precisely the point. Those in France during *les Années noires* felt these same dark sentiments when trying to carry on with daily life. We know that these were terrible, dark, and painful years for many who had the same difficulties obtaining provisions for their families. But Némirovsky's voice, while remaining objective, takes us beyond a typical history lesson. If we listen carefully to her words, we sense that her letters are not overtly emotional, as she mainly states facts. Recalling their context, however, these simple facts become a powerful portrayal of real human emotions.

Whereas a history book would be more inclined to list all of the reasons why people were unable to obtain food, such as cut supply lines, the black market, exploitation by the occupying force, etc., Némirovsky's focus was to illustrate realities through the action and emotions of her characters and the observations of her narrator. She was able to render such vivid human emotions because they were emotions she too had felt. In her manuscript notes, she writes: "Méditer aussi: the famous 'impersonality of Flaubert and his kind lies only in the greater fact with which they express their feelings---dramatizing them, embodying them in living form, instead of stating them directly."[123] By "embodying [feelings] in living form," the writer was forced to draw upon her own tangible experiences in order to give life to the emotional side of the characters. These contemplative measures support the fact that Némirovsky cleverly wove a

[123] Némirovsky, SF, 527. The words in English are original to the text, not a translation.

thread of her own voice into the thoughts, words, and deeds of her characters. With the help of an indirect style, Némirovsky, rather than explicitly stating personal facts and opinions, imparted them to the characters. Based on what some have suggested, Némirovsky not only wanted to prove her worth as a writer of novels and short stories, but also as one "whose talents went beyond fiction."[124] Mounting evidence seems to suggest that she achieved this goal through keen observations that vividly captured the decisive actions and, most importantly, emotions of those around her.

Through almost all of the characters in her novel, even those whose moral integrity is questionable, we detect traces of Némirovsky's voice and personal story. Gabriel Corte is the first of many characters to illustrate this chaotic "rêve confus" everyone seemed to be living.[125] So many of the characters lose their scruples, and through the Péricand family, Corte, Florence, Corbin, Arlette Corail, and Charles Langelet, we see at what point "la panique abolissait tout ce qui n'était pas instinct."[126] The narrator tells us that "rares étaient les gens qui regrettaient leurs richesses," and she eventually reveals the deplorable, perfidious, and self-serving actions of them all. Upon deciding to flee Paris, Madame Péricand, for example, was so caught up in maintaining the rites and rituals of preparing the house as if she were leaving on vacation that she inconceivably left behind her ailing father-in-law. Similarly, Charles Langelet, a pacifist, could think of nothing more than carefully packing his precious porcelain objects, because like Mme. Péricand, "il était attaché comme un chef à ses vieilles habitudes."[127] No one seemed to be

[124] Weiss, 140.

[125] Némirovsky, SF, 54.

[126] Némirovsky, SF, 72.

[127] Némirovsky, SF, 77.

able to grasp the magnitude of what was about to ensue under the Occupation, but Némirovsky understood. She writes:

> Ils agissaient en deux temps, eût-on dit, à demi dans le présent et plongés à demi dans le passé, comme si les évènements n'eussent pénétré que dans une faible partie de leur conscience, la plus superficielle, laissant tout tune région profonde endormie dans la quiétude.[128]

Némirovsky understood the calm before the storm, as she was no stranger to exile and war, and perhaps it is this foreknowledge that informed her writing. While it is the narrator whose voice projects these words, it is Némirovsky who had seized upon the notion of people being frozen in time and knowingly oblivious to present realities. Suspended between the past and present, many people remained immobile and settled into a life of peaceful indifference. Langelet, a pacifist who had plans to find a "coin tranquille, à la campagne" where he would live with the money he had accumulated until "les homme redeviennent sages," offers a prime example of this unresponsiveness.[129] In La Peste, Albert Camus poignantly showed the passivity of the inhabitants of Oran when faced with the mounting peril of the plague. While Camus' novel had not yet been published, Némirovsky understood that there were no such peaceful corners to be found in France during *les Années noires.* She knew all too well the impossibility of finding one's own peaceful haven in the country while feigning to carry on calmly with daily life. In failing to accept the fate being handed to them, many, knowingly or not, did not respond to the wake-up call that something was going terribly wrong.

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[128] Némirovsky, SF, 72.

[129] Némirovsky, SF, 79.

That the magnitude of the Occupation did not fully penetrate the consciousness of the French has been documented in non-literary texts as well. In Vichy France and the Jews, Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton write that after the Germans had taken Paris, "indifference seems to have been the predominant attitude [because] ordinary people had other things on their minds as they attempted to piece their lives together again." They go on to highlight that some head officials had reported the population had been utterly devastated and now suffered from "intellectual and moral anesthesia." Apathetic attitudes helped create an atmosphere in which personal preoccupations took precedence over kindness to those in need, especially those like Némirovsky, Jewish by birth, whom some unjustly associated with the fall of France.[130]

After the initial shock of the Occupation had dissipated and everyone settled into a new way of life, Némirovsky illustrates how egotism led to the moral degradation of the majority of her characters. The Michaud family, however, provides Némirovsky the chance to present a contrasting example to the self-serving majority. Rather than languishing over leaving an apartment they had occupied and possessions they had accumulated for sixteen years, Jeanne and Maurice Michaud quickly packed the bare necessities, including a picture of their son, Jean-Marie, a deployed soldier in the French army. Prepared to leave behind their memories, the Michauds arrive at their departure point only to learn that Monsieur Corbin, Maurice's boss, had given their seat to Corbin's mistress, Arlette. As the only noble, morally driven characters in *Tempête*, the presence of the Michauds suggests that Némirovsky was unbiased in her portrayal of the French. She sought to capture the actions and emotions of all types of people, not just those driven by self-interest and self-preservation. While it is true that the discourse in the novel

[130] For an excellent discussion of the roots of anti-Semitism in France, and other related issues, see Micahel R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, Vichy France and the Jews (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 16.

is fictionalized, it remains acutely grounded in reality confirmable through other historical documents.

History tells us that France was shaken to its core during the summer of 1940 when nearly three-fifths of the country was occupied by German forces, 1.5 million French had been taken as prisoners of war, the economy was weakening, and about four million people were on the run from the advancing enemy. As Marrus and Paxton point out, "It was human dislocation, though, that was the main mark of this disaster."[131] Némirovsky has proven herself to be quite the astute historian, for upon beginning work on Suite française in 1941, she had already grasped the severity of not only the physical dislocation of humans but also their psychological, emotional, and moral displacements. The Exodus provided the spark that allowed Némirovsky to harness the perfidious behaviors that led to the disarticulation of a nation that had prided itself on *liberté, fraternité,* and *égalité* for all.

Upon reaching their destinations and learning of the fall of Paris, the characters all appear dismayed, but these feelings quickly dissipate. Némirovsky hones in on the ephemeral nature of everyone's chagrin over the presence of the enemy. Upon hearing the news, Hortense, an acquaintance of Corte, begins to cry repeating, "Ça me fait quelque chose." A few others lament over the news until a man interjects, "Enfin, c'est comme ça, c'est comme ça, nous n'y pouvons rien."[132] And like that, the group dismisses the news while resuming the senseless conversation about the excellent dinner they had just eaten.

What is also remarkable in Némirovsky's fictive discourse is the presence of a female tone and insight. While she does posit more men's reactions in *Tempête* than in *Dolce,* overall

[131] Marrus and Paxton, 14-15.

[132] Némirovsky, SF, 127.

they remain quite stoic. The one exception is the German officer, Bruno von Faulk, who appears in the second volume, but he shall be the object of a later discussion. For now, in the Péricand family's reactions to the news of the armistice, we observe that the men were "silencieux" and "baissaient la tête," finding it inappropriate to speak of their "désespoir." They waited silently for the "cauchemar" to end. On the other end of the spectrum, the narrator shows some women's sensitivities to have been more affected by such grave news:

> On entendait leurs murmures, leurs soupirs; pleurant sur les malheurs de la Patrie, elles la voyaient sous les traits chéris des maris, des fils qui se battaient encore. Leur douleur était plus animale que celle de leurs compagnons, plus simple aussi et plus bavarde . . .[133]

These words reveal more than just a gendered reaction. The women here were distraught by the Occupation, and the pain they expressed was more pronounced and savage than that of their male counterparts. Unlike the men, they were much more talkative and willing to engage in conversation about their feelings and attitudes. When looking at Némirovsky's particular situation, there is no evidence in her notes or correspondence to suggest that she had the opportunity to speak with other women about personal feelings and fears; thus, the conversations she held about the Occupation took place predominantly in the pages of her manuscript and manifested itself through characters in her novel. Through Lucile Angellier, the main female character in *Dolce* who is most representative of the writer, Némirovsky reveals her own conflicts. However, in keeping with her goal to provoke as many futures debates as possible and to be objective in giving her testimony, Némirovsky provides a contrasting female example. Yet, even in this deplorable character, a glint of Némirovsky's voice surfaces.

[133] Némirovsky, SF, 130.

Having abandoned her lover, stolen his car, and taken refuge in a hotel room with the much younger Hubert Péricand, Arlette Corail, a "dancer," proves herself to be quite a ruthless gold-digger. Unlike the women described above, she is not even momentarily sickened about by news of the armistice. She is, however, worried about exploiting Hubert to make a connection to the Péricand family who had "des relations brillantes dans le monde officiel."[134] Other than this, she is preoccupied with finding her preferred American make-up which, under the circumstances, would be increasingly difficult to locate. Like many, Arlette is quite impatient for daily rituals to resume:

> Qu'un mode de vie, n'importe lequel, s'établisse; tout cela, cette guerre, ces révolutions, ces grands bouleversements de l'histoire, pouvait exciter les hommes, mais les femmes . . . Ah! Les femmes ne ressentaient que de l'ennui.[135]

In her notebook, Némirovsky wrote a passage similar to the one above, and while Arlette is not representative of Némirovsky, she uses her character to convey the depth and breadth of her own feelings. When compared with the following entry in her notebook made on July 3, 1942, we detect a hint of the writer's voice. She wrote: "Décidément, et à moins que les choses ne durent et ne se compliquent en durant! Mais que ça finisse bien ou mal!"[136] Even if not for the same motivations, Arlette and Némirovsky, longed for the end of the war.

It is at this point that Némirovsky begins to build the bridge to the second volume of her novel by introducing the first German soldier who enters the village of Busy (modeled after Issy l'Évêque) asking for "a light." A Frenchman lights his cigarette while inquiring in German if the

[134] Némirovsky, SF, 162.

[135] Némirovsky, SF, 163.

[136] Némirovsky, SF, 532.

armistice has been signed to which the German responds that he does not know. In this simple exchange of actions and words, the villagers' preconceptions about the inhumanity of the occupier are shattered. The narrator reveals:

> Et la résonance humaine de cette parole, ce geste, tout ce qui prouvait jusqu'à l'évidence que l'on avait affaire non à quelque monstre altéré de sang mais à un soldat comme les autres, cela brisa tout à coup la glace entre le village et l'ennemi, entre le paysan et l'envahisseur.[137]

By this simple gesture, the ice had been broken between the occupier and the occupied, and preconceived notions of bestiality dispelled. The villagers express a variety of reactions:

> Un mode d'expressions contradictoires se lisait sur son visage: du soulagement que tout fût fini, de la tristesse et de la colère que tout fût fini de cette façon, les souvenirs du passé, la peur de l'avenir; tous ces sentiments semblaient se refléter sur les traits des autres. Les femmes essuyèrent leurs yeux pleins de larmes ; les hommes silencieux gardaient un air buté et dur.[138]

Némirovsky's uncanny ability to personify this symphony of human behaviors and emotions stems from her own inner conflict of where to turn for help. While in Issy l'Évêque, she witnessed the contradictory expressions of sadness and rage on the faces of the inhabitants longing for the past, fearing for the future, yet seemingly immobile in the present. However, it is ultimately the theme of humanity that resonates as one of the central melodies in *Dolce*. Némirovsky certainly struggled with her own conflicted feelings about the Occupation, but she boldly bore the afflictions of war while recording her testimony in both natural and fictive discourse.

While *Tempête* is marked by the fury and turbulence of the Exodus from Paris, *Dolce*, set in the provinces, is lugubrious and ruminative in tone. Many critics have equated this portion of

[137] Némirovsky, SF, 164.

[138] Némirovsky, SF, 165.

the novel to Vercors' Le Silence de la mer, and while this is a valid comparison, Némirovsky's text seems more complex. Through the relationship between Lucile Angellier, a sensible young woman married to an unfaithful Frenchman now a POW, and Bruno von Faulk, a charismatic German officer occupying her home, Némirovsky exposes the profundity and intricacies of human interactions and sentiments during wartime. Complexity reaches new heights as the writer focuses on morally ambiguous issues like the friendship between these seemingly innocent people bound by the constraints of war to be enemies.

In the last pages of *Dolce,* the narrator reveals that the benefit of war is that it strips people of their appearances revealing the authentic being hidden inside. The narrator admits:

> On sait bien que l'être humain est complexe, multiple, divisé, à surprises, mais il faut un temps de guerre ou de grands boulversements pour le voir. C'est le plus passionnant et le plus terrible spectacle [. . .]; le plus terrible parce qu'il est plus vrai; on ne peut se flatter de connaître la mer sans l'avoir vue dans la tempête comme dans le calme. Celui-là seul connaît les hommes et les femmes qui les a observés en un temps comme celui-ci [. . .]. Celui-là seul se connaît lui-même.[139]

Lucile's thoughts remind us that just as one cannot pretend to know the sea without having endured its raging tides and tranquil waters, one cannot pretend to know others without having observed them in wartime and in peacetime. Moreover, to understand oneself is to have witnessed others in their own complexities and under a variety of circumstances. Again, the reader cannot help but hear Némirovsky's voice breaking through these metaphorical lines. In many ways, Lucile's character presents the most comprehensive perspective of a woman's life under the Occupation. In some respects, it is through Lucile, more so than any other, that we recognize not only Némirovsky's voice, but also her very presence. Némirovsky was not a

[139] Némirovsky, SF, 511.

stranger to the "grands bouleversements" of *les Anneés noires* or of any other moment from her life, as she had never experienced an extended period of peace.[140] Lucile, who weathers both the calm and the storm in Bussy, incarnates the passionate, yet terrible, spectacle that Némirovsky lived in Issy, and that which she had lived in Russia and elsewhere. Because of turbulent times throughout her life, we also hear evidence to support the possibility that Némirovsky was coming to a better understanding of herself, just as Lucile does in the text.

By juxtaposing Lucile to her crotchety mother-in-law, Madame Angellier, Némirovsky affectingly illustrates the conflicted emotions of curiosity and repudiation brought about by the presence of the occupier. While Madame Angellier is repulsed by his presence, Lucile is so immensely interested in Bruno that the first night he stays in her home she cannot sleep. The narrator helps us understand the inner conflict she feels:

> Lucile ferma à demi les yeux. Quelle paix, triste et profonde . . . Par moments, quelque chose en elle se réveillait, se révoltait, réclamait du bruit, du mouvement, du monde. De la vie, mon dieu, de la vie! Combien de temps durerait cette guerre? Combien d'années faudrait-il demeurer ainsi, dans cette sombre léthargie, ployé, docile, écrasé comme un bétail sous l'orage?"[141]

At the same time troubled by the occupier's presence, she is also intrigued. It is the subtlety with which the narrator's voice shifts while explaining Lucile's conflicted reaction that invites us to peek into Némirovsky's own tormented soul.[142] In these words, we cannot help but hear the writer's voice crying out against being "crushed like a beast in the storm." Like Lucile who felt

[140] Lienhardt and Philipponnat, 366. They write, "Accoutumance au peril. Irène Némirovsky a traversé le pogrom de Kiev, la Révolution russe, la guerre civile finlandaise. Elle n'a pas eu peur. 'Je n'ai jamais connu une époque paisible, expliquait-elle à la radio en 1934, j'ai toujours vécu dans l'angoisse et souvent le danger. Eh bien, malgré tout, j'ai mené une vie de jeune fille normale, je travaillais, je lisais comme maintenant." They took this information from a radio interview conducted by Jeanne-Marie Veil in 1934 entitled, "*Comment travaille une romancière."*

[141] Némirovsky, SF, 329.

[142] Lienhardt and Philipponnant, 343.

helplessly immobile wondering when the war would end, the writer's notebook and correspondence suggest she felt the same. For women who were restless, it could be that the Germans offered a welcome distraction to their periods of lassitude, sexual desire, and longing for a return to normalcy.

Némirovsky longed to be back in Paris, but in Issy, she was isolated from the world. As of October 1940, it was still uncertain whether this village would become part of the free zone, so Némirovsky waited there hoping she would soon be able to resume writing. Since Michel had lost his job, her income was critical to the family's well-being. Feeling that she had done nothing wrong and would be immune to threatening racial laws, she refused to flee Issy.[143] While living in the Hôtel des Voyageurs, Némirovsky's husband maintained a relationship with the officers billeted there because he was the only one in the village fluent in German. We learn that these soldiers were friendly and spent their time drinking beer, playing pool, and tossing little Elisabeth Némirovsky up in the air. Surrounded by Germans in a French village, during the first months of life under Occupation, the writer ambivalently asked herself, "Faut-il parler de la guerre?" Much like Lucile who wanted to know more about Bruno, Némirovsky, was anxious for answers about the future.

History has shown that no one else was really willing to talk about the war, and those who were had to do so clandestinely. Némirovsky overcame such qualms and did not hide from her origins. In reality, she wrote letters to those whose favor she felt might offer some form of salvation to her and her family. She even went so far as writing a letter to Pétain himself in which she asked to be considered a "desirable" foreigner. In a letter dated September 13, 1940,

[143] Lienhardt and Philipponnant, 345-46.

she wrote, "Je ne puis croire, Monsieur le Maréchal, que l'on ne fasse aucune distinction entre les indésirables et les étrangers honorables . . ."[144] By December of 1940, her vanity faded as she grew weary that no one would be able to save her. In a letter to Jean Vignaud, who had hired her in 1936, she wrote:

> Vous me dites que j'oublie la situation dans laquelle nous nous trouvons [. . .] c'est justement parce que cette situation est, pour moi comme, hélas pour bien d'autres, tragique que je me débats pour sauvegarder mon gagne-pain et celui de mes enfants. Mais je commence à croire que c'est impossible.[145]

Ironically, she had already written the provisional lines of Suite française on November 21, 1940, just weeks prior to having written these words to Vignaud. Her letter reveals that she had no illusions about the precariousness of her situation. And the timing of the commencement of her novel suggests that her hopes of avoiding persecution were fading for she "began to believe that [saving her life, profession, and family] was impossible."

These anecdotes about Némirovsky's biography are important because they seem to underscore an intrigue with the Germans she met in Issy, largely because they appeared civilized and humane. Given that scholars have confirmed that Vichy set in motion many anti-Jewish laws before the Germans did, it is plausible that Némirovsky, in her desperation, felt that they might be able to save her.[146] Some critics might question the authenticity of her love for France given that she portrayed the Germans rather favorably in *Dolce*, but it only makes sense, in light of the indifference with which some of her pleas had been received, that she would have done so. After

[144] Lienhardt and Philipponnant, 347.

[145] Lienhardt and Philipponnant, 353.

[146] Marrus and Paxton, 3-4. They point out that the repeal of the *loi Marchand-eau* on August 27, 1940 reauthorized the power of the press to denigrate racial groups like the Jews. Prior to that on July 22, 1940, a law to reevaluate the status of those naturalized in France since 1927 in an effort to cull out those found "undesirable" had been implemented by Pétain himself.

several failed attempts to get through to any one in the French hierarchy capable of helping her, maybe she saw untapped potential in the Germans' abilities to assist. After all, many of the soldiers, having read some of her works, were quite familiar with Némirovsky.[147]

Throughout *Dolce*, as in *Tempête,* Némirovsky again seizes upon the "affectation de froide indifférence" of some residents of Bussy whom she described as unable to talk about anything of real substance or importance like Pétain or the sinking of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kébir.[148] Once more, Lucile breaks the silence and confronts some very real issues of the era, like female collaboration. During a visit to her seamstress, who happens to be in a relationship with a German soldier, Lucile confronts and warns her of the repercussions and dangers of such actions. Ironically, Lucile longs for a similar affirmation of liberty to solicit Bruno's affection, while struggling to combat such desires:

> Il la regarda fixement sans répondre; elle envia tout à coup ces enfants qui prenaient leur plaisir sans souci du temps, de la guerre, du malheur. Il lui sembla que, parmi un peuple d'esclaves, eux seuls étaient libres, "et de la vraie liberté", se dit-elle.[149]

As history has confirmed, women *Collabos* who engaged in relationships with German soldiers were publically shamed after the war. However, through these two characters, Némirvosky embodies the delicacy and complexity of this situation in which many women of her time found themselves, longing to be free from the constraints of war. On the one hand, Lucile seems to suggest that having a relationship with the enemy is wrong, and on the other, she envies her ability to disregard the potential damaging consequences.

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[147] Philipponnat and Lienhardt, 344.

[148] Némirovsky, SF, 358.

[149] Némirovsky, SF, 401.

It seems as though Lucile's condemnation is hypocritical since she desires the same, but as Némirovsky will show, that is not the case. First of all, wartime often implies that people act according to altered social standards, doing what they can to protect themselves while trying to carry on a normal life. For many women whose significant others were in prisoner camps or elsewhere, they viewed the occupier as being simply "des gens comme nous" who offered a welcome distraction from the inconveniences and disruptions of war.[150] Like Vercors had done in Le Silence de la mer, Némirovsky's novel suggests, that the German soldiers were often far more civilized and cultured than the natives, and invited an appreciation of their refinement. In this relationship between guest and host, we see the writer's humanity for she does not offer up a condemnation of either character, but makes us see that wartime is capable of blurring the lines defining morality.

Shortly after this scene in *Dolce*, Lucile returns home to find herself alone with Bruno. It is in this unforgettable instant that Némirovsky illustrates that moments of sweetness, even if only ephemeral, are possible during wartime. While nothing romantic transpires between Bruno and Lucile, their dialogue discretely unveils the voice of the writer and her own desires for happiness, peace, and justice. Lucile, disheartened by the German's story of having abandoned his pursuit of music for the war, asserts: "Je pense . . . que l'individu ne devrait pas être sacrifié ainsi. Je parle pour nous tous. On nous a tout pris! Amour, famille . . . C'est trop!"[151] We could very easily attribute these words to Némirovsky who also shared the belief that war destroyed personal liberty. Her message, however, is not devoid of hope. It is music, and the power of art,

[150] Némirovsky, SF, 398.

[151] Némirovsky, SF, 409.

that are central to the discussion of happiness and peace. Moved by the war-themed sonata Bruno plays, Lucile "ressentait en son âme une sorte de chaleur jamais éprouvée" whose "mouvements eux-mêmes étaient plus legers, plus adroits que de coutume."[152] Summed up best by the words of Bruno, Némirovsky helps us to understand that out of the impossibilities of war (like the love between these two) and its hostilities sometimes springs an eternal moment of tranquility and contentment. Whether or not Némirovsky experienced any moments like these of her own is difficult to know, but her art, and the hopes it offers, affirms that she desired joy and serenity for all.

In subsequent chapters, Némirovsky continues to focus on the war as a universal *malheur,* and a thief of freedom. While the connections between the metatext and novel are not as explicit in *Dolce* as in *Tempête,* it is the humanity of the relationship between Lucile and Bruno that takes center stage. Through an interior monologue, the narrator reveals Lucile's most tormented feelings toward their friendship:

> Je ne fais rien de mal. C'est l'ami le plus respectueux, les livres, la musique, les longues conversations, nos promenades [. . .] Ce qui les rend coupables, c'est l'idée de la guerre, de ce malheur universel. Mais il n'en est pas plus responsable que moi! Ce n'est pas notre faute. Qu'on nous laisse tranquilles . . . Qu'on nous laisse! [. . .] Je demande moins la liberté extérieure, celle de voyageur, de quitter cette maison (quoique ce serait un bonheur inimaginable!), que d'être libre intérieurement, choisir ma direction à moi, m'y tenir, ne pas suivre l'essaim. Je hais cet esprit communautaire dont on nous rebatte les oreilles. Les Allemands, Les Français, les gaullistes s'entendent tous sur un point : il faut vivre, penser, aimer avec les autres, en fonction d'un État, d'un pays, d'un parti. Oh, mon Dieu ! je ne veux pas ! Je suis une pauvre femme inutile; je ne sais rien mais je veux être libre ! Des esclaves nous devenons [. . .] la guerre nous envoie ici ou là , nous prive de bien-être, nous enlève le pain de la bouche ; qu'on me laisse au moins le droit de juger mon destin . . . [153]

[152] Némirovsky, SF, 412.

[153] Némirovsky, SF, 456.

Like so many other moments in the text, it is difficult not to recognize Némirovsky's voice in these words. While there seems to be no parallel between the fictional relationship (fueled perhaps by sexual desire) Lucile has with Bruno and Némirovsky's real life, their friendship serves as a metaphor allowing the writer to express her own heart's desires to be free, free to determine the course of her life. The narrator and Lucile's voices are intricately laced with the writer's. A victim of war's menace and enslavement herself, Némirovsky seems to be crying out for freedom, not the superficial kind, but that which comes from within and liberates the soul. We gather from this lamentation that she was adamantly opposed to the community spirit which led many to follow the masses, and as previous actions and words proved, she was quite the rebel and wanted nothing more out of life than to be able to have the opportunity to determine her own destiny. Amidst her distressed and troubled soul, one thing was clear, she wanted to be free.

To reinforce the value she placed on happiness, liberty, and peace, Némirovsky concludes her portrayal of Bruno:

> Il n'était pas uniquement soldat du Reich. Il n'était pas mû simplement par les intérêts du régiment et de la patrie. Il était le plus humain des hommes. Il songea qu'il cherchait comme tous les êtres le bonheur, le libre épanouissement de ses facultés et que [. . .] ce désir légitime était constamment contrarié par une sorte de raison d'État qui s'appelait la guerre, sécurité publique, nécessité de maintenir le prestige de l'armée victorieuse. [. . .] Mais ce que les Français n'auraient pu comprendre, c'est qu'il n'était pas orgueilleux ni arrogant, mais sincèrement humble, effrayé de la grandeur de sa tâche.[154]

Longing for the possibility to love Lucile, which he understood to be "irréalisable," Bruno finally comes to the conclusion that through liberation of the soul, this love was no longer impossible.

[154] Némirovsky, SF, 486.

He proclaims, "En mon âme, je suis libre."[155] And it is perhaps this lasting impression that Némirovsky wanted to leave of *Dolce*, that is of possibilities that open to us once we have freed ourselves from the constraints and expectations placed upon us by social, political, and cultural institutions. For Bruno, it is only upon shedding loyalties to such obligations as "public security" and "the necessity of maintaining the victor's prestige" that he is finally emancipated to seek happiness and the free expression of his thoughts.

Perhaps it would have been too compromising to allow this budding romance to develop into more than a friendship, and so Némirovsky does not. In the end, Bruno is sent to the Eastern front, but not before finally learning that he meant something to Lucile. Before departing, he gives her a print of a sailboat at sea, one he describes as having an appropriate subject, "Un temps menaçant, noir, un navire qui s'éloigne . . . et tout au loin une ligne de clarté à l'horizon . . . un vague, très pâle espoir . . ."[156] In one last striking metaphor, Némirovsky leaves us with the impression that hope for a better day is on the horizon. Even though weak and pale for many years, the light at the end of *les Années noires*, thanks to voices like hers, has become increasingly illuminating.

Conclusion

For the simple reason that Némirovsky is not the survivor, but rather, her text, knowing the context of Suite française is crucial to understanding the complexities and ambiguities of Irène Némirovsky and how she saw the history of *les Années noires* unfolding before her very eyes. The context, as Kaplan suggests, adds "a shimmering sense of surplus value" to the content of the novel. When readers do not choose content over context, but read in such a way that the

[155] Ibid.

[156] Némirovsky, SF, 509.

two combine, great literature emerges. The resulting discourse reinforces the power of art showing that, when combined, text and metatext can provide an invaluable testimony.

It is true that this text is shocking when posited against once prevailing thoughts about the heroes of the Resistance and the wicked Collaborationists. Without a doubt, the text would have been far too scandalous for publication in the immediate aftermath of the war because its content and context told a story that no one wanted to hear or admit and furthermore defied the very myths those institutions in power sought to advance. Unfortunately, it is still a story that some do not want to hear. Cultural, political, historical, and social developments post 1970 have largely proven these myths devoid of truth, and thanks to evolving discoveries about *les Années noires,* we can now approach Némirovsky's text, and others like it, more objectively, all the while seeing for ourselves the misnomers that might have previously influenced and formed our perceptions of realities.

Some suggest that she was foolish for not having fled France, and maybe that is true. It is difficult to understand why anyone would knowingly remain in such a dangerous situation for many years, but she must have had a reason. Lienhardt and Phillipponnat suggest that she had no other choice because of the family's financial predicament. Secondly, they are quick to reiterate that Némirovsky, at least in the beginning, did not feel threatened by the presence of the Germans in Issy. Did Christian beliefs govern her decision to weather the storm? Or did she feel that those with whom she felt connected, like Sabatier and Esménard, would be able to protect her and her family? Was the relationship with German officers that she and her husband had established while living in Issy enough to protect them from the fate that awaited? We can only seek answers in her writing.

There are no explicit statements of Némirovsky's Christian beliefs in her text; however, in the sketches for *Captivité,* the projected third volume of Suite française, she wrote the following about Jean-Marie Michaud, a young soldier from her novel:

> Naturellement, il voudrait la revanche de la France mais il se rend compte que ce n'est pas un but car qui dit revanche dit haine et vengeance, la guerre éternelle et le chrétien que gène l'idée de l'enfer et du châtiment éternel; il est lui ennuyé par cette idée qu'il y aura toujours un plus fort et un plus faible; il va donc vers l'unification . . . Ce qu'il désire [. . .] c'est la concorde et la paix. Or le collaborationnisme tel qu'actuellement il se pratique le dégoûte, et de l'autre côté, il voit le communisme qui convient à Benoît mais pas à lui.[157]

This young soldier had participated in the defeat of France, and naturally wanted revenge on the enemy, but felt conflicted. Due to his values, he rejects vengeance as a legitimate response because for Jean-Marie, revenge spoke only of hatred when what he really sought was peace and harmony. Given the choice of Collaboration or Communism as a course of action, he would choose neither. Contrasting Jean-Marie's ideals with those of Némirovsky, the writer appeared to be working out her own response to such a question. In her efforts not to take political sides in her narration of Jean-Marie, she wrote:

> Il n'y a pas à prendre parti. Mon parti: régime bourgeois représenté par Angleterre malheureusement fichu, demande du moins à être renouvelé car au fond il est immuable dans son essence; mais il ne se reprendra sans doute qu'après ma mort: reste donc en présence deux formes de socialisme. Ne m'enchantent ni l'un ni l'autre mais there are facts! Un d'eux me rejette, donc. . . le second. . . Mais ceci est hors de la question. En tant qu'écrivain je dois poser correctement le problème.[158]

The above quote, which actually precedes the previous one in her manuscript, is most certainly representative of the writer's thoughts on two forms of socialism to which she would

[157] Némirovsky, SF, 536.

[158] Némirovsky, SF,535.

not submit, and to which she would not submit the characters in her novel. The writer valorizes putting forth an accurate representation of the polemics of *les Années noires.* We see her struggle to remain neutral and objective in depicting the tensions that existed between the choices many people of her time had to make. The letter Michel Epstein addressed to Otto Abetz reaffirms that Némirovsky "ne s'est jamais occupé[e] de politique."[159] The denial of an official French citizenship allowed her to adopt a position of an outsider, consequently helping her to become an objective witness. Admitting a personal preference for England's government, she dismisses that option for her novel because of the impossibility of its occurrence before her own death. The striking notion here is that Némirovsky herself was unwilling to posit hatred and vengeance as a solution to the humiliation Jean-Marie had suffered, just as she was unwilling to submit both herself and this character in her novel to either form of socialism. We do not know how Jean-Marie's fictional destiny would have played out, but that is not the point.

In addition, the above words leave us to wonder if she might have written a similar prefatory note to the readers of Suite française. Had she done so, might it have resembled the above quote from her manuscript in which she subtly reveals the objective position and nonchalant attitude she adopted? Unfortunately, we will never know. Yet, given what the opening lines of the novel reveal about the author's intentions to illuminate the shadows of *les Années noires,* we can be sure that Némirovsky was engaged in being an honest, credible witness. She did not seem influenced by propaganda or political ideals that pervaded many people's beliefs under the Occupation, nor did her thoughts seem commensurate with those of the Resistance.

[159] Michel Epstein's letter to Otto Abetz, German Ambassador, in Némirovsky, SF, 554.

There are two discoveries we can glean from the connection between Jean-Marie and Némirovsky. First, it illustrates her intentions to be objective while portraying the issues in a correct and just manner. Again, it is the verb *devoir* that shows us that as a writer, she felt a duty to attempt to establish her own neutrality before capturing the historical essence of the struggles she observed. An objective approach is vital to a testimony administered in front of a court of law where one has sworn to tell the truth, and this eyewitness paradigm is sometimes useful with regard to literary testimony because as Hutton suggests, "A lack of affect is consistently equated with truth."[160] Secondly, Némirovsky's valorization of peace and harmony suggest that these Christian principles might have guided her actions, thoughts, and writing. While some like Franklin have questioned the sincerity of her conversion to Christianity, others like Weiss have hinted that later works, especially those published post 1937, reveal the genuineness behind the switch. This is beyond the scope of this study, but would be a very interesting point for further inquiry. In looking again at Denise Epstein's dedication, the battle against intolerance comes to mind. Denise understood the message of Suite française not as one of abhorrence for those who persecuted her mother, but as one capable of promoting peace and understanding among those with dissenting worldviews. But it is ultimately Némirovsky who confirms in her own words the necessity for tolerance and peace:

> Je fais ici serment de ne jamais plus reporter ma rancune, si justifiée-soit-elle, sur une masse d'hommes quels que soient race, religion, conviction, préjugés, erreurs.[161]

Here, the writer promises never again to express her resentment, even if it is justifiable, toward any particular people based on their race, religion, convictions, prejudices or errors. This is a

[160] Hutton, 13.

[161] Némirovsky, SF, 522.

strong statement of principles that mirror the prized French virtue of tolerance. With the emergence of the *Lumières* and the *Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du cityoen* in the eighteenth century, the religious and cultural notions of tolerance have been at the cornerstone of French society. While it is true that Némirovsky's pre-1937 anti-Semitic tendencies contradict these words written in her notes on June 28, 1941, we should not disregard their potential to clear up some misnomers about Irène Némirovsky's legacy.

No doubt, Némirovsky, like all humans, had her faults, but she certainly had her strengths too. The mere presence of her literary testimony suggests that she appears to have been courageous and calm in spite of the hellacious torment she and her family experienced during the Second World War. After all, she was able to continue writing until the bitter end. In revisiting one of her previous texts, a central question emerges from Les Chiens et les loups, a novel published in 1940, one that is capable of helping clarify the writer's potentially ambiguous motivations for testifying. In this particular text, as well as in Suite française, Némirovsky indirectly asks if we too would refuse to see ourselves as we really are with both our strengths and weaknesses. Némirovsky seemed not care what others thought of her or what she had said, and maybe this is due to the fact that she somehow knew she would never live to face such questions as why she had portrayed the vices of those whom she found displeasing. Yet maybe the seemingly carefree position she adopted arose out of her own certitude for having told the truth. Obviously she felt this way, for she wrote, "I know I am telling the truth." Even though she knew that what she had written in Les Chiens et les loups would not be pleasing to some people, and that some of them might even harbor resentment toward her, she held fast to the belief of having provided a valid testimony.

Nonetheless, it is critical to remember that Suite française is an incomplete testimony. Aside from some rough sketches in her notebook, we have no idea how *Captivité, Batailles,* and *La paix* would have ended, nor do we know how her life would have evolved had she survived Auschwitz.[162] But in looking at her last words, as the personal narrative in the metatext suggests, we sense the evolution of her views from the time she began writing Suite française . . . from "Mon Dieu! Que me fait ce pays?" to "Pour finir, l'accent est posé sur l'amour de Lucile et de Jean-Marie et sur la vie éternelle. [. . .] Ce qui en somme correspondrait à ma conviction profonde. Ce qui demeure: 1) Notre humble vie quotidienne 2) L'art 3) Dieu." [163] Here, one can sense the progression of her thoughts. The latter of these two phrases explicitly reveals what mattered: humble daily living, art, and God. These words repudiate the unfair judgement of Némirovsky as "a writer who made her name by trafficking in the most sordid anti-Semitic stereotypes" that some like Franklin have proposed. In fact, the impression with which one is left after having carefully examined both the fictional and personal narratives in this text and metatext is one of a tenacious, courageous, dedicated, and morally conscientious writer who was committed to telling the truth dictated by the historical, social, cultural and political circumstances in which she found herself living.

In her *prévoyance*, Némirovsky seemed to understand the challenges of disrupting patterns of cultural regularities, and that is why she chose to write a text capable of causing a disturbance to such practices. In her notebook appears the following:

[162] Némirovsky, SF, 530. These are the suggested titles for the third, fourth, and fifth portions of Suite francaise.

[163] Némirovsky, SF, 521, 536.

> En somme, il n'y a que le premier choc qui compte. On s'habitue à tout, tout ce qui se fait en zone occupée: les massacres, la persécution, le pillage organisé sont comme de flèches qui enfonceraient dans la boue! . . . dans la boue des cœurs.[164]

One chance is all she would be granted for making an impression upon her readers, one chance to give a shocking testimony that might force them to awaken from their "calme quiétude." She knew all too well the adaptability of human beings, and she understood the readiness with which they were capable of turning a blind eye to certain inconvenient realities of wartime like massacres and persecutions. Through a combination of natural and fictive discourse, her text has achieved the sought-after shock factor, and it has not only caused a disturbance among attentive readers but stirred them to take part in the witnessing process. In spite of the difficult task of facing the truth, and regardless of the discomfort felt when dealing with subjects considered to be taboo, we should all accept this same moral responsibility to committing ourselves to the truth. Némirovsky is a courageous reminder impelling us to confront our own faults and strengths while striving to promote tolerance and peace.

[164] Némirovsky, SF, 523.

Chapter 3---Marguerite Duras, La Douleur

"C'est dans ce silence-là que la guerre sourd à travers le sable et le vent."[165]

Another voice from the past, Introduction to Marguerite Duras

Since her death in 1996, several scholars have written biographies of the enigmatic woman of letters, Marguerite Duras. Among those who have consecrated their efforts to unmasking some of the ambiguities surrounding this writer and her oeuvre are Laure Adler, who published Marguerite Duras with Gallimard in 1998, and Jean Vallier, who published C'était Marguerite Duras, tome I, 1914-1945, with Fayard in 2006. One of the main differences in the two biographies is that Adler had been granted Duras' permission to pursue the project fifteen years prior to its publication, whereas Vallier began his project after Duras' death. Vallier, however, had been friends with Duras since 1969.[166] One point upon which these biographers and other scholars agree is that Duras' literary oeuvre is largely autobiographical; yet, as Vallier indicates the raw facts of Duras' life are largely absent from previous studies on the author.[167] As he suggests, without a better understanding of her life's trajectory, it is challenging to attempt to explain her literary and film choices and her subsequent life passions. This is precisely why Vallier chose to reconstruct 'la verité historique' of Duras' life with as much precision as possible. Jean Vallier who committed ten years of research to Duras' life and writing, explains his motivation for engaging in such a project, "J'ai voulu savoir comment cette vie s'intégrait

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[165] Duras, La Douleur, 83.

[166] Aliette Armel, "Un personnage héroique: Entretien avec Jean Vallier," Magazine litteraire 452 (2006): 36.

[167] Ibid. Jean Vallier states, "J'ai commencé ce travail peu de temps après sa mort qui m'a beaucoup touchée. J'ai relu son oeuvre, ce qui avait été écrit à son propos et j'ai été frappé par l'absence d'informations précises concernant sa vie: les faits, tels qu'ils étaient avant d'être eventuellement repris dans ses livres, n'avaient pas été établis."

dans tout ce qu'elle avait traversé: deux continents, des périodes politiques très différentes." Vallier goes on to clarify that he wanted to focus on the works in which Duras' voice resonates still today.[168] La Douleur is one of the most profound concretizations of this resonance. For her part, Adler was drawn to Duras' life story because in spite of the fact that so much had been written about her, there still were so many unknowns.

In many respects, my desires to incorporate a chapter on Duras into this study stem from similar observations about the still nebulous nature of her life and writing, particularly within the context of *les Années noires.* But rather than trying to reconstruct the historical truth or accuracy of her life's events to fill in the gaps, as Vallier and Adler have already attempted, I will focus on Duras' voice as heard in La Douleur as a testimony capable of helping us to better understand some of the traumatic consequences of Second World War, which are indeed still actively evolving today.[169] Marguerite Duras' writing and life offer a fine illustration of the impact war can have on a human being, and upon reading her story, one realizes that it can provoke as many questions as it clarifies. Her testimonial voice adds a new dimension to our perspective on this historical period, leading us on a voyage beginning with what seemed like indifference to the war, to collaborative tendencies, to resistance, to communism. Certainly, this is an unusual trajectory to follow.

As with Némirovsky and Delbo, Duras' life experiences during the Second World War illustrate the complexity of the decisions with which many people were presented; yet, the complexities with which she dealt were not common to all. Duras' life represents another

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[168] Armel, 36.

[169] This point reiterates one that I bring up in Chapter 1 in which Felman and Laub underscore the fact that the history of the Second World War is not over and its repercussions are omnipresent.

fragment of the shadowy history of *les Années noires*. She guides us through her experiences as a female survivor-witness of *les Années noires.* As her voice will testify, these dark years mark an extremely traumatic period whose consequences profoundly affected the rest of her life, to the point where she felt like she could never find a suitable way of telling her story. There is one episode in La Douleur that hints at the fact Duras was never able to come to terms with the pains she endured, not even with the passage of time. Writing about her own cowardice, she proclaims to be the most cowardly of all the women "who wait." Dionys Mascolo, her lover and Robert's best friend, tells her that she is sick and crazy and has no right to destroy herself; yet, Duras cannot understand what he is trying to tell her. Suddenly, bracketed off in the text appears the following: "Même maintenant que je retranscris ces choses de ma jeunesse, je ne saisis pas le sens de ces phrases."[170] This phrase is important in underscoring the notion that the grief she experienced because of the war was so immense that even later in life as she edited and transcribed the account, she still could not understand the magnitude of her *douleur.* Of course, there are other possible explanations of Duras' "inability" to grasp the sense of what she was transcribing, which might be linked to her own needs and desires to conceal her own moral deficiencies. La Douleur is her attempt to understand that which lies at the source of war's damaging effects, but this illustration is evocative of what Suleiman suggests about the task of writing for the survivor-witness being both "impossible" and "inexhaustible".[171] Like many survivors, she could not find enough words or the right words to convey her testimony, and in spite of that, she seemed to demonstrate the courage to try.

[170] Duras, La Douleur, 33.

[171] Suleiman, 158.

Both Adler and Vallier point to the war years as a part of Duras' story that still lies within "les zones d'ombre." Both cite 1945 as a pivotal year in relationship to Duras' development as a writer. For Vallier, 1945 was "une année charnière" because it was a critical time representing the junction between her life before and after the war, in other words, her life as Marguerite Donnadieu versus Marguerite Duras. "Duras" did not exist before she began writing, which is a fact she herself confirmed in L'Amant, a novel that was awarded the Prix Goncourt.[172] Adler explains, "C'est le désir d'écrire qui la fondera comme individu ayant un rôle à jouer dans le monde, et c'est l'écriture qui lui donnera son nom: Duras."[173] Curiously, as she wrote in L'Amant, she considered her wartime experience to be a part of her childhood, her gestation as a writer, a time when she had not yet taken a firm stance on social and political issues. Bogaert and Corpet write:

> Aux yeux de Marguerite Duras, le temps de l'enfance et celui de la guerre ont donc ceci de commun qu'ils imposent l'expérience de la soumission, et poussent à une révolte dont l'écriture fait l'instrument. [. . .] Le passé, loin de toute nostalgie, s'enracine au contraire dans le présent le plus actuel, faisant de l'enfance de l'écrivain "un temps inépuisable, inouï, qu'il (lui) semble ne jamais pouvoir mesurer."[174]

Duras' wartime experiences pushed her to become a writer while also providing an inexhaustible and intangible subject she attempted to address. Her wartime past was forever rooted in her present; it permanently invaded her being. She lived with its horrendous images etched in her mind. Thus, La Douleur allows Duras' reader not only to discover and participate

[172] Marguerite Duras, L'Amant (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1984).

[173] Laure Adler, avant-propos, Marguerite Duras (Paris: Gallimard, 1998) 15.

[174] Marguerite Duras, Cahiers de la guerre, préface, eds. Sophie Bogaert and Olivier Corpet (Paris: P.O.L./Imec, 2006) 12. Note the subsequent citations of this work will be denoted by Cahiers de la guerre followed by the page number referenced.

in her past but also her present. Not a day passed that she did not hurt from what she witnessed during *les Années noires*. In spite of the fact that Duras was not Jewish, never deported to a concentration camp, or even arrested, she was still a vicarious victim of the Holocaust. Like others from her era, she experienced a *prise de conscience* about the Jews, and she felt a sense of guilt for not having responded in what she might have considered a more appropriate way. La Douleur, written in part during these historical moments, becomes an exceedingly important link allowing us to hear a first-hand account of these tumultuous and transitional days. In many ways, Duras' testimony transcends that of a mere eyewitness account by heightening our sensitivities to the challenges all victims of trauma face in our world today. It also helps to link past and present by serving as a paradigm capable of helping us to confront our fears of dealing with the consequences of trauma.

One woman's life from *les Années noires*

While extensive biographies and numerous critical works about Duras exist, there are a few important points about her life and maturation during *les Années noires* that merit recall. Born Marguerite Donnadieu on April 4, 1914, she grew up in Indochina having a rocky relationship with both her older brother and mother. These early instabilities, coupled with the outbreak of the Second World War, led her on an incessant search for self-discovery, one she explored through writing. It was after having moved to France in 1932 to pursue her studies at the Sorbonne that Duras engaged in activities eventually leading her to a career in writing. Upon completing a degree in law and political science, Duras went to work for the Ministry of Colonies office in Paris in June 1938 and held various positions until 1941.[175] In the beginning,

[175] Adler, 130.

she worked in the office of the "service intercolonial d'information et de documentation" where she sifted through and synthesized texts on a variety of colonial topics---from the quality of tea to the flow of African rivers---producing technical reports destined for internal, ministerial use. Immediately, others in the office noticed her talents for writing and proposed that she become the speechwriter for the Minister, Georges Mandel.[176] Duras had begun climbing the ladder.

After a promotion in September 1938, Duras began what might be considered her first written work, L'Empire français, a text written with colleagues Philippe Roques and Pierre Lafue.[177] The book, whose premise was to heighten awareness of the value of the enormous overseas empire France possessed, was published April 25, 1940 under the co-authorship of Philippe Roques et Marguerite Donnadieu. Adler attributes the militant tone of the book to the attitude many had at the time---that the Empire and its future armies could and had to be a source of resistance against the impending German threat.[178] This was Mandel's main objective for the Ministry of Colonies, to prepare the colonies for war. By June 1939, Mandel reported to the Daladier government that he had 600,000 men ready to fight, but he realized he needed someone to help promote this "action politico-stratégique," and so he solicited help from Duras who became his attaché de presse. Like Adler explains, "Marguerite va devenir le soldat zélé de cette propagande militaro-coloniale et, en effet, faire ses premières armes d'écrivain en defendant haut et fort la grandeur de la politique coloniale."[179] In spite of its exploitative and propagandist

[176] Ibid.

[177] Adler, 132.

[178] Adler, 137. "L'Empire et ses futures armées peuvent et doivent devenir une source de résistance à la menace allemande."

[179] Adler, 132.

nature, Adler is quick to point out that Duras' behavior at the time was not incongruous with that of the majority of her compatriots, especially those born in the colonies.[180] Keep in mind, Duras was not yet politically engaged. Furthermore, Vallier underscores the fact that since 1940, she ardently desired becoming a writer, and this desire helped structure her existence. He notes that "elle avait la volonté farouche [. . .] elle continuait à écrire malgré tout," perhaps suggesting that she accepted Mandel's propositions merely to advance her career.[181]

Duras was the product of a colonial setting, which does shed light on historical, social, cultural, and political circumstances that led her to write about its merits. In later works, like *le Vice-consul*, Duras' reader comes to understand her revulsion for the French Colonial Empire, which she portrayed as rotten to the core. Luckily for Duras, L'Empire français did not leave a huge mark on the readers of 1940 for Gallimard sold only 3,700 copies, of which 3,000 were pre-purchased by Mandel's ministry. In speaking with Adler, Duras attributed collaboration on this project to an "erreur de jeunesse."[182] Clearly, the author would have rather erased this project from her repertoire, and she did so by excluding it from bibliographies.[183] Whatever the case, her co-authorship did provide a springboard that later helped her publish a first novel. On June 16, 1940, shortly after this text was published, German troops seized Paris. At the beginning of the Occupation, Duras, like many others, did not question the presence of the Vichy regime in France. In fact, she fled Paris during the Exodus of June 1940 in the comfort of a nice car, while many others took to the highways in less secure ways. Adler points out:

[180] Adler 137.

[181] Armel, 39.

[182] Adler, 139.

[183] Ibid.

> Marguerite participe indirectement à ces journées tragiques où le destin de la France bascule, mais curieusement, elle n'évoquera jamais, ni dans ses entretiens ni dans ses romans, le climat vénéneux dans lequel évoluait la république agonisante.[184]

We are left to wonder why Duras kept her silence about the events of June 1940. One possible explanation is that during her time at the Ministry of Colonies, Duras was still (what one might call today) "finding herself." She had not yet subscribed to any particular political ideology, but she did have an affinity for the left. Anecdotally, earlier actions point to this leftist penchant, for while still a student in 1935, she suddenly withdrew from classes to volunteer for a semester with the Salvation Army, an experience which most certainly contributed to the development of her political ideas.[185]

What might seem even more troublesome than her stint with the Ministry of Colonies office is the position she held afterwards. In July 1942, Duras took a new job with the *Comité d'organisation du livre*, the organization responsible for deciding which literary works would be published in accordance with the German censorship. This also happened to be the group linked to the publication of the famous *liste Otto*, indicating those texts that had to be taken out of circulation. Shortly after the beginning of the Occupation, most major publishers complied with stipulations set forth by the Germans who claimed to want to promote French thought, yet who limited themselves to publishing only those French thoughts that respected their rights as victor, which were, of course, not very "French" at all. Other than a few writers, like Sartre, who was able sufficiently to code his thoughts in plays like Huis Clos and Les Mouches, few were able to pass along their ideas and had to publish clandestinely.

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[184] Adler, 141.

[185] Adler, 118.

Marguerite became the secretary of *la Commission du contrôle du papier d'édition* where she was in charge of doling out paper to publishers. But in fact, her position was not that of a simple secretary; she had more responsibility than the title indicates. It so happens that her commission was also in charge of reading manuscripts in order to decide which ones to publish and which ones to reject. German eyes were never far away, and Duras had to play by their rules.[186] These watchful eyes kept her from formally engaging in the intellectual Resistance, but they might also have been the impetus driving her decision to enter the Resistance. It is difficult to be certain as it seems even Duras herself was never able (or perhaps willing) to give an explanation. When asked later in life about her work from 1942-1943, she responded as follows: "Marguerite balayait d'un revers de main cette question qui l'irritait. Elle ne savait plus pourqoui ni comment elle était arrivée dans cette commission et affectait de ne pas y accorder d'importance."[187] Given all that we have come to know about her today, this line of work was certainly not characteristic of later resistance activities; some might even say that it was quite the antithesis. While it might be tempting to condemn her wartime activities prior to entering the resistance in 1943, judging her activities lies beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, it is essential to see Duras' testimony as one that embodies those morally ambiguous moments life often presents, moments forcing us to confront our own similar dilemmas. And so, while it might be equally tempting to ask what led Duras to work in what might be perceived as collaborative ways with the Vichy government, and by extension the Germans, perhaps that is not how we

[186] For a much more in dept discussion of Duras' work with this commission, see Adler, 155-59.

[187] Adler, 159.

should spend our energy. On the other hand, what might be a more fruitful question is this: In a similar situation, what would we do?

It is impossible to comprehend fully another's sufferings, and in 1943, Duras was grieving. Other than the outbreak of the war, there were two major events at the root of her pain: the still-birth of her first child with husband, Robert Antelme, in May 1942, and the death of her younger brother, Paul, in December of that same year. One good thing did interrupt this sorrowful period; in November 1942, she met Dionys Mascolo, who at the time, was working for Gallimard. "D.", as she refers to him in La Douleur would become a vital force in Duras' life as lover, friend, and father of her only child, Jean.[188] Before Robert's deportation, Duras, Mascolo, and Antelme were an inseparable *ménage à trois* (even though Robert did not suspect an amorous relationship between his wife and Mascolo) and participated in the same resistance group. Even after Robert learned of their affair after his return from Buchenwald in 1945, the three remained friends. In light of La Douleur, it is important to evoke Duras' relationship with Mascolo because he played such a major role in supporting and encouraging her while she awaited Robert and once he had returned.

Shortly after meeting Mascolo, in April 1943, Duras managed to have Les Impudents, her first novel, accepted for publication at Plon.[189] Duras later withdrew this work from the shelves only to re-release it much later in her career. This aside, the acceptance of her first novel proved that she was a writer, and, given what she had endured at the time, that was critical for her fragile mental state. It was not until September of 1943, after significant developments—in January, the

[188] Jean Vallier, Marguerite Duras: La vie comme un roman (Paris: Les Editions Textuel, 2006) 86.

[189] Vallier, La vie comme un roman, 84.

defeat of Germans at Stalingrad, and in February, the implementation of the STO (Service de travail obligatoire)--- that Duras formally engaged in resistance activities with her comrades from the Rue Saint Benoît, a point to which I will return.[190] Duras seemed to be on the path to success as a writer in 1944. Just when she had had La Vie tranquille accepted for publication with Gallimard, Robert was arrested and deported for resistance activities. This is where the first episode of La Douleur comes into play.

As the previous year, 1944 also brought its share of hardships. Vallier describes it as "une année d'épreuves" during which La Douleur evokes the emotions the writer felt in the face of such adversity.[191] In 1944, Duras had lost that which best defined her, Robert and her emerging writer's voice. It was unfortunate timing as Frédérique Lebelley reports: "Au moment où l'écrivain Marguerite Duras est reconnu, elle se sent dans l'obligation morale de se taire. Sous l'emprise des événements les plus terrifiants que l'humanité ait connus, Duras va s'interdire d'écrire."[192] She would not come out with another work until Un Barrage contre le pacifique in 1950. This is not to say that Duras wrote nothing during the war and its immediate aftermath, which is a point I hope to have already made abundantly clear.

The genre and origins of La Douleur

La Douleur (The War, in translation), is a work in which we encounter Duras' memories of the Second World War, but it is not a mémoire in the proper sense of the word. It is a text

[190] For a good discussion on the increasing numbers of resisters in 1943, See Jackson, 475-80. Also note that the rue Saint Benoît was the name of the Parisian street on which Duras' apartment was located. She lived there unitl her death in 1996.

[191] Vallier, La vie comme un roman, 89.

[192] Frédérique Lebelley, "Duras femme libre: Marguerite Donnadieu-Antelme-Duras: une jeune femme dans la guerre," Le Nouvel Observatuer 1526 (Feb. 1994): 7.

rooted in *les Années noires* when Duras was "journaling" about her life, but it was not entirely composed during that time. There are six episodes or stories that appear in *La Douleur,* the first of which bears the same title as the text. In this episode, Duras testifies about the agony of awaiting her husband's return from Buchenwald, the horrors of seeing others return, and the failures of the Provisional Government to react appropriately after the Liberation. The other episodes include *Monsieur X dit ici Pierre Rabier,* which tells the story of a relationship Duras maintained with Gestapo agent Charles Delval during Robert's deportation as a political prisoner. In *Albert des Capitals* and *Ter le Milicien,* Duras writes about taking part in torturing collaborators after the Liberation, including Delval. According to Duras' prefatory notes to her reader, the last two episodes, *L'Ortie brisée,* and *Aurélia Paris,* are intended to be read as literature since they are "inventé." For the purpose of this study, my analysis will focus primarily on the first episode.

Where and when exactly did La Douleur originate, and why was it not published sooner? The original manuscripts containing portions of some of the episodes appearing in La Douleur are now available under the title Cahiers de la guerre et autres texts. Only three episodes, *La Douleur, Albert des Capitals,* and *Ter le Milicien*, appear in part in the Cahiers de la guerre. The episode *Monsieur X dit ici Pierre Rabier* did not figure among the original war notebooks and was added "out of necessity" by Duras before publication.[193] I will return to this intriguing point. Among the ensemble of the war notebooks, there are four original *cahiers---Le Cahier rose marbré, Le Cahier Presses du XXe siècle, Le Cahier de cent pages,* and *Le Cahier beige*--- containing fragments of texts that would appear in later texts like L'Amant, Un Barrage

[193] Adler, 188.

contre le pacifique, and other works. While much of what she wrote in *Le Cahier Presses du XXe siècle* and *Le Cahier de cent pages* was published under the title La Douleur in 1985, it was not until 1995 that Duras decided to confer all of her personal papers and manuscripts to IMEC, a repository for twentieth-century French literary archives. Among these documents were the war notebooks, considered to be Duras' oldest preserved documents, which many suggest provide "l'enfance de l'oeuvre" or the very foundation upon which the Durassian universe is constructed.[194] But, where did they originate?

In 1985, Duras led her reader to believe that she discovered these journals comprising La Douleur "dans deux cahiers des armoires bleues de Neauphle-le-Château", a country home where she often went to write. In spite of the author's assertion that "*La Douleur* est une des choses les plus importantes de [sa] vie," she reported having no recollection of writing it, and could not have imagined doing so while awaiting Robert's return from Buchenwald in April 1945.[195] Later in life in an interview with a journalist from Libération, Duras admitted that it must have been during the months immediately following Robert's return that she began writing them.[196] Adler provides more conflicting information stating that Duras explained to her in an interview that she discovered the notebooks while looking for a sample of her earlier writing to

[194] Duras, Cahiers de la guerre, préface, 9. The editors write: "Sur le plan biographique, l'intérêt des *Cahiers de la guerre* est considérable; l'attention toute particulière que leur ont accordée deux biographes de Marguerite Duras en témoigne. [The reference here is to Laure Adler and Jean Vallier]. Cette édition permet à cet égard de donner à lire dans leur continuité des textes qui n'ont encore été cités que de façon partielle; et d'établir, notamment, le fait qu'on n'y trouve pas à proprement parler de journal intime, bien que la rédaction suive de près les événements relatés dans *La Douleur*.

[195] Duras, La Douleur, 12.

[196] Duras, Cahiers de la guerre, préface, 9. In the editors' footnote here, they reference Marianne Alphant's article in Libération from April 17, 1985 in which Duras said, « A mon avis, j'ai dû commencer à écrire *La Douleur* quand on est allé dans des maison de repos pour déportés. »

submit to the review Sorcières.[197] The facts here are incongruous and led many early critics to say that the text was a farce, entirely invented. This is not, and never was, a valid claim. Like others, I have held the notebooks in my own hands; indeed, they exist and are filled with stories about Duras' experiences.

As for the original war notebooks' ambiguous origins, we can credit Sophie Bogaert and Olivier Corpet with having clarified the matter. In the preface to Cahiers de la guerre they suggest Duras composed them between 1943 and 1949, years the editors refer to as "cette époque cruciale dans la vie de l'écrivain."[198] As they so eloquently write, these writings are not a random collection of preliminary drafts or a series of disjointed writings, but "un ensemble où tout se tient, qui semble d'une seule coulée d'écriture."[199] Due to their perceived inadequate nature, Duras withheld these writings for nearly 40 years. What is not as well known is that 1985 was not the first time the portions of the war notebooks containing La Douleur had been edited or published. In 1976, Duras submitted a story about Robert's return from the camps entitled "*Pas mort en déportation"* to Sorcières, but she did so anonymously.[200] Apparently, she had grappled with the idea of publishing years before she was able to follow through with it. No one really knows why Duras waited so long to publish this text, but we can certainly speculate. Adler reinforces the notion that La Douleur percolated for a long time:

> Pour autant, ce texte n'est pas la transcription de ces carnets de guerre. Une première version a bien été écrite en 1945. Une autre, retravaillée, fut rédigée en 1975. Une dernière version fut 'recouturée'. Ajouts, reprises, surfilages abondent

[197] Adler, 186.

[198] Duras, Cahiers de la guerre, préface, 8.

[199] Duras, Cahiers de la guerre, préface, 7.

[200] Duras, Cahiers de la guerre, 161, 244.

> comme en couture. [. . .] L'état des épreuves avec leur multitude de corrections en témoigne. Duras ne voulait pas qu'on appelle *La douleur* 'écrit.' Ce texte, qu'elle considérait comme une des choses les plus importantes de sa vie, connut une lente maturation. *La douleur* n'est pas son journal transcrit tel quel, comme elle l'a affirmé dans sa préface. Ce n'est pas la reproduction pure et simple de ces pages qui témoignent 'd'un désordre phénoménal de la pensée et du sentiment' et dont elle affirme qu'elle n'a pas osé les toucher. C'est une recomposition littéraire, une traversée dans le temps, une mise à l'épreuve d'elle-même.[201]

The implications and questions raised here are numerous. First of all, if Duras did not want to call the first episode in La Douleur literature, does this suggest that she had something else in mind? If so, what exactly did she intend to call it? Did she consider it her testimony? The claim that this text was one of the most important things in her life coupled with the explanation that it took it such a long time to come to maturation gives credence to this supposition. She had to give her wounds time to heal, but it seems as if time did not work in her favor. The scar tissue left by the residues of war was too deep and would continue to have an adverse affect on her life. Duras must have come to terms with the realization that her testimony was never going to be "perfect." Afterall, it was *une oeuvre d'art.* Yet in publishing this text that is a manifestation of the irreparable scars left by war, she affirms the fact that she felt an intense need to talk about it. I agree with Adler, this text is not a simple transcription of pages that bear witness to the "phenomenal mental and emotional derangement" that Duras endured during these years; it is something more . . . but, what? Adler's suggestion is that the work is a literary recomposition, a voyage across time, and a "mise en épreuve d'elle-même." It is the latter of the three terms that piques my curiosity, meriting further exploration.

How exactly does one define the elusive term *une mise en épreuve d'elle-même,* which harbors a number of different connotations? Is the intended meaning here to be that Duras' text is

[201] Adler, 187.

a proof of herself? Or, perhaps the implication is that through the written word, Duras puts herself to the test by proving that she was able and ready to talk about these shadowy moments of her past. As I have already posited, another possible explanation is that Duras opened her life up to others in order to share her legacy. Perhaps it is the multiple interpretations of this particular point that help to qualify the voice we hear in this text as testimonial in nature. And it is through the writer's own words that we will most likely find the strongest supporting evidence of her authorial intentions.

Duras' authorial intentions

To revisit the framework guiding my understanding of testimony, one who bears witness also enters into a "juridical imperative" to tell the truth. Often, testifying involves more than a matter-of-fact recap; it also encompasses conjuring up memory in order to make an impression and an appeal to a community of listeners, hence readers. Felman and Laub write:

> To testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness stand, or to take the position of the witness insofar as the narrative account of the witness is at once engaged in an appeal and bound by an oath. To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: *to take responsibility*---in speech---for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences.[202]

In spite of her reluctance, Marguerite Duras wanted to make her case to a large community of listeners. In the absence of a courtroom, she stood up before the court of history in order to render what is an illuminating and thought-provoking statement about her life. In this light, one thing is clear: this text is a manifestation of Duras having confronted a painful part of her past, proving (mainly to herself) that she was able to talk about her pain. There is supporting evidence near the end of the first episode when Duras is vacationing on the beaches of Italy with some

[202] Felman and Laub, 204-5.

friends and Robert. According to the dates given, it is the first summer of peace, 1946. While the others play games and converse, Robert, still recuperating physically and mentally, only observes. Duras' friend, Ginetta, remarks that Robert will never again regain the strength he had before being deported, and at this, Duras is overcome with tears. She writes: "Dès ce nom, Robert L., je pleure. Je pleure encore. Je pleurerai toute ma vie." She goes on to write:

> Chaque jour elle croit que je pourrai parler de lui, et je ne peux pas encore. Mais ce jour-là je lui dis que je pensais pouvoir le faire un jour. Et que déjà j'avais écrit un peu sur ce retour. Que j'avais essayé de dire quelque chose de cet amour. Que c'était là pendant son agonie que j'avais le mieux connu cet homme, Robert L., que j'avais perçu pour toujour [sic] ce qui le faisait lui, et lui seul, et rien ni personne d'autre au monde, que je parlais de la grâce particulière à Robert L. . . .[203]

In these closing lines of this part of her testimony, Duras professes the intense, unique love she experienced for Robert. It was a love so transcendent and precious that even in spite of the tears, she knew she had "to try and say something of this love." Even the sound of his name brought tears to her eyes. It is not my intention to delve into Duras' love life, which is far too complicated for the scope of this project; nonetheless, it is important to know that the bond that she shared with Robert was truly unique. They were what some might characterize as "soul mates," and interestingly, it was during his deportation and convalescence and her distress that she professed to have come to know her husband the best. But getting back to the point here, Duras hints, in 1946, at a burning desire to be able to talk about Robert's return from the camps, to be able to render homage to his life and the grace with which he lived it. In spite of others' perceptions that Duras might be ready to talk about it, she overtly admitted that at that time she could not yet do so. At this point, Robert had been home from the camps for nearly a year and a half, and while Duras was not able to talk about it, she had (by her own admission) already

[203] Duras, La Douleur, 84.

written a little on the subject. The key consideration here is that Duras admitted her intentions to one day be able to talk about Robert's return. This, however, was not the only episode from her past that she felt obligated to share.

There is one crucial piece of evidence in the discussion of authorial intentions that must be brought to light. Unlike the first episode in the text, the story of *Monsieur X dit ici Pierre Rabier* was not mentioned in the original *cahiers*. Before publishing La Douleur, Duras was encouraged by friends to include it. Yet, she also felt intrinsically motivated and compelled to address the Delval affaire. *L'affaire Delval*, as it has come to be known, finds itself at the epicenter of Duras' shadowy past during the *les Années noires.* In fact, the publication of Adler's biography was actually delayed due to some passages about Charles Delval (the purported "Monsieur X dit ici Pierre Rabier" in La Douleur*)* that Jean Mascolo, Duras' son, wanted to censor. To explain briefly, it is important to know that Delval, a *gestapiste* and reported German sympathizer, was responsible for uncovering the resistance mouvement—MNPDG (*Mouvement national des prisoniers de guerre et deportés*), led by François Mitterand ("Morland")---in which Duras and her husband had officially participated since June 1943 upon agreeing to harbor other *résistants*. Having uncovered the ring, Delval was supposedly to blame for Robert's arrest. In an effort to maintain a link with her deported husband, Duras entered into an ambiguous relationship with Delval, and she recounts episodes of their encounters in the episode *Monsieur X dit ici Pierre Rabier*. After the Liberation and before he was brought to trial, Duras participated in the interrogation and torture of Delval, of which she writes in the episodes of *Albert des Capitale* and *Ter le Milicien*. Once put on trial in December 1944, Delval was found guilty and shot at the beginning of 1945. Today, the story becomes even more complicated

considering that both Delval and Duras went to their graves never knowing one astonishing thing. In a twisted irony, neither of them would ever know that her lover at the time, Dionys Mascolo, and Charles Delval's wife had had a child together just six months after Delval's death. These anecdotes are important for recognizing the many hidden aspects of Duras' life, unknown even to her. According to Adler, Duras recognized the inherent darkness and ambiguity of her life and even referred to it as "l'ombre interne" and le "noyau noir."[204]

What we can glean from this particular episode is a clear signal of Duras' authorial intentions. In the prefatory note to the reader, Duras responds to those who might be tempted to ask about her reasons for publishing what might seem like anecdotal information. She writes:

> Reste ceci, que l'on peut se demander: pourquoi publier ici ce qui est en quelque sorte anecdotique? C'était terrible certes, terrifiant à vivre, au point de pouvoir en mourir d'horreur, mais c'était tout [. . .] ça n'allait jamais vers le large de la littérature. Alors? Dans le doute je l'ai rédigée. [. . .] Ils [ses amis] ont décidé qu'il fallait la publier à cause de la description que j'y faisais de Rabier, de cette façon illusoire d'exister par la fonction de la sanction et seulement de celle-ci que la plupart du temps tient lieu d'éthique ou de philosophie ou de morale et pas seulement dans la police.[205]

Encouraged by Yann Andréa and Hervé Lemason, Duras consented to include *Monsieur X. dit ici Pierre Rabier* in her text. Ultimately, it was her decision. I do not believe that she published it solely because her friends said that it was a good idea. She knew that in order to attempt fulfill the "juridical oath" she had to try and tell the whole truth, not just part of it.

There is further evidence that she wanted to give what she considered a full testimony. Without an account of her relationship with Delval and her participation in torturing, her

[204] Marion Van Renterghem, "Elle s'est fait violence pour tricher avec tout le monde:" Entretien avec Laure Adler," Le Monde 26 Aug. 1998: 19.

[205] Duras, La Douleur, 90.

testimony would have been less complete. In a similar comment prefacing *Albert des Capitales* and *Ter le Milicien* Duras says that these two episodes should have come before *La Douleur*, but they did not because she preferred to distance them from it "pour que cesse le bruit de la guerre."[206] She goes on to confess her complicity in torturing people during the war, admitting her conflicted feelings of wanting to torment and to make love to her victim. In closing, she writes: "Je vous donne celle qui torture avec le reste des textes. Apprenez à lire: ce sont des textes sacrés." [207] It is the last of this phrase that keeps us guessing about her intentions. What did she mean when she said that we need to learn to read these texts because they are "sacred?" That is a very perplexing question, but one possible interpretation is that these were extremely personal memories that Duras treated delicately due to the light they shed on her "ombre interne."

It seems that writing about her past allowed Duras to deal (at least momentarily) with the psychological repercussions left by the wartime events she endured. And the fact that she wrote, edited, and published portions of this testimony at different moments in her life offers strong evidence that the war was omnipresent. Perhaps making this testimony available for generations of readers to come made her feel like she was fulfilling her calling as a writer, that is to say that this particular act completed her task of leaving her mark on the world. Looking at the legacy of La Douleur, one senses its potential to illuminate the past, while at the same informing the present and future. In this light, this work is indeed "sacred." In spite of its fragmentary and discontinuous form, this testimony is her version of what happened, rendered in an artistically transformed way. By making it public and by appealing to a community of listners, Duras

[206] Duras, La Douleur, 138.

[207] Ibid.

seemingly took a witness' oath to tell the "truth" about what happened. Therefore, this still unclear portion of Duras' life and her writings about it fit nicely into this study attempting to illuminate *les Années noires*. By considering what is presented in her literary testimony, perhaps we can better understand this transitional, shadowy time in Duras' life and France's history.

Duras' elusiveness and hazy, often seemingly contradictory, life stories leave many unknowns about her past. Through this text, Duras commits herself and testimony to us. Some critics have questioned the sincerity and authenticity of her accounts; yet Duras' literary testimony transcends mere fiction and embodies the complexities of her existence. Did she tell the truth in her writing, or did she simply invent an identity that suited her? To this end, Adler points to the disparity between Duras' lived life and the life recounted through her writings. She writes:

> Il y a, d'un côté, la vie de Marguerite Duras telle qu'elle l'a vécue, de l'autre, celle qu'elle a racontée. Comment distinguer la vérité de la fiction, des mensonges? Elle a voulu, au fil du temps reconstruire sa vie par l'écriture et faire sienne cette biographie. Ce livre tentera de démêler les différentes versions, et de les confronter sans avoir la prétention de dire la vérité sur un personnage qui aimait tant se dérober. Il essaiera de mettre en lumière les zones d'ombre qu'elle-même a mises en scène avec tant de talent: la relation avec le jeune homme chinois à la fin de l'enfance, son attitude pendant la guerre et à la Libération, ses passions amoureuses littéraires et politiques. Car la vie de Marguerite est aussi celle d'une enfant du siècle, d'une femme profondément engagée dans son temps et qui en a épousé les principaux combats.[208]

Indeed, Duras' life was that of a child of the twentieth century, that of a woman profoundly embroiled in the main causes of her generation. The testimony we encounter in La Douleur sheds light on her past but also brings to light many aspects of the collective past capable of helping us

[208] Adler, avant-propos, 12-13.

to see things from a new perspective. She accomplishes this primarily through a unique discourse.

Discourse in La Douleur

As discussed in Chapter 1, La Douleur functions as a prime example of the often indistinguishable nature of natural and fictive discourse. Hernnstein Smith considers natural discourse to be those statements rendered as historical acts and interpreted as historical events and fictive discourse to be simply a representation of such acts and events. Duras' testimony combines both of these, creating a truthful, historically reliable account of her wartime experiences. Certainly, the precision of her testimony might be a bit off kilter, as some critics have been quick to note; however, it is not my intent to delve into a discussion of exactitude, which I find irrelevant. Phillip Lejeune reminds us in Le Pacte autobiographique of the interplay between autobiography and fiction. His suggestion is that one should not question which is more true because autobiography will always lack complexity and clarity, whereas fiction will always lack precision. As such, neither one nor the other should be given more credence, for to seek the truth, it is necessary to consider both. La Douleur offers a commanding illustration of the powerful way in which writers can sometimes combine autobiography and art to deliver a compelling testimonial account. Jeanine Plottel seems to echo Lejeune in her analysis of Duras' discourse in which she senses a *mise en abyme* or "recursive reading pattern." She asserts:

> [. . .] in fact Marguerite Duras' narrative aims at apprehending the complexities of her experience in order to convey what really happened in 1944 and 1945. It seems to me that the discourse here both undermines and makes use of literary devices for the purpose of creating a discourse more truthful than literature and more historical than history.[209]

[209] Jeanine Parisier Plottel, "Memory, Fiction and History," L'esprit créateur, 30:1 (1990) 47-55. This citation comes from page 48.

Like Plottel, I find that the power underlying Duras' art is her ability to braid personal memories, fiction, and history, opening to us the possibility not only of hearing about the past but experiencing it too. Duras uses her writing to attempt to deal with her own pain and to create an artistic oeuvre capable of helping others do the same. [210]

As contradictory as Duras' life during *les Années noires* might appear, it is by facing her own complexity and ambiguity that she was able to impart a legacy capable of informing future generations. Let us explore the message her testimony conveys. *Les Années noires,* especially after June 1944, the day on which her husband, sister-in-law, and other friends were arrested, were agonizing as she awaited Robert's return from Buchenwald. However, in light of what Duras divulges about her life at the time, it is clear that her pain was also linked to her volatile lifestyle of having a lover who was best friends with her deported husband, who knew nothing of the affair. And as if this were not enough, Duras maintained a connection to Delval, the Gestapo agent who had arrested Robert and friends and even felt sexually attracted to him. Like many women of her time, Duras fought battles of her own, battles of waiting, battles of extreme physical and emotional pain, battles of conscience. In La Douleur, she alludes to these battles, and upon discussing various sections of her work, I will further explain their depth and importance.

In the first episode, we hear a multi-dimensional account of what life was for this woman who, like so many others in April 1945, lived under tremendous fear and stress of the unknown. Duras characterizes the battles that she and women like her fought as "un combat sans nom, sans

[210] Plottel, 55.

armes, sans sang versé, sans gloire." It was what she referred to as "l'attente."[211] For so many in France, and for all historical purposes and notation, *les Années noires* had "ended" with the Liberation of Paris on August 24, 1944, but the reality was that the war raged on in Europe and in the East for almost another year. During this time, there were so many unknowns and so many who fell prey to the waiting game. Yet, as history has shown, upon Liberation, the Provisional French Government was ready to restore order to the nation; therefore, so many unpleasant aspects of the war were masked by the dominant discourse of the day. Their focus was publicizing the heroes of the Resistance, not the victims returning from the camps, or the families who had been victimized by the death of a loved one. While the first convoys to return from the East brought back some of the fears and horrors many had experienced during the Occupation, still people chose rejoicing over sorrow. Jackson writes:

> The return of the *déportés* from German camps in April 1945 had caused a terrible shock. The sight of these ghostly and emaciated creatures cast a pall over the victory celebrations. Nor was it easy to fit them into the embryonic Gaullist interpretation of the Occupation which required heroes not victims.[212]

Of his entire 632-page volume on *les Années noires,* historian Julian Jackson devotes only two and a half pages to the victims persecuted under the Occupation. When Jackson refers to the deported, this includes all those victims sent to the East, for whatever reason, but it does not account for those like Duras who were *victimized* and "shocked" by such deportations. Today, it is critical to continue listening for those voices from the past that can bring to light inconvenient

[211] Duras, La Douleur, 48.

[212] Jackson, 610. His discussion of the deported appears in the Epilogue under the sub-title "Buried Memories: The Victims," 610-12.

realities readily ignored during the rebuilding process. Duras' voice is one capable of doing just that.

Her testimony imparts a sense of the physical frenzy of looking for a location to place her pain in the world. She was so convinced that Robert had died during deportation that his death invaded her life, her body, and her soul. She describes this invasion of death as "le battement dans les tempes [qui] continue" that she must try and stop but simply cannot because "Sa mort est en moi."[213] Her imagination runs wild as it is informed by the top headlines of the day; she fears the worst, especially upon learning that the allied troops had crossed the Rhine and set Berlin a blaze. According to the text, this is where her pain begins. Obsessed by the thought of Robert lying dead in a ditch, Duras tries to escape the stifling atmosphere of the apartment where she awaited his homecoming, but she cannot shake the fear.

In the first pages of the text, we encounter an intermingling of what seem to be Duras' real and conscious observations and imaginary and subconscious thoughts. On the real and conscious side of her remarks, she writes about the war's approaching end: "Soleil rouge sur Paris, lent. Six ans de guerre se terminent. C'est la grande affaire du siècle. L'Allemagne nazie est écrasée." Then, follow these words, which seem to transition, to the more subliminal:

> Lui aussi dans le fossé. Tout est à sa fin. Impossible de m'arrêter de marcher. Je suis maigre, sèche comme de la pierre. [. . .] Rien au monde ne m'appartient plus, que ce cadavre dans un fossé. Le soir est rouge. C'est la fin du monde. Je ne meurs contre personne. [. . .] 'Aucune nouvelle?—Aucune.' [. . .]. Je me tais."[214]

Here, it is possible to interpret the phrase "lui aussi" as a reference not only to Robert but also to the Nazi regime that was dead. Duras' voice becomes emotional as she expresses her *désespoir*

[213] Duras, La Douleur, 15.
[214] Duras, La Douleur, 17.

of having received no news. Possessing nothing and having come to the end of the world, she feels that she is dying all alone.

From here, Duras' testimony returns to more concrete, evidential information. In September 1944, Duras created *le Service de recherches*, an organism of the MNPDG that sought to gather, synthesize, and publish information about convoys, transfers, and deportations for their journal, Libres. When she first tries to establish a presence for her group, which was not a government organization, at the *Centre d'Orsay*, she is told that she has no official place and is forced to work standing. At this point in her testimony, Duras berates the government apparatus in charge of repatriation procedures for STO workers and deportees, which she finds appalling. She testifies to the inefficiency and indignity of the entire process stating:

> Entre le moment où ils descendent du train et celui où ils accèdent au niveau du premier bureau du circuit, celui du contrôle d'identité, il se passe deux heures et demie. Pour les déportés, ce sera encore plus long parce qu'ils n'ont pas de papiers et qu'ils sont infiniment plus fatigués, à l'extrême limite de leurs efforts pour la plupart.[215]

The delicate process of repatriation is something that is often overlooked in the history of the Second World War, as I will address in more detail in the following chapter. Other than alluding to the damper it placed on the celebratory mood in Paris, Jackson's account does not dwell on it either. Duras' description, however, substantiates the notion that the Provisional Government failed miserably to respond appropriately to the *déportés*. Considering all that the deportees had endured, one could see the shame in admitting such failure, and understand why for so many years no one talked about it. With each new arrival, she grows continually weary of not seeing her husband return. After days of no news, the first convoy of prisoners arrives:

[215] Duras, La Douleur, 22.

> Tout à coup débouchent du couloir d'entrée deux scouts qui portent un homme. L'homme les tient enlacés par le cou. [. . .]. L'homme est habillé en civil, il est rasé, il a l'air de beaucoup souffrir. Il est d'une étrange couleur. Il doit pleurer. On ne peut pas dire qu'il est maigre, c'est autre chose, il reste très peu de lui-même, si peu qu'on doute qu'il soit en vie. Pourtant non, il vit encore, son visage se convulse dans une grimace effrayante, il vit. Il ne regarde rien, ni le ministre, ni la salle d'honneur, ni les drapeaux, rien. Sa grimace, c'est peut-être qu'il rit. C'est le premier déporté de Weimar qui entre dans le centre.[216]

The voice we hear here is that of a reporter, mostly objective in recounting what she sees. Duras' use of the present tense draws the reader into the experience making us feel as if we were there seeing this semblance of a human return from Weimar, Germany. Later in the text, the tide turns from general observations to more personal ones tinted with overtones of disgust. While some might cite Duras' motivations for being at the Orsay as selfish, still, she was profoundly affected by the experience. In fact, she was so repulsed by the indignity with which the deported were received that she felt compelled to speak out against this injustice and inhumanity.

In speaking about the Germans, De Gaulle, and the political right, Duras' testimonial voice conveys the real outrage she felt. She points to the way in which the government apparatus seemed to ignore the reality of what had just happened in Europe, sweeping many inconvenient realities of the day under the rug only to be uncovered years later. Most people who had lived through the war only wanted to establish a sense of normalcy in their lives, and dealing with emaciated prisoners of war and death and concentration camp survivors did not figure among those official actions deemed necessary in the immediate aftermath of the war. Duras was equally disgusted by the negligence of those in power in preventing further atrocities. Her testimony speaks of some gruesome facts about the final days before the peace citing that in

[216] Duras, La Douleur, 30-31.

certain camps, the liberating troops discovered bodies that were still warm. This is horrific, and Duras rightfully lashes out against the inaction she cites as the culprit in such crimes.

Duras had a lot to say about Charles De Gaulle, and it was not exactly flattering. First, she chastises him for not talking about the political prisoners and for having said the unforgivable: "Les jours de pleurs sont passés. Les jours de glories sont revenues," words which perhaps provided the impetus behind the forgetting.[217] De Gaulle continued to build upon the myth that France had liberated itself by its own hand, but some like Duras were ahead of history in rejecting that version of the story. Before historians would clarify the issue of the Gaullist myth, Duras wrote:

> De Gaulle, laudateur de la droite par définition [. . .] voudrait saigner le peuple de sa force vive. Il le voudrait faible et croyant, il le voudrait gaulliste comme la bourgeoisie, il le voudrait bourgeois. De Gaulle ne parle pas des camps de concentration, c'est éclatant à quel point il n'en parle pas, à quel point il répugne manifestement à intégrer la douleur du peuple dans la victoire, cela de peur d'affaiblir son rôle à lui, De Gaulle, d'en diminuer la portée.[218]

Not only was she angry that he refused to integrate the pain of the people into the victory, but she also resented the fact that he acknowledged a national day of mourning for President Roosevelt but had not declared a "deuil national pour les déportés morts."[219] It was not until 1954 that the French would officially commemorate National Deportation Day every April, and even then, they made no distinction among political and Jewish deportees; that would have to wait for future generations. [220]

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[217] Duras, La Douleur, 44.

[218] Duras, La Douleur, 45.

[219] Duras, La Douleur, 46.

[220] Jackson, 611.

Pages before she rebukes De Gaulle's handling of the end of the war, she addresses the physical *déchirement* she experienced of not knowing how to react to the double-sided image of Robert's possible death. Torn between loving Robert and hating the Germans, she writes:

> Maintenant, entre l'amour que j'ai pour lui et la haine que je leur porte, je ne sais plus distinguer. C'est une seule image a deux faces: sur l'une d'elles il y a lui, la poitrine face à l'Allemand, l'espoir de douze mois qui se noie dans ses yeux et sur l'autre face il y a les yeux de l'Allemand qui visent. Voilà les deux faces de l'image. Entre les deux il me faut choisir, lui qui roule dans le fossé, ou l'Allemand qui remet la mitraillette sur son épaule et qui part. Je ne sais pas s'il faut m'occuper de le recevoir dans mes bras et laisser fuir l'Allemand, ou laisser Robert L. et me saisir de l'Allemand qui l'a tué et crever ses yeux qui n'ont pas vu les siens.[221]

Based entirely on speculation, she convinces herself again that Robert is dead. Yet, the conflicted feelings that underlie her discourse here are real, not imagined. Duras was torn apart thinking about that moment when she might be reunited with her husband. In this scenario, she wonders about embracing Robert or tearing out the German's eyes who had shot him. While this is not a pleasant situation to think about, what it illustrates is the real difficulty of surmounting such emotional conflict. As later episodes show, Duras' actions were a reflection of the vagaries she felt in confronting these very emotions.

Fortunately for himself, Marguerite, and his friends and family, Robert finally did return from Buchenwald, but the pain did not end there. Duras' testimony walks us through the ghastly process of his return to life, one that those fortunate enough to return home from the camps most likely endured. It is at this point in the text that the reader comes to understand the power of an autobiographically and stylistically transformed testimony, that is to say an account that Duras not only saw but also lived.

[221] Duras, La Douleur, 38.

One of the most poignant moments in the entire text is the moment when Robert is touring his home for the first time and walks into the kitchen to discover a cherry pie, a *clafoutis* posed on the table. His eyes light up, but he is denied the pleasure of eating a piece. He cannot understand why he is still refused food and withdraws from further conversation. Duras explains:

> Il avait cessé de poser des questions sur ce qui s'était passé pendant son absence. Il avait cessé de nous voir. Son visage s'était recouvert d'une douleur intense et muette parce que la nourriture lui était encore refusée, que ça continuait comme au camp de concentration, il avait accepté en silence. Il n'avait pas vu qu'on pleurait. Il n'avait pas vu non plus qu'on pouvait à peine le regarder, à peine lui répondre.[222]

This particular part of her testimony is so heartrending, yet it represents only one minor example of what it must have been like for the deported who survived and for those who helped them return to life. Robert only wanted to eat, a necessary act to living. That, we understand. Yet, what makes this passage so moving and striking is the way in which Duras is able to tell us about it. Through her discourse, she is able to integrate facts and emotion in such a way that we do not question the validity of what she writes.

She leaves us with the lingering impression of the enormous torment survival from the camps carried. Her testimony reminds us that life did not resume where it left off after for victims and their families, a point I will reiterate with Charlotte Delbo's testimony. During the three weeks that Robert fought for his life, Duras' testimony grows most graphic. He had to eat, so they fed him spoonfuls of coffee and bouillon, but that was the difficulty: "Non, il ne pouvait pas manger sans mourir. Or, il ne pouvait plus rester encore sans manger sans en mourir. C'était là la difficulté."[223] She continues to describe the contents of Robert's body once he begins to eat

[222] Duras, La Douleur, 70.
[223] Duras, La Douleur, 71.

more solid foods. From inhuman odors to unknown compositions, Duras spares no detail until the day when Robert says, "J'ai faim."

With Robert's appetite intact, Marguerite confronts her own pains. The onset of peace had not ushered in the relief and tranquility for which Duras and others had hoped. If anything, it only offered a sedative, pain pill. In other words, peace carried with it the beginning of conscious forgetting of which Duras seemed keenly aware when she wrote that peace was nothing more than "le commencement de l'oubli" and a "signe de mort, signe de demain sans eux."[224]

Near the end of this episode, Duras is still struggling to shake her pain. In many ways, she is a vicarious victim, or victim of the outer reaches of the Holocaust and the Second World War. In addition to fighting the battle of waiting, she wrestles with her own personal identity struggle that resurfaces after Robert's return to life, and it is in the following words that we can sense just how excruciatingly painful her life had been during *les Années noires:*

> Je me sens très près de la mort que j'ai souhaité. Ça m'indiffère, et même cela, que ça m'indiffère, je n'y pense pas. Mon identité s'est déplacée. Je suis seulement celle qui a peur quand elle se réveille. Celle qui veut à sa place, pour lui. Ma personne est là dans ce désir, et ce désir, même quand Robert L. est au plus mal, il est inexprimablement fort parce que Robert L. est encore en vie. Quand j'ai perdu mon petit frère, mon petit enfant, j'avais perdu aussi la douleur, elle était pour ainsi dire sans objet, elle se bâtissait sur le passé. Ici, l'espoir est entier, la douleur est implantée dans l'espoir.[225]

Through these words, we come to understand that Duras' pain is implanted in hope. She wants to rid her life and body of this pain so that she can attempt to recapture her identity that displaced itself during the Occupation. Other than giving her reader insight into some facts about the failures of the Provisional Government and the indignation with which so many had been treated,

[224] Duras, La Douleur, 64.

[225] Duras, La Douleur, 79.

Duras' testimony is also extremely personal, especially when looking at episodes two, three, and four. It seems like she had to let all of her testimony out in this text before attempting to move forward in reconstructing her identity as a writer. And perhaps she waited forty years to publish this account because she felt that she had, in a certain sense rebuilt her identity as a successful writer. It is like writing a letter to someone and never sending it; sometimes it makes you feel better just to exorcise your feelings. When L'Amant came out in 1984 bringing her much notoriety, maybe Duras felt that she was at a place and time in her career and life that she could finally share her testimony about this dark period that she had kept concealed. It is a plausible explanation since La Douleur came out in 1985.

One of the most profound messages that Duras' testimony delivers, and the one with which I would like to conclude this part of my discussion is humanity's complicity in the Nazi crimes. She, like all of us, could not ever comprehend how one of the most civilized countries in the world could have systematically assassinated 11 million human beings through an industry of the state. She writes:

> Comment être encore Allemand? On cherche des équivalences ailleurs [. . .] Une des plus grandes nations civilisées du monde, la capitale de la musique de tous les temps vient d'assassiner onze millions d'êtres humains à la façon méthodique, parfaite, d'une industrie d'état. Le monde entier regarde la montagne, la masse de mort donné par la creature de Dieu à son prochain. [. . .] La seule réponse à faire à ce crime est d'en faire un crime de tous. De le partager.[226]

The only appropriate response she can find in the face of such crime is to imply that the Germans did not act alone. Her message evokes Jacques Chirac's 1995 speech in which he addressed the necessity of recognizing past faults as an act of defending the rights, freedom, and dignity of

[226] Duras, La Douleur, 64-5.

humankind.[227] Duras had already understood this necessity to fight against evil forces constantly at work in the world. In stating that these crimes were everyone's offense, she recognized that it was as much her responsibility as anyone's. Duras, like Chirac, called for all, including us, to share in bearing this burden. But how are we implicated in these events that happened perhaps before some of us were born? I can see where those who had absolutely no connection to this era, like myself, would reject the notion that they somehow need to share crimes committed by people in a far away time and place. Although we may not have *had* a hand in what happened during the Second World War, the reality is that we do now *have* a responsibility to share the burden, or to carry the ashes as Ross Chambers suggests. In light of what Duras' testimony and others like it implore us to do, we are left to wonder in what capacity are we to bear this burden? One simple answer is by taking up the battles of our times and fighting for social and political justice in our own communities. We must learn to show compassion for one another, and we must not be afraid to speak or act when we feel that we or others have been wronged.

Conclusion

The complexity of Duras' life is emblematic of *les Années noires*. While her testimonial voice reiterates many important (and often overlooked) details from history, still, ambiguities remain. As it was for Duras, there are certain things that we too will never understand because certain events lie in excess of our frame of reference. Nonetheless, we must continually seek ways to apprehend the ways in which we remember, and we must treat inconvenient realities with courage and delicacy. Marguerite Duras was a victim of war's outer reaches, but she was also a survivor, one from whom we can learn.

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[227]This is a reminder of a point I make in Chapter 1 when at a 1995 commemorative ceremony of the Vel d'Hiv round-ups in Paris, Chirac emphasized the necessity to continue witnessing by stressing the need to "témoigner encore et encore."

It is ironic that a text with the title La Douleur and The War could leave us with a lasting message of hope. Thanks to Duras' courage and commitment to establish a purpose for herself as a writer, she was able to impart a legacy rooted in the possibility of change, hope, and love. In an interview with Laure Adler, Duras affirmed her sincere beliefs in these ideals. Adler writes:

> Duras croyait à la révolution, comme à l'amour, et au nom de cette croyance que le monde devait être changé, elle a embrassé la Résistance, la cause de l'Algérie pendant la guerre, mai 68, et à chaque fois elle a été deçue. Mais elle y croyait sincèrement, comme elle n'a jamais triché avec cette espèce de puits sans fond qu'est la possibilité d'écrire. C'était à la fois une souffrance, un appel presque mystique et en même temps une dévoration d'elle-même, y compris de son propre vécu qu'elle a fini par annihiler au profit de la réinvention d'un imaginaire qui pouvait lui servir. [. . .] ce qui reste de Marguerite Duras, c'est son écriture. Pour elle, elle a tout risqué.[228]

The physical pains that Duras endured all of her life were partially rooted in the Second World War. After April 1945 and Robert's return, her agony did not subside; yet, fortunately, Duras refused to be consumed by suffering. Through her pen, she began to respond to this "appel mystique" summoning her to revolt. The mystical calling Duras felt, coupled with an obsession with her own life, led her to explore the possibilities of revolution in writing, which was for her a bottomless pit. Duras devoted her life to examining her own potential to change, to hope, and to love, and once she embarked on this exploration, she never stopped. That is what we are called to do. We all have a role to fulfill in this life, and while the path leading us there may not always be straight and short, we must not cease to continue our life's journey in search of our place in this world.

[228] Marion Van Renterghem, 19.

Chapter 4---Charlotte Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, from Auschwitz et après

"Mon coeur a perdu sa peine, il a perdu sa raison de battre, la vie m'a été rendue et je suis là devant la vie comme devant une robe qu'on ne peut plus mettre."[229]

One final voice from the past, Introduction to Charlotte Delbo

Although Auschwitz et après and Le Convoi du 24 janvier are now available in translation, Charlotte Delbo is not well-known in the English-speaking world outside of academic circles.[230] Quite honestly, from what I gathered during a visit to France in November 2008, she is not very renowned there either. I was surprised at the French responses I received upon mentioning the name, Delbo: "*C'est qui? Qu'a-t-elle écrit? Je n'ai jamais entendu parler d'elle!"* These were not reactions of those I met in the streets, but rather of well-educated, well-read French, one of whom is retired from the Sorbonne, and another who is a research librarian at IMEC. Despite recent claims of "canonical status," Delbo's writings remain rather obscure in both America and France.[231] Before one of my French professors introduced me to it, I too was ignorant of Delbo's voice, one that carries a poignant message capable of making us feel some of the unspoken tragedies of *les Années noires.*

Delbo's trilogy, Auschwitz et après, is at the same time a personal and collective account of prisoner life before and after deportation, including to the most notorious death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau. Delbo seemed to sense that had she published Aucun de nous ne reviendra,

[229] Charlotte Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 19.

[230] Charlotte Delbo, Le Convoi du 24 janvier (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1965); ---, Convoy to Auschwitz: Women of the French Resistance, trans. Carol Cosman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997).

[231] Hutton, 210. She writes: "Any reference to the subject matter of this book, whether in France or the UK, has almost invariably provoked mention of one name: that of Charlotte Delbo. In spite, or perhaps because, of her atypical status Delbo appears to have become emblematic of the French female deportee writer in the public imagination. [. . .] However, while her texts have elicited a number of different critical responses, no one has sought [. . .] to consider why she alone has achieved canonical status."

the first volume in her trilogy, immediately after completing it in 1946 that her voice would remain hushed by the dominant political, social, and cultural discourse of the day. In 1947, she wrote the second volume Une connaissance inutile but decided that the lapse of time still was not sufficient for publishing. It was not until 1965 that Delbo released the first volume, as well as le Convoi du 24 janvier, for publication; the second volume followed in 1970. Eventually, she wrote the third volume, Mesure de nos jours, and published it in 1971.

The inclusion of her testimonial voice in this study stems in part from the fact that when it comes to remembering war, in general women's voices have traditionally played a secondary role. As many, including Nicole Thatcher have highlighted, during the Second World War, women's roles in wartime drastically changed:

> Les femmes, même les infirmières à proximité des champs de bataille, ne sont pas considérées comme des combattantes actives, et par conséquent, leurs représentations de la guerre ne jouent qu'un rôle secondaire dans la formation de la mémoire culturelle. Le mythe féminin consiste avant tout dans l'image d'une femme en pleurs, ou bien consolatrice et vaillante. La guerre de 1939 change cette perspective : cette guerre totale vise les civils, les femmes et les enfants. Un certain nombre de femmes peuvent revendiquer un rôle actif dans la guerre, et dans la France occupée, cela se traduit par leur participation à une résistance contre l'occupant, et bien souvent en conséquence, contre le gouvernement Vichy. Cependant, après la guerre, les témoignages des femmes, leurs représentations, n'obtiennent pas l'audience ou la considération qu'elles méritent ; les raisons de cet accueil sont nombreuses [. . .]. [232]

Upon learning that her friend, Andre Woog, had been senselessly beheaded after being judged by special courts to deal with *résistants* set up by Phillipe Pétain in 1941, Charlotte Delbo returned to France from South America, where she had been touring with Louis Jouvet's theatre company since 1940. Delbo refused to stand idly by while Vichy government officials tried to

[232] Nicole Thatcher, "La Mémoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale en France et la voix contestataire de Charlotte Delbo," French Forum 26.2 (2001), 13 Nov. 2008 <http://go.galegroup.com>.

convince the masses that collaboration was the only solution. Like many women and men, Delbo did not accept this proposition and instead, chose a courageous course of action to resist the Occupation. Yet, her literature does not address her heroism as a *résistante.* Rather, it reopens the wounds of a disturbing past. Delbo's testimonial voice makes us sensitive to the outer-reaches of war, or what John K. Roth has termed "the Holocaust's web."[233] As official memory has begun to recognize, the Vichy regime and its cohorts had a hand in the creation of this web. Thus, her testimony not only helps us trace its complexities but also proves that Delbo, even though she is no longer alive, still has an active role to play in the still-shadowy history of *les Années noires.*

Delbo was not deported as a Jew, but as a French political prisoner engaged in resistance. As such, her voice becomes one of special interest due to its particularity. After her arrest by the French police and a five-month internment in the Romainville prison, Delbo was one of 230 women, almost all of whom were non-Jews engaged in anti-Nazi resistance activities, on the transport that left Compiègne on January 24, 1943. Of those women deported to Auschwitz on this particular convoy, only 49 returned to tell their story. In Mesure de nos jours, the third volume of the trilogy, with the intercession of Delbo's voice, many of these survivors were able to testify about what has come to be known as one of the most tragic periods of modern history. Delbo spent her life "after Auschwitz" trying to make sense of the "useless knowledge" she had acquired in the camps and, at the same time, to memorialize those who would never have that chance. In a very unconventional, lesser-known text, Le Convoi du 24 janvier, Delbo, with the

[233] See John K. Roth's chapter, "Equality, Neutrality, Particularity: Perspectives on Women and the Holocaust," in Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust, eds. Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003) 5-22. In this chapter, Roth writes, "Women could be found in virtually every intersection and intricacy of the Holocaust's Web" (p. 8). See also Carol Ritner and John K. Roth, preface, Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust, in which Roth makes the same point.

help of some fellow survivors, attempted to reconstruct the lives of those other women on her convoy. The text is a poignant illustration of Delbo's efforts to commit these women to our memory.

Her texts leave no doubt about the scars left by the trauma of deportation, but what we do not anticipate discovering is that life "after Auschwitz" was equally as disturbing. Thus, we are left to ponder what her particular experience and writing tell us about the political and historical context in which her voice is rooted. It is important to remember that of the nearly 75,721 Jews deported from France during the Second World War, only about 3% of them returned. Of the 63,085 résistants, political prisoners, general criminals, and others deported, nearly 59% returned.[234] Some might feel that Delbo's position as a non-Jewish deportee means that her experiences were not equal to the Jewish experience during the Holocaust. She finds herself in a delicate position, but I do find her writing to be emblematic of the *l'univers concentrationnaire*, a point to which I will return. When the first deportees returned to France in 1945, as Rousso suggests, no one knew how to react. The deportees who returned were lumped under one term, "les absents."[235] And as far as most official discourse is concerned, many of the deportees stories are still "absent."

To fully absorb the resonance of Delbo's testimonial voice, it is crucial to remember that her story brought to light a part of France's history that lay outside the bounds of national

[234] Annette Wieviorka, Déportation et génocide: entre la mémoire et l'oubli (Paris: Plon, 1992) 21; Renée Poznanski, Jews in France during World War II, trans. Nathan Bracher (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2001) 462.

[235] Wieviorka, Déportation et genocide, 32. In talking about Henry Frenay, head of the repatriation process for the French, she writes, " Des services secondaires sont mis en place, notamment celui d'assistance aux 'absents', terme délibérément général, significatif, qui dessine une population en creux, évite de mettre en évidence les causes de l'absence et la situation de ceux qui sont retenus dans les territoires contrôlés par le Reich. Car pour Henry Frenay, dès la fin 1943, ces 'absents' doivent former un tout."

memory during the post-war years. As Marguerite Duras eloquently pointed out, no one in the Provisional French Government was talking about the concentration, death, and work camps in part because those memories had no role to play in restoring the *grandeur* of France. Furthermore, those trying to create a sense of national unity had no interest in Delbo's voice or those similar. Since all information that could serve as potentially damaging testimony against the national rehabilitation effort was repressed, it really is not all that surprising that Delbo waited twenty years after she had returned to publish the first part of her testimony.

Delbo decided to break her silence in 1965, just six years prior to what Rousso deems the third phase, "The Broken Mirror," in which the there was a sudden urge to bring forth repressed memories.[236] Myths led to misunderstandings about many aspects of *les Années noires:*

> Au fond, c'est bien la nature intrinsèquement idéologique du mythe résistancialiste qui explique ses faiblesses. Il a par exemple laissé par la touche d'autres mémoires toutes aussi marquées par l'Occupation : les prisonniers de guerre, plus d'un million d'hommes qui n'ont pas connu l'Occupation, sont restés souvent attachés au Pétain de la Grande Guerre, et dont la perception des événements a été radicalement différente du reste des Français ; les travailleurs du STO, mémoire honteuse par suite de la glorification outré du réfractaire, assimilé souvent au maquisard; les déportés raciaux , juifs en tête, ombre insupportable au tableau idyllique, dont le réveil tardif dans les années 1970 a précisément contribué à modifier la représentation des années de guerre; et peut-être aussi une bonne partie des . . . résistants eux-mêmes, dépossédés de leur histoire, et dont beaucoup ont été en porte à faux du fait de leurs réserves à l'égard du gaullisme ou du communisme.[237]

Charlotte Delbo participated in this "reawakening" process. She seemed to sense that had she published Aucun de nous ne reviendra, the first volume in her trilogy, immediately after

[236] Robert O. Paxton, foreword, Vichy: An Ever-present Past: Contemporary French Culture and Society, by Eric Conan and Henry Rousso (Hanover: Hanover University Press of New England, 1998).

[237] Rousso, 342.

completing it in 1946 that her voice would remain hushed by the dominant political, social, and cultural discourse of the day.

Part of the confusion is linked to the fact that government and social officials selected what information would be passed along to the public. There were many filters at work---in the press, on the radio, and even through the postal service--- to "protect" the public, and specifically the families who waited for their loved ones to return, from the horrific realities of the concentration and death camps.[238] As Henry Rousso explained, the divisions among French society during the Occupation---resisters, collaborators, pacifists, militia, milice, Gestapo, the Free French---posed one of the main obstacles to national unification. A collective healing would have been impossible given that there was no agreement among officials about whom to mourn, whom to punish, and whom to exalt.

Historians Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci and Edouard Lynch have offered some very insightful explanations of the potential reasons why memories of deportation were not immediately integrated into the political and social discourses of 1945. First, they point to the fact that the first Nazi camp, Majdanek, was liberated in July 1944; whereas, Mauthausen was not freed until May 1945. During this span of time, the French were liberated from the Germans and had already set their sights on rebuilding their nation. The first prisoners returned to France in January 1945, while others had to wait many months before their homecoming, if they were fortunate enough to hang on that long. Matard-Bonucci and Lynch ask pertinent questions about the days following the Liberation in France:

[238] Edouard Lynch, "Les filtres successifs de l'information," in Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci and Edouard Lynch, eds. La Libération des camps et le retour des déportés: l'histoire en souffrance (Versailles: Editions Complexe, 1995), 163-75.

> Les informations et les images se superposent et se mélangent: combats acharnés en Allemagne, retour des prisonniers de guerre et des déportés du travail, découverte des camps et souffrances endurés par les déportés, révélations sur l'extermination systématique des Juifs d'Europe, effondrement de nazisme. Dans ce contexte où les évènements s'emballent, quelles sont les images qui finirent par l'emporter ? La libération des camps a-t-elle frappée la société française ? Quelle idée de la déportation s'imposa alors à l'opinion publique ? A-t-on cherché à savoir ? A-t-on cherché à entendre les rescapés ?[239]

It appears as if we are still grappling with these questions, in part because there were so many competing images, but mainly because memories of these events were fragmented and revised to fit into the dominant discourse of the post-wartime years. Because so many realities of deportation experience were altered by the censure mechanism of both the authorities and French society, the post-wartime public was not as shocked to learn about their plight as one might believe. After reading Mesure de nos jours, we are left to wonder if they were indifferent to it.

Like these historians, I too will attempt to explore this "rendez-vous manqué avec l'histoire immédiate de la déportation."[240] While sifting through historical archives is a likely place to find some illumination, so too is an existing body of testimonial literature that bears many emotional, yet objective, truths. As I will attempt to show, Delbo's testimonial voice eradicates any misconceptions or false ideas people had (or perhaps, still have) about deportation and life afterwards. Regardless of whether the post-wartime public eagerly sought to "know" or "hear" the survivor's accounts, Delbo was determined to make future generations "feel" and "see" the horrors of the entire experience, both during and after it.

[239] Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci and Edouard Lynch, eds., introduction, La Libération des camps et le retour des déportés: l'histoire en souffrance (Versailles: Editions Complexe, 1995) 11.

[240] Ibid.

Critical reception of Auschwitz et après

In spite of her limited exposure, there have been some critical studies conducted on Charlotte Delbo. Some of the attention aimed at Delbo stems from her being a female survivor of Auschwitz and, more generally, the Second World War.[241] Others have focused on the aesthetics of her art and the often-perceived contradictions between aesthetics and history.[242] Yet, most of the references I have encountered to Delbo's writings have come primarily from compilations of essays and extracts of literary works written about women survivors of the Holocaust. One such text is Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust.[243] Within the framework of this study, Delbo's voice stands out because of its "difference" from Jewish women's voices.

Margaret Hutton's study of French women's testimonies from the Nazi camps contextualizes Delbo's voice according to its female and French tones; yet, even Hutton emphasizes the "atypical" nature of this voice, especially in relationship to other French women's testimonies from the camps.[244] Scholars like Carol Rittner and John K. Roth have included portions of Delbo's trilogy in sections of their compilation Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust, including "Voices of experience" and "Voices of Reflection," focusing

[241] Sayre P. Sheldon, ed., Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write about War, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999)133; 222-23.

[242] Brett Ashley Kaplan, Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007). See specifically the introduction and Chapter 1, "Aesthetic Survival: Paul Celan, Charlotte Delbo, and 'Living Next to Auschwitz,'"1-51.

[243] Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg, Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

[244] Hutton, 210.

specifically on women's voices from the Holocaust.[245] Roth has written other articles about Delbo including "Equality, Neutrality, Particularity: Perspectives on Women and the Holocaust," in which he takes a more analytical approach to enumerating the particularities of her texts.[246] Roth argues for the inclusion of Delbo's voice not just because it is female in nature, but because both Jewish and non-Jewish "women could be found at virtually every intersection and intricacy of the Holocaust's web."[247] For those like Roth who seek revision and expansion of their understanding of the Holocaust, listening to voices like that of Delbo is essential.

Roth and others like him who have initiated the discussion on women's experiences or various types of Holocaust experiences stress that they are not trying to privilege one gender, class, or race over another, but rather are attempting to explore the similarities and differences of their experiences. He claims that an inquiry into women's experiences is "a legitimate and important aspect of Holocaust studies to advance the growing realization that the history of the Holocaust is incomplete without responses to questions that focus explicitly on what women did and on what happened to them during those dark years." Roth substantiates his argument adding:

> Testimony and scholarship that reflect gender differences deserve more attention and respect. Holocaust history, however, grants no comfort, and therefore differentiating does not entail privileging. Done well, differentiating leads to increased insight and greater depth of understanding.[248]

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[245] Carol Ritner and John K. Roth, eds, Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust (New York: Paragon House, 1993) 38; 58-64; 99-103; 228; 328-331.

[246] John Roth, "Equality, Neutrality, Particularity: Perspectives on Women and the Holocaust,"Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust, eds. Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003) 5-22.

[247] Roth, 8.

[248] John K. Roth, "Equality, Neutrality, Particularity: Perspectives on Women and the Holocaust," Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust, eds. Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003) 13.

We should not question the fact that all those trapped in this tangled web woven by the Nazi regime experienced the same hell. But, as many have suggested, the horrors, though similar, were not exactly the same for men and women, Jews and non-Jews. To this end, Myra Goldenberg has written an article "Different Horror, Same Hell: Women Remembering the Holocaust."[249] While recent scholarship has begun to concentrate on gendered experiences during the Holocaust, as Roth and others suggest, further exploration is needed. By contextualizing Delbo's Holocaust experience within the larger framework of *les Années noires* and the post-Liberation years, this study offers an expansion of these calls for more attention to be directed at women's wartime, and more specifically, Holocaust experiences. The term "holocaust," is nonetheless a bit problematic, and I will return to this discussion in the following section.

Though our perceptions might lead us to believe it, the Holocaust's horrors did not end with the liberation of the camps or once the survivors returned home. Like Delbo succinctly and effectively shows in the third volume, Mesure de nos jours, freedom from the camps did not correspond to the images of liberty the deportees had conjured up while still imprisoned. The reasons for this are most likely linked to the unprecedented magnitude of the Second World War, but they are also connected to the unprecedented reactions such a cataclysm evoked. Thus, Charlotte Delbo's voice not only beckons an expansion of Roth's call for differentiation, it also brings to light an overshadowed portion of the history of *Les Années noires* and the Second World War.

[249] Myra Goldenberg, "Different Horrors, Same Hell: Women Remembering the Holocaust," Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Paulist Press, 1991) 150-66.

Because she is not Jewish, not all scholars would consider Delbo's voice as one from the "Holocaust." Yet, it would be unjust to disregard the tremendous insight it offers not only into daily life in the camps but also the striking portrait it paints of what life must have been like for *all* deportees who survived and had to attempt to live again, to return to life, to *revivre.* Many survivor's stories end with Liberation, but as we experience in reading Mesure de nos jours, their struggles to return did not end with freedom, rather new ones began. Few have focused on this aspect of her trilogy, or the specificities of her voice and its testimonial value vis-à-vis *les Années noires.* While Hutton hints at this, her discussion centers largely on the place of Delbo's voice amongst others from the Holocaust, not upon its place in France's history.[250] This is significant, for even though Delbo has attracted some critical attention, I would not go as far as Hutton does in saying that her texts have achieved "canonical status." In spite of Hutton's claim that her works "are available in translation and thus capture the large Anglophone (Holocaust) market," that does not mean that her voice has resonated outside of this type of reader. Her voice still rests on the margins of those we need to hear. It is a voice that reminds us of the rabid hatred that led the Nazi regime and its cohorts, including France, to entangle so many *other* victims in its web. By including her voice in this study, I hope that Charlotte Delbo will begin to capture the readership of those interested in *les Années noires*, French history, and more generally, the Second World War.

The genre and origins of Auschwitz et après

The diversity of critical responses to Delbo stems from the number of different labels assigned to her texts, the most obvious being "Holocaust literature." Much of the difficulty in

[250] Hutton, 210-11.

deciding which voices to include in studies like those mentioned above stems from definitional debates about the term "Holocaust". In light of the original Greek term meaning "sacrifice by fire," the Holocaust has come to signify "the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators."[251] The French language, on the other hand, prefers the broader term *Shoah*, which comes from the Hebrew meaning "catastrophe." While I do not wish to enter into a lengthy discussion about the various terms used by different groups, it is important to recognize that they are not arbitrary. As Omer Bartov suggests, "A multiplicity of names for an event, an object, a phenomenon, may signify a confusion as to its essence, an unease with its presence, fear and anxiety at calling it *what it really is.*" Within the term "Holocaust," we hear religious, notably Judeo-Christian, overtones.[252] Bartov points out that "nations that had not experienced the event at close quarters" find this term appropriate. In the United States, for example, where the lines between the secular and religious are often blurred, the notions of sacrifice, God, and purpose are bound up in the term Holocaust. [253] The French had an initial predilection for the term *genocide*, as Bartov explains:

> The French have no qualms about calling the thing by its name, genocide, yet prefer to maintain their distance from it not merely by employing a legalistic terminology, but by connecting it with all other genocides, While during the war the English and the Americans were on the opposing side of genocide, [. . .] the French hovered on the periphery. According to the French perception of the war, all kinds of terrible things happened, such as occupation, collaboration, resistance,

[251] "Holocaust Encyclopedia," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 4 Feb. 2009 <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005143>.

[252] Omer Bartov, "Antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Reinterpretations of National Socialism," The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) 79.

[253] Bartov, 80.

> destruction, and genocide. [. . .] the French see the genocide of the Jews as the counterpart of their lot under the occupation [. . .]. Precisely because unlike the American and English case, mass murder took place at a greater geographical proximity and with wide-ranging French collaboration, it becomes necessary to define it accurately and unsentimentally and to associate it with one's own sacrifices, rather than with one's own complicity.[254]

Given this, the use of the term "Shoah" allows the French to identify their own sacrifices during the war. Due to complicity in the events of *les Années noires*, the French had to find a term other than that of their Anglo-Saxon neighbors, and since the release in 1985 of the film Shoah by Claude Lanzmann, the French have gravitated toward this Hebrew term. Bartov asserts that the use of the term "Holocaust" would have only diminished the value of the Résistance and heightened the sense of national guilt in France. The opening of le Mémorial de la *Shoah* (and not *génocide* or *Holocaust*) in Paris in January 2005 is further evidence of a shift from the generic *génocide* to the more specific *Shoah*, suggesting a recognition by the French of the catastrophe for the Jewish people and their own part in it.

During the *Shoah*, there were a total of nearly eleven million people who perished: six million Jewish victims and five million "other", or "Non-Jewish" victims. Delbo survived deportation to Nazi Germany's most infamous concentration camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, while also spending time in Ravensbruck and Raisko, but again, she was not Jewish. Is it misleading, then, to classify Charlotte Delbo's writing as "Holocaust literature," when a strict definition of the term refers to literature written by Jewish victims and survivors? It is outside the scope of this study to engage in current scholarly debates about terminology and classification, but it is important to recognize the recent dynamic nature of Holocaust studies, which, in some instances, has offered an expanded chorus of voices to consider. Among them, we hear those of Gypsies,

[254] Bartov, 80-81.

homosexuals, non-Jews, and others. As Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg stress, "the place of the Non-Jewish victim" is indeed "a highly sensitive area in Holocaust studies." [255]

When I visited le Mémorial de la Shoah in December 2008, it was clear that the French not only "had no qualms about calling the thing by its name," but that they had moved beyond the all-encompasing, generic term *génocide* to the more specific, *Shoah.* The memorial clearly illustrates the role the Vichy regime and its cohorts played in the round-up, arrest, and deportation of Jews from France. To me, this is a clear suggestion that certain groups are willing and have begun to address these difficult and painful past realities. In the overall process of promoting the rights of humankind, some seem to have recognized the importance of reconciliation. As I started my descent into the crypt of le Mémorial de la Shoah, the very first comment I read etched on a plaque was the following from historian Georges Wellers: "A nous tous de nous l'approprier, de vivre et de construire avec ce crime, et malgré ce crime." As this particular part of the exhibit suggested, French amnesia is finally gone, but I would add that this only means that the remembering process must continue. Because so many memories from *les Années noires* have been repressed or unspoken, we still have much to discover. Delbo's testimonial voice offers one part of departure in tracing the complexities of the period.

As an anecdote to what I have said here, in many places that I visited throughout France, including bookstores, I noticed references to *les Justes de France.* Both the Panthéon and Mémorial de la Shoah had special exhibits on these just and righteous people who risked their own lives to save Jewish children and families during *les Années noires*. I mention this for three reasons. First, thanks to Pierre Sauvage's film, Weapons of the Spirit, many people may have

[255] Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg, introduction, Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003) xv.

heard of le Chambon-sur-Lignon , a small village in the south of France where André Trocmé, a protestant pastor who, with the help of his wife and community, was able to save 5,000 Jews from persecution during the Second World War. Still, there are others of whom we have little if any knowledge who were equally as courageous and successful in saving lives as Trocmé. One suggestion is that there are 2,693 *Justes de France*, that is, of whom we are aware.[256] The point is that there is still much work to be done in this area, which leads to the second point I would like to make. It seems that the French are making progress in bringing to light these fragments of their history, which is essential to trying to eliminate those still-lingering shadows. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the recent attention granted to *les Justes* reminds all of us that the Occupation, and more generally wartime, provokes many different responses that manifest themselves in various forms be it resistance, compliance, abstention, or retaliation, to mention a few. Like Rousso and others have made clear, not all French were *résistants*, nor were all of them *collaborateurs*; it just was not that simple. Further exploring the role that *les Justes* played during the war would distract from the intentions of this study, but I do believe that there is work to be done in this area.

Charlotte Delbo, like *les Justes*, finds herself on the margins of French history, or at least outside of the dominant discourse which have, until recently, substantiated it. I do not know if this is tied to her gender or the fact that she did not publish any works about her wartime experience until 1965. At any rate, her voice remains to be heard by the masses in both France and the English-speaking world.

[256] "Le mur des Justes" Memorialdelashoah.org. le Mémorial de la Shoah. 11 Feb. 2009 <http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/b_content/getContentFromTopNavAction.do?navId=140>

Rosette Lamont has referred to Delbo's writing as a "literature of conscience" in both her translator's preface to Auschwitz et après and in an article that appeared in the Massachusetts Review.[257] Due to the moral obligation Delbo felt to share her comrades stories, she became a *porte-parole* for those who did not have the strength or courage to talk about their past. Lamont clarifies the label "literature of conscience" by explaining that the French language has two meanings for the word *conscience*, one which means "conscience" or that still small voice that helps one distinguish from right and wrong, and the other which means "consciousness" or state of awareness. This "literature of conscience" becomes "an amalgam of conscience and consciousness." [258] Lamont asserts, "It is Delbo's acute consciousness which makes her a privileged witness."[259] That Delbo was an observer-witness of the systematic annihilation of Jews and others needs no explanation. Auschwitz and After, as Lamont suggests, is not only a "literary masterpiece," but also a "precious scientific document," and might I add a historic and sociological one as well.

Others have hinted at calling Delbo's writing a "literature of extremity" or "literature of atrocity."[260] It is not my intention to enumerate all of the possible labels given to this body of literature, but it is important to place it into the context of this particular study. Auschwitz and After, and more specifically the third volume, Mesure de nos jours, is a self-effacing

[257] Rosette C. Lamont, translator's preface, Auschwitz and After by Charoltte Delbo, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) vii, and "The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo," The Massachusetts Review 41.4 Amherst: Winter 2000/2001, 483-97. 11 May 2007 <http://www.lion.chadwyck.com/search>.

[258] Lamont, "The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo."

[259] Lamont, translator's preface, Auschwitz and After, vii.

[260] Lea Fridman Hamaoui, "Art and Testimony: the Representation of Historical Horror in the Literary Works by Piotr Rawicz and Charlotte Delbo," Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature 3.2 (1991) 243-259; Lawrence Langer, The Age of Atrocity: Death in Modern Literature (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 201-244.

autobiographical, yet collective testimony filled with a multitude of emotional past truths. Delbo uses literary discourse to call upon her memory and artistic ability to render a rare form of witness that clarifies a dark part of history.

Delbo's authorial intentions

Charlotte Delbo made it known that she committed herself to others. In her post-wartime years, she strove to revise the perceptions the general public held about *les Années noires*, specifically what it meant to have experienced Auschwitz or any Nazi camp and what it meant to try to return from there. Delbo's literary oeuvre embodies her dedication to eradicating any misconceptions that might exist about the tragedies of the Second World War. Lamont explains:

> To emerge from the stifling silence of trauma one must strive to reshape a community. Remembering what her camp companions expected from her, she proceeded to do so. First this was achieved by the very structure of her trilogy, which brings to mind a vast chorus composed of many voices blending into one. They are unified by the author-memorialist.[261]

The term, author-memorialist, is clever and summarizes Delbo's authorial intentions. She wanted to use the art of writing and the subversive powers of literary language to create a text capable of making us feel the presence of the absence of others, in other words, all those victims of the Shoah who did not return home. In a similar vein, she also wanted to memorialize other survivors by lending them her voice so that their stories might be shared. Delbo's third volume in the trilogy is an affirmation of her ability to assemble a diverse chorus of voices representing all victims of the Shoah.

In Mesure de nos jours, we hear the voices of a cross-section of survivors, incluing Jews and non-Jews, French and non-French, young and old, men and women, that help us to sense the

[261] Lamont, "The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo."

individual, yet similar, difficulties they faced upon returning home. Compared to Duras' voice, Delbo's is not as militant; in fact, it comes across as apolitical and neutral. In reading Delbo, one does not sense that she is trying to privilege one voice over another, including her own, for she selflessly committed herself to the task of making others see and sense the atrocities inflicted on all victims. As she often pointed out, "il faut donner à voir," and the admirable thing is that Delbo was able to make us "see" through the pen of one, the collective suffering of many. If anything, Delbo's voice reveals that in some ways, the Jewish victims of the Shoah faced atrocities that others did not, like the initial selection process upon arriving in the camps. One of the voices in Mesure de nos jours explains that the French POW's knew they had been deported for resistance activities; whereas, the Jewish deportees had been interned simply because of their religious affiliation.

Unlike some writers, Delbo makes her authorial intentions very explicit. In speaking with Rosette C. Lamont, her translator and friend, Delbo articulated her intentions in writing Auschwitz et après:

> Although I did not know it at once, I came to the realization that I wrote this text so that people might envision what *l'univers concentrationnaire* was like. Of course it wasn't 'like' anything one had ever known. It was profoundly utterly 'unlike.' And so, I knew I had to raise before the eyes of a future reader the hellish image of a death camp [. . .]. I hope that these texts will make the reoccurrence of this horror impossible. This is my dearest wish.[262]

The images of roll calls, mud, death, etc., imprinted in one's mind after reading Delbo are worse than "hellish." In fact, they are so horrific that it is difficult even to talk about them. Imagine not bathing for over two months and being forced to wear the same filthy rags and undergarments encrusted with bodily waste. Think about then being able to bathe in a stream but

[262] Ibid.

having to scrub your filthy body with mud, and washing so hard that your thin skin bleeds, only to find that you had to return to camp where you would "sleep" on wooden planks in barracks infested with lice. These are just a few of the terrible, incomprehensible images Delbo crafts with her words. Like any artist, she wanted to leave a lasting impression, one that could be didactic in the prevention of "the reoccurrence of this horror".

After Buchenwald was liberated by the allied forces, the citizens of neighboring Weimar, Germany were made to tour the camp and bury the dead. Some of them were forced to carry the dead through the streets of their town so that all might know the atrocities committed on their own soil. The purpose of such exploits was to punish and humiliate the citizens but also to reeducate by forcing them to see what had happened under their very noses. In many respects, Delbo strives to reeducate her reader in much the same way. She transports us there, to the camps, as well as to the France of 1945-1970, so that we too might be exposed to the atrocities of war. While we are not responsible for burying the dead, like the citizens of Weimar, we are implicated in bearing the burden of their deaths and lives. If, as Duras suggested, the only way to respond to these crimes is to make them everyone's to share, then we must bear our portion.

In the foreword to Convoy to Aushwitz, John Feinstiner suggests that Delbo understood the necessity to bear the burden of the living and the dead because she was haunted by the question of who still thinks about the children burned at Auschwitz. Preserving these memories is one of the primary reasons why she decided to give her collective testimony. It has been 64 years since the liberation of most of the camps, and the question, along with others, still beckons us to respond: Who still thinks about the Shoah? *Les Années noires?* After reading Delbo, how could one not have an increased awareness of this catastrophic past? And how can we lead a

normal existence after having encounterd it? Delbo even recognizes the difficulty in this endeavor claiming that it is better not to believe the *revenants* because if we do, we will never again sleep. In the poem, "Prière aux vivants pour leur pardonner d'être vivants," Delbo explains:

> Et puis
> mieux vaut ne pas y croire
> à ces histories
> de revenants
> plus jamais vous ne dormirez
> si jamais vous les croyez
> ces spectres revenants
> qui reviennent
> sans pouvoir même
> expliquer comment.[263]

Just because it would be "better" not to believe the appalling testimonies Delbo relays, that does not mean that we are freed from the responsibility to do so. With the fleeing of time, memories fade, and that is precisely why Delbo concretized them in literary form. Our role in restoring and integrating them into our memories is crucial. For those who have no direct, personal memories of *les Années noires* or the Shoah, and even for those who do, testimonial texts like Delbo's provide a key to informing our mediated and often skewed perceptions of history.

In the closing lines Delbo pleads with her readers while issuing an imperative:

> Je vous en supplie
> Faites quelque chose
> un pas
> une danse
> quelque chose qui vous justifie
> qui vous donne le droit
> d'être habillés de votre peau de votre poil
> apprenez à marcher et à rire

[263] Delbo, Une Connaissance inutile, 191.

parce que ce serait trop bête
à la fin
que tant soient morts et que vous viviez
sans rien faire de votre vie.[264]

This charge issued to the living, be it those who returned beside her, or those of us who encounter her testimony today, summons us to "justify" our lives by learning "to walk" or perhaps "to laugh." Delbo understood the necessity to do something worthwhile with her life. In many respects, these words are reminiscent of the existentialist thought that at the end of a life, a person is but the sum of his or her acts. Regardless if one believes in the afterlife or not, every member of the human race has a duty to use the gift of life to make a positive impact in the world. Delbo recognized this imperative and certainly led by example. Opening herself to us must have been excruciating, but Delbo heeded her own charge and surmounted her own desires to succumb to admissions of "je ne pourrais plus vivre." Her testimony makes it clear that it would have been easier for her to have crawled in a hole and died, but she resisted this temptation. After all, as Delbo said in her poem, it would have been "trop bête que tant soient morts et que vous viviez sans rien faire de votre vie." May her supplication and example implore, encourage, and inspire us to follow in her footsteps by giving meaning to our own lives.

Discourse in Mesure de nos jours

Mesure de nos jours, again, presents us with a unique form of testimony in that it is a collection of survivor's voices, some of whom were on the original convoy that left Compiègne for Auschwitz on January 24, 1943. Others Delbo must have met either during the repatriation process in 1945 or during the post-war years. As the text is devoid of explicit biographical details about those whose voices we encounter, the connections between Delbo's voice and theirs are

[264] Delbo, Une Connaissance inutile, 190.

sometimes ambiguous. One thing is clear: through the testimonies she transmits, we sense the disenchantment that virtually all of them experienced upon their return home.

Lawrence Langer attributes Delbo's unique form of witnessing to her ability "to pierce the skin of memory, to expose the naked self divested of its heroic garments." He underscores the necessity of both "common" and "deep" memory in our attempts to "pursue the effects of the Nazi past on the lives of individual men and women."[265] In La Mémoire et les jours, Delbo's last text, she addresses the fact that the Auschwitz experience is etched in her "mémoire profonde" and that as a result she lives a double existence:

> Auschwitz est là, inaltérable, précis, mais enveloppé dans la peau de la mémoire, peau étanche qui l'isole de mon moi actuel. A la différence de la peau de serpent, la peau de la mémoire ne se renouvelle pas. [. . .] Dans cette mémoire profonde, les sensations son intactes. [. . .] j'ai le sentiment que celle qui était au camp, ce n'est pas moi, ce n'est pas la personne qui est là, en face de vous. [. . .]Et tout ce qui est arrivé à cette autre, elle d'Auschwitz, ne me touche pas, moi, maintenant, ne me concerne pas, la mémoire profonde et la mémoire ordinaire. Je vis dans un être double.[266]

The effectiveness of her literary discourse in helping us to examine the effets of the past stem directly from this functioning of different types of memory. Langer also points to the connection Delbo makes between "mémoire profonde" and "mémoire ordinaire" and "external" and "sense" memory, or what Delbo refers to as "mémoire externe" and "mémoire des sens." External memory is thinking memory, whereas, sensory memory is that which "transmits the physical imprint of the ordeal [and], enables us to approach the unthinkable."[267] The power of Delbo's testimonial voice is linked to the discourse that emerges when she combines both deep and sense

[265] Langer, introduction AA, xiii.

[266] Charlotte Delbo, La Mémoire et les jours (Paris: Berg International, 1995) 13.
[267] Langer, introduction to AA, xiv.

memory, resulting in a text that paints with words images allowing us to approach the unthinkable.[268] As Langer asserts, "Memory must serve a seeing truth as well as a thinking truth, the *profonde* as well as the *ordinaire*."[269]

When pitted against the French historical, political, social and cultural discourse, Delbo's collective testimony also "pierces the skin of memory," adding a new dimension to contemporary discussions on French national history, memory, and identity. Within the context of *les Années noires*, Delbo's voice is foreign because it is one that has been marginalized. As Hutton points out:

> For all of the focus on the Vichy years, and in spite of the apparently growing importance of the witness [. . .], the testimonial accounts of a particular group of individuals who suffered the consequences of the Vichy regime—French women deported to Nazi concentration and death camps have, as yet, received next to no critical attention.[270]

Given the research I have completed, this certainly seems to be the case, but I would also add that very little, if any, critical attention has been paid to Delbo's voice for what it reveals about post-wartime memories. As Wesley R. White's review of Auschwitz et après indicates:

> By far the most poignant and important section of the book addresses the author's readjustment to society after her liberation, her struggle to remember and make others understand her experiences. Many Holocaust memoirs stop at the liberation, but Delbo's descriptions help the reader understand the posttraumatic stress disorders prisoners experienced. In describing her friends' postwar lives, she reveals to the reader an intricate mosaic of emotions and experiences that reinforced her own difficult readjustment. She describes friends who suffer from flashbacks, physical ailments, agoraphobia, survivor's guilt, and other problems.
> Because Delbo's work is such a poignant reminder of the horrors of the concentration camp experience and addresses survivors' difficulties in postwar

[268] Langer, introduction to AA, xiv, xvii.

[269] Langer, introduction to AA, xv.

[270] Hutton, introduction, 1-2.

> life, it would be an excellent choice for an undergraduate or graduate class on the Second World War. It should also be required reading for graduate courses on the Holocaust."[271]

Despite this recognition, few have devoted their attention to Mesure de nos jours and this aspect of her writing. Nicole Thatcher does mention the uniqueness of Delbo's voice for its attention to the return process, but her study dismisses the details of what her voice and others have to say about their actual homecoming.[272] Obviously, there is a need to address this topic.

So many survivors have addressed the atrocities of thirsting and having noting to drink, of starving and having nothing to eat, or being cold and having nothing with which to stay warm. Delbo addresses these abominations in the first two volumes of her trilogy. I certainly do not wish to diminish the significance of these topics, but as White emphasizes, Delbo's account continues past the liberation experience and invites us to attempt to feel what it must have been like to have experienced freedom after living with death for so long.

I could not agree more with Wesley White's assertion that Delbo's trilogy should be "required reading," but I would not limit it to students studying the Second World War or the Holocaust. While it certainly is not pleasurable bed-time reading, or, for that matter, pleasant to read at any time of the day, it is important to remember that the Holocaust and the Second World War did not end with the cease fire. Through Mesure de nos jours, Delbo reminds us of this. We must recognize that the world is still dealing with the presence of these events and others like them. These testimonies are important not only for their capacity to "illuminate" a shadowy past,

[271] R. Wesley White, Review of Auschwitz and After, by Charlotte Delbo," German Studies Review 19.3 (1996). 13 Nov. 2008 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1432570>.

[272] Nicole Thatcher, Charlotte Delbo: Une Voix Singulière: Mémoire, témoignage et littérature (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003) 20.

but also for their capacity to raise awareness about similar radical behaviors. Thatcher touches upon this when she writes:

> Ces témoignages revêtent une signification importante non seulement parce qu'ils maintiennent vivant le souvenir d'un moment tragique de l'historie du XXème siècle, mais aussi parce qu'ils prennent une valeur d'avertissement et d'actualité dans le monde d'aujourd'hui où les tendances extrêmes, racistes, xénophobes ou totalitaires, sont toujours actives.

We encounter these "extreme tendencies" everyday when we turn on the television, search the Internet, or pick up a newspaper. Racism, xenophobia, and totalitarianism still exist and are actively at work in our world today in the United States, France, and elsewhere. It seems as if we, as a human race, have not heeded history's lessons. Despite the obscure forces of evil still at work in our lives, we must continue to ward them off as best we can. One way of doing so is to pass on the testimonies Delbo has gathered here.

The dominant theme of Mesure de nos jours is summed up in one word, *retourner*. What was it like for those who returned from the camps? What difficulties did they face in their attempts to "live again?" How did social and government institutions welcome the deportees home, and how did they assist them in the process of returning? After much searching, I found two enlightening historical studies that address the return of deportees in France, one entitled La Libération des camps et le retour des déportés: l'histoire en souffrance, edited by Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci and Edouard Lynch, which I have already evoked in the opening section of this chapter. The second study, Déportation et génocide: entre la mémoire et l'oubli, is by Annette Wieviorka. These two texts were invaluable in helping clarify the various reasons why the history of deportation has been so challenging to write. This historical information is analogous to the questions under scrutiny here, so allow me to enumerate a few of the more important facts.

First of all, once prisoners of war, deportees, political prisoners, racial deportees, etc. started to return to France in late 1944, government officials wanted to view all of "les absents" as "deportees" because this helped them unify public sentiment, and consequently, heal a fractured nation.[273] Wieviorka cites that many different groups of deportees resisted this practice, which, consequently led to much confusion and dissension among them. Thus, much of the disorientation about what to do with those who returned was initially linked to definitional debates about who should be called a "déporté," but a French law dating to 1992 clarified the matter by excluding those deported for work with the STO (Service de Travail Obligatoire).[274] The CFLN (Le comité français de la Libération nationale) and the GPRF (le gouvernement provisoire de la République française) were in charge of organizing the actual repatriation process. Given the enormity of the task, a special "commissariat" was set up under the direction of Henry Frenay and was dissolved once everyone had been "successfully" brought back to France. Frenay, named head of the commission of "Prisonniers et Déportés" in November 1943, was to give moral and material support to both returnees and their families, organize repatriation logistics, and help reintegrate the returnees into French society. With such a daunting task ahead of him, Frenay reached out to the international community for assistance. The United Nations Relief for Rehabilitation Administration was formed, but as of April 5, 1945, this organization

[273] Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, "Retour à la vie: entre mise en scène et lecture officielle de la deportation," in Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci and Edouard Lynch, eds. La Libération des camps et le retour des déportés: l'histoire en souffrance (Versailles: Editions Complexe, 1995), 216.

[274] Annette Wieviorka, "Déportation et génocide: Le cas français, essai d'historiographie," in Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci and Edouard Lynch, eds. La Libération des camps et le retour des déportés: l'histoire en souffrance (Versailles: Editions Complexe, 1995), 237. She provides the following information in a footnote: "Le 31 janvier, réunie en assemblée pleinière, la Cour de Cassation déclare que seuls les déportés résistants et les déportés politiques, à l'exclusion des personnes contraintes au travail forcé en pays ennemi, peuvent se prévaloir du titre de déporté."

had only 25 teams in place across Europe to help with the repatriation of prisoners. Another part of the problem for Frenay is that he was in Algers when many of his initial decisions were made, and he did not have pertinent information about the location of the deportees, etc.[275] In spite of these logistical problems of having the means and support necessary to execute effectively the repatriation of over 2 million deportees (STO workers, POWs, political prisoners, Jews, et al.) the largest problem seems to have been the indifference of both the government and the public at large. Wieviorka writes, "Mais surtout, les services du ministère portent un intérêt limité aux déportés et ignorant leur état de détresse physique et morale."[276] Some have attributed the lassitude of the post-wartime French public to a general attitude: "Cette attitude est générale: les Français sont las; après toutes ces années de guerre; ils ne veulent plus entendre parler d'horreur et aimerait que la déportation soit une parenthèse qui se ferme à la liberation."[277] The following testimonies show us this state of physical and moral distress that remained a part of the returnees' daily lives. They also illustrate how the indifference of others to such pain can sometimes exacerbate it. Testimonial, literary accounts, such as Delbo's are invaluable in helping us reopen these parentheses that have been closed for far too long.

Along with providing insights into what it was like to return from *l'univers concentrationnaire,* Delbo's text also raises many questions about governmental and social systems in place (or not) to assist in the repatriation of returnees. It is astounding to think that after all these people had endured that there was perhaps a lack of desire to welcome them home

[275] Annette Wieviorka, Déportation et génocide, 31-41. She devotes the entire first chapter of her book to "Le Ministère Frenay et les déportés."

[276] Wieviorka, Déportation et génocide, 37.

[277] Amélie Marin la Meslée and Stéphanie Bourget, "Le retour dans les récits publiés après-guerre," in Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci and Edouard Lynch, eds. La Libération des camps et le retour des déportés: l'histoire en souffrance (Versailles: Editions Complexe, 1995) 149.

in a humane way. The following testimonies make clear that the only support system the returning deportees had was one another.

Delbo opens this volume of the trilogy with her own testimony about *le retour.* As she does in previous volumes, she uses her artistry to mix past and present in order to illustrate the omni-presence of Auschwitz in her life. Upon arriving in Paris, Delbo admitted no longer recognizing the companions who were returning alongside her, as well as having doubts about her own existence.[278] Suddenly, she found herself alone and confused as to whether she was with "les morts" or "les vivants." She writes, "J'étais prise dans une angoisse qui me laissait errante, glissante et flottante---, il me fallait admettre que je les avais perdues et que désormais je serais seule." She then poses a pertinent question, "Où chercher secours?"[279] Without the support network of her friends with whom she had endured morning roll calls, labored during endless work details, and dreamed of being free from the hell they were living, how was she to carry on with her life? Where was she to turn for help? Could she learn to live again, to return to life? Delbo needed her friends to be there for her, but they too had to learn to return to life. Delbo addresses trying to reestablish a daily rhythm:

> Avec difficulté, par un grand effort de ma mémoire, puisque je n'avais plus de mémoire?---par un effort que je ne sais comment nommer, j'ai essayé de me souvenir des gestes qu'on doit faire pour reprendre la forme d'un vivant dans la vie. Marcher, parler, répondre aux questions, dire où l'on veut aller, y aller. [. . .] je ne voyais ni comment m'y prendre ni par où commencer. [. . .] D'abord, il fallait réfléchir.[280]

[278] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 9-10.

[279] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 11.

[280] Ibid.

These simple, lucid words relay the emotions of trying to reactivate her memory, no longer accessible because it had died in Auschwitz. Delbo calls to our attention these feelings of being utterly lost with nowhere to turn. What I mean to suggest is that maybe the sheer fact that people survived the camps mislead some to believe that since they had the fortitude to return, surely they were strong enough to go on living without much assistance. Delbo's testimony tells us otherwise. Even though there was a crowd of people gathered to meet Delbo and her fellow returnees, the masses who had not been in the camps could not fathom the magnitude of their suffering, and at the same time, the deportees could not find a way to explain the inexplicable. They found themselves at an intraversable "fossé" that inhibited communications.

Delbo, after taking sufficient time to reflect upon her deportation experience, or at least to make it accessible by publishing it, proves that she can make us feel the unfathomable. What seem to be trivial gestures in life, walking, speaking, and answering questions were for Delbo and those like her, seemingly insurmountable and useless. After all, even if the former deportees could respond to questions about the camp experience, what purpose would that serve? Delbo summarizes that "tout était incompréhensible."

The themes of absence and disconnect from life resonate through practically all of the testimonies Delbo shares. In the former volume, Une Connaissance inutile, she addresses the distinction between *là-bas* and *ici*, the former being the camps, the latter, the present. No one from *ici* could understand *là-bas*, let alone the notions that so many who returned figuratively died there. We know that Delbo wanted "to carry the word" of her friends from *là-bas*, and that is what gave her the courage to live.

The first voice we hear is that of Gilberte. In cross-referencing Le Convoi du 24 janvier, we learn that Gilberte Tamise, and her sister, Andrée, were from Bordeaux where they had engaged in resistance activities with their father and twenty or more young people from their area. After the war, only two of them, including Gilberte returned; her sister was not as fortunate.[281] Gilberte's testimony reveals that her difficulties in returning began with repatriation. While there is no explicit mention in her account of the failure of social and government institutions to facilitate the repatriation process, we are left to wonder about their activity when she reports wanting to take a shower but having no soap, towels, or hot water with which to "faire sa toilette".[282] A few pages later, we learn that it was another returnee from Mauthausen who helped her telegraph her family and to obtain her "feuille de route" to be able to catch the train home. She had neither the mental, nor the physical force to notify her family, and ironically, it was a fellow returnee who helped her complete this task. Gilberte explains, "J'étais si affolée [. . .] maintenant qu'il fallait donner un commencement d'exécution à mon projet, le rendre inéluctable, que j'aurais voulu fuir."[283] Clearly, she needed moral and physical support to initiate her "projet" of returning home, and thankfully, this fellow deportee was there to lend a hand.

Gilberte's testimony evokes the sentiments of solitude, separation, absence, and disorientation that returnees faced. Liberty was full of disillusions and those coming back had perhaps not anticipated experiencing such feelings. As Gilberte explains, "J'avais rêvé de la liberté pendant toute la déportation;" yet, once she was free, she contemplated: « C'était cela, la

[281] Delbo, Le Convoi du 24 janvier, 275.

[282] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 25.

[283] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 35.

liberté, cette solitude intolérable, cette chambre, cette fatigue?"[284] Here, we are reminded of Duras' commentary on liberty in that it merely became a sign of "demain sans eux," tomorrow without all of those who had not returned. For Gilberte, freedom from the camps translated as unbearable solitude and exhaustion. Through Gilberte's voice, we come to realize that even those who did return were not actually "present" but trapped "là-bas."

The psychological aspects of returning are made very explicit in the literary discourse of this and other testimonies. Gilberte was absent and confused, and like Delbo she tried to make sense of her inability to perform what are normally effortless tasks like speaking. She admits that "tout était si décousu dans ma tête que je ne parvenais pas à formuler une phrase."[285] She was so overwhelmed by the return that everything in her head was disengaged leaving her incapable of formulating an idea, let alone a phrase. Moments later, she describes her mental state: "Je ne faisais attention à rien. Tout se passait derrière un brouillard [. . .]"[286] The fog did not lift until Gilberte was able to return home. Upon seeing the objects in her sister's room, she noticed them taking on "leurs contours, leur usage, leur passé, leurs marques." Yet, these objects evocative of her past offered little comfort:

> Tout devenait tranchant [. . .] menaçant. Je ne savais comment faire pour éviter le contact de tous ces objets qui m'encerclaient, m'assaillaient, me heurtaient. Comment fuir, me dissoudre, ne plus être reprise par le passé, ne plus me cogner murs, aux choses, aux souvenirs? En même temps, tout était irréel, comme dépourvu de consistance. Sans consistance et pourtant coupant. Tout était meurtrissure et de fait j'avais l'impression d'être couverte de bleus, aucune partie de ma peau qui ne me fît mal. Depuis . . . comment ai-je fait?[287]

[284] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 24.

[285] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 38.

[286] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 39.

[287] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 40.

These words evoke both the mental anguish and physical suffering Gilberte experienced because of the memories of her deceased sister that these objects evoked. As things seemed to come to life swirling around and hitting her, leaving her covered in bruises, she wanted only to flee this painful past. At the very end of the quote, she grounds her testimony in the present by asking the rhetorical question "Since [that moment] . . . how have I survived?" What we discover is that she cannot explain how she has lived after Auschwitz, only that she has had to learn to relive. Happiness is a feeling she yearned for but twenty-five years post liberation, it still evaded her. Though she admires those who have rediscovered the joy of living, happiness was something she would never know:

> Je les admire celle qui ont eu le courage de se remettre à vivre après. [. . .] Etre heureux, est-ce une question que nous nous posons, nous? Je me répète pour m'en assurer qu'il y a vingt-cinq ans que nous sommes rentrés, sinon, je ne le croirais pas. Je le sais comme on sait que la terre tourne, parce qu'on l'a appris. Il faut y penser pour le savoir.[288]

Just as she knows that the world turns because she learned it, presumably as a child, Gilberte finds that she must also learn that twenty-five years have passed since her return. If she did not reassure herself of this fact, she would not believe it. Even with nearly a third of a lifetime elapsed, this former deportee has not yet fully returned to life.

At this point in the text, a voice continues the theme of the complexity of returning. In many ways, this poetic discourse summarizes Gilberte's testimony:

> Qu'on revienne de guerre ou d'ailleurs
> quand c'est d'un ailleurs
> aux autres inimaginable
> c'est difficile de revenir
> [. . .]
> Qu'on revienne de guerre ou d'ailleurs

[288] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 41.

quand on revient de là-bas
et qu'il faut réapprendre
c'est difficile de revenir
[. . .]
quand on a regardé la mort
à prunelle nue
c'est difficile de réapprendre
à regarder les vivants
aux prunelles opaques.

These poetic words engender the classic symptoms of what we now call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When a person has experienced a traumatic event, be it a life-threatening accident, war, or in this case, *l'univers concentrationnaire*, it is common for the victim to have symptoms that cause them to re-experience, avoid, or become hyper-sensitive to the traumatic event. Such symptoms might include having flashbacks or nightmares, and feeling emotionless or lackluster about life, and in this case guilty for having survived when so many others did not. Difficulty sleeping and feeling "on edge" about life are two indicators that one may be suffereing from permanent effects of PTSD. Whatever the case, victims of PTSD have trouble leading a normal existence as these symptoms disrupt their daily routines and habits.[289] In light of this, it is clear what the poet means in writing "c'est difficile de revenir . . . c'est difficile de réapprendre."

The repetition of the phrase "c'est difficile de revenir" is striking because it translates as "It's difficult to come back." Perhaps it is overly optimistic to see the goodness in this phrase, but the poet did not say that it was "impossible" to return to life. In relying on inner-strength and courage, as well as one another, these witnesses triumph over inhumanity. In spite of their personal beliefs or perceptions about their ability to return, we sense that they have looked into

[289] "What are the symptoms of PTSD?," National Institute of Mental Health, 21 Jan. 2009, 9 Mar. 2009 <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/what-are-the-symptoms-of-ptsd.shtml>.

deep into our eyes, while piercing our hearts with their words. What we must understand though is that they suffered indefinitely from PTSD at a time when little credence was given to such an anxiety disorder.

Madeleine Doiret's testimony echoes Delbo's and offers a continuation of her attempt to speak out against general indifference to the returnees' plight. Mado, as Delbo calls her, was a teacher in the Parisian region until France fell to the Germans. In 1940, she engaged in resistance activities, printing and distributing anti-Nazi texts. Arrested June 17, 1942, she did not return from Ravensbruck until April 23, 1945. Mado had lost her brother and husband during the war, and returned to find her mother, father and sisters still alive. In 1952, she had a son, Jean Michel, but his birth did not bring the joy she desired but rather feelings of guilt. The only thing she thought of when she saw her son were all the women who perished in the camps who would never have the chance to give birth and experience the same joy.[290] In Le Convoi du 24 janvier, Delbo highlights part of the reason why Mado was still suffering twenty years after her liberation:

> Vingt ans après, elle souffre de l'indifférence, de l'ignorance, de l'incompréhension qu'elle rencontre chez ceux qui n'ont pas été déportés. Qui songe encore aux quarante mille enfants juifs de Paris brûlés à Auschwitz?[291]

Mado, like Delbo, understood that forgetting about these Jewish children deported from France was not an option. Ironically, in Mesure de nos jours, Mado's husband "wants to help her forget" past atrocities. Sadly, Mado cannot make him or any of her relatives understand that forgetting is impossible because "oublier serait atroce." Indeed, wiping away these memories would be a

[290] Delbo, Convoy to Auschwitz, 67.

[291] Delbo, Le Convoi du 24 janvier, 90.

victory for Nazi ideology. The atrocity of forgetting is not a new theme, and one of the most poignant examples comes from La Nuit when Elie Wiesel writes, "Jamais je n'oublierai cela, même si j'étais condamné à vivre aussi longtemps que Dieu lui même. Jamais."[292] Just as he will never forget, neither can Mado who makes clear that forgetting is not a matter of volition: "Oublier ou nous souvenir ne depend pas de notre vouloir, même si nous en avions le droit. Etre fidèle aux camarades que nous avons laissés là-bas, c'est tout ce qui nous reste."[293] Fidelity to their camarades, those who returned and those who did not, has now become her *raison d'être.*

One other important aspect that Mado's testimony brings to light is the unique blend of discourse that is born out of Delbo and survivor's voices. Like many, Mado could not find her voice. Without Delbo's help, she could not seize the notion that she was present in this "liberated" life:

> Ma voix se perd. Qui l'entend? Qui sait l'entendre? Elles aussi voulaient rentrer pour dire. [. . .] Et moi, je serais vivante? Alors que je ne peux rien dire. Vivante, alors que ma voix s'étouffe? Que nous soyons là pour le dire est un démenti à ce que nous disons.

Here, we feel as much from what she is not able to say as from what she is able to say. Running through questions in her mind, Mado wrestles with the guilt of being here when others are not. It seems as thought she also reproaches herself for being alive while her voice remains mute and strangled. Yet, the very fact that she is alive defies the claim she makes about having died in Auschwitz. She lives without living because *l'univers concentrationnaire* seems to have sucked virtually every breath from her. Through Delbo's assistance, her voice slowly comes to life

[292] Elie Wiesel, La Nuit (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958) 59.

[293] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 64.

revealing the incessant struggle to return to life. We often hear that there exists a distinction between being alive and living, and Mado's testimony confirms this notion.

By her own admission, her testimony is "ni optimiste, ni gai," understandably so; yet, one might say that she did have one small victory over death in that she found the courage and strength to share her testimony. She expresses disdain over the fact that wars still rage, injustice still prevails and fanaticism reigns. Does this suggest that what she and others endured served no purpose at all? Mado answers that "le monde est encore à changer." [294] Hopefully, our encounter with her testimonial voice will encourage us to respond to her charge.

In juxtaposition to the intensity of Mado's testimony, we encounter that of Marie- Louise. Unlike the others, she seems to have found happiness in her husband Pierre with whom she spoke incessantly of her camp experience. Delbo visited them, while collecting testimonies for this text, and the tone of this particular segment is comparatively much lighter. During their conversation, Marie-Louise and her husband discuss topics like what kind of wine will best accompany lunch and their pilgrimage to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Ironically, it is Pierre who tells of visiting the camp and Delbo who sporadically, when prompted, confirms the details.[295] But when Pierre, who professes to know quite a bit about the camp experience, says the following, we sense the paradox:

> Evidemment, j'en ai vu plus que vous n'en aviez vu quand vous y étiez: les crématoires, les chambres à gaz, le mur des exécutions au camp des hommes en bas. Nous avons tout visité.[296]

[294] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 52.

[295] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 96-7.

[296] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 97.

Regardless of what Pierre purports to know or understand about his wife's experience, his comprehension, as does ours, falls short of the horrific experiences the victims lived. He did not "see" more than they when they were there. In conversations with his wife and in visiting the camp for a short time, it simply is not possible that he understood the reality of Block 25 or the interminable roll-calls. In spite of the fact that Pierre visited "everything" in the camp---the crematoria, the gas chambers, the execution wall---the brief visit was no substitute for the lived realities of the camp.

Ida's testimony follows and distinguishes itself from the others in this collection because she was Jewish. As a teenager, her family sent her to live in hiding with Alice's family in Poitou. When the Gestapo came for Ida, Alice was forced to surrender her or her own child. After three days in the Drancy holding camp, Ida was sent to Auschwitz. She found comfort in the fact that her mother had been deported earlier, and she held on to the thought of being reunited with her in the camp. For a fourteen-year-old girl, she demonstrated tremendous courage: "Personne ne s'occupait de moi. Je devrais prendre soin de moi toute seule."[297] It is this resolve to take care of herself that most likely helped her survive. Upon returning to France in 1945, Ida discovered her family had not survived, so she went to live with a friend who employed her as a baker. In spite of her wishes to return to school, there was no money available from the Israeli community, or it seems anyone else. This is another indication of the absence of social and governmental structures to assist those who returned, be it financially, psychologically, or otherwise.

Ida did eventually marry and have a child, but like many other returnees, found herself split between here and there. One day, she was overcome by a personal crisis and had to seek

[297] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 103.

treatment at a clinic. These crises continued to plague her for years after her return, and from time to time, she had to return to the clinic for a few days until she could pull herself together.[298] The striking thing about her testimony is that it avoids talking about the specifics of camp life. In fact, when she visited with other deportees, they also avoided talking about that topic. Rather than focusing on the problems of thirst and hunger, Ida's voice sheds light on many of the peripheral events that were part of the concentration and death camp experience. The most distressing moment in her testimony comes as she talks about Alice, the lady who had tried to protect her before deportation. Ida visited Alice regularly upon returning, that is until one winter when Alice hung herself. It would be unfair to make a false judgment, but perhaps what this suggests is that Alice simply could not live with the heavy burden of the past. If this was the case, it is unfortunate that she saw suicide as the only solution.

While Ida's voice only hints at the ineffectiveness of others to help in the return process, Loulou's testimony gives the most concrete example of such failures. Loulou was nineteen upon returning from Auschwitz. The voice we hear is ambiguous, and in the text it appears that "Lucien et moi" are the ones retelling this story to Delbo, but again, this is not clear. First, it is helpful to know that Loulou was living in "un asile de fous" in spite of the fact that he was not crazy.[299] He had returned June 3, 1945, and upon completing "les contrôles de papier [. . .] personne ne l'attendait."[300] His entire family had been deported, his house requisitioned by the authorities and his possessions stolen, so he decided to rent a hotel room. Every day, he returned

[298] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 120.

[299] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 127.

[300] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 127.

to the station hoping to run into his family. So, he waited: "Il restait appuyé aux barrières du matin au soir, regardant ceux qui revenaient, questionnant, avec l'espoir de reconnaître l'un des siens, au moins d'avoir des nouvelles."[301] For nearly one month, he remained pressed against the fence questioning those who returned. Eventually, he ran out of money and had to abandon the hotel where he was staying. Without a clue as to where to go, and no one to turn to, Loulou took to the streets. Understandably, he was overcome with the mental and physical anguish of not reuniting with at least one person from his family. One morning two police officers woke him while he was sleeping on a bench:

> Il a sursauté. Il a montré son tatouage, sa carte de rapatrié. Les agents ont été compréhensif. Ils l'ont emmené au poste, mais sans le bousculer, et le commissaire, en voyant Loulou dans cet état—pas rasé, pas lavé, et avec le mine qu'il avait au retour [. . .] le commissaire l'a fait escorter à l'hôpital. [. . .] Quand il s'est vu là, il a eu peur. [. . .] il s'est sauvé. Comme il était en robe de chambre, il n'a pas tardé à se faire arrêter et cette fois on l'a pris pour amnésique. Il était si fatigué qu'il ne trouvait plus ses mots. On l'a pris pour amnésique et on l'a interné.[302]

Within six months, Loulou was back on his feet. Once again, he returned to the rue Rambuteau with the hope of finding loved ones, but none of them remained. He did not know where to go, he had no money, and so, he asked to stay at the psychiatric hospital where he felt a sense of security. It appears that some time later Lucien and his wife visited him there before bringing him to live with them.

This testimony is important in that it adds to what we know about the way deportees were treated upon returning. Furthermore, it also shows the importance of the deportees' reliance on

[301] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 128.

[302] Delbo, Mesure de nos jours, 128-29.

one another even after the camp gates were opened. They had all shared a collective experience, and that experience, despite what they might have imagined, bound them to one another for the remainder of their lives. Had it not been for Lucien and his wife, perhaps Loulou would have remained "locked away" in the hospital where for so many years he was presumed to be a crazy man with no memory.

This analysis of the testimonies in Mesure de nos jours is merely a start in understanding the complexities of the post-liberation years and the trials and tribulations deportees faced in their efforts to return to life. There is still much work to be done in this area, especially from a historical and psychological point of view. These voices heighten our awareness of the magnitude of the burden of the Second World War, the Shoah, and *les Années noires.* Essentially, by listening to these voices we begin to feel the imprint of their lives on our hearts. While it is naïve to think, like Marie-Louise's husband, that we could every fully understand or feel what those who returned knew and felt, it would be atrocious, as Mado said, to forget those who did not live to tell. We must acknowledge the emotional truth of these testimonies and the possible implications they have in our lives today.

Conclusion

A few recent commemorative events in France suggest that Charlotte Delbo is perhaps beginning to attract some long-overdue attention from cultural, political, and social institutions. In 1998, officials in the small village of Tronget named their middle school after her, and they also decided that every two years they would organize a week of studies devoted to the memory of Charlotte Delbo and to the concentration camp experience.[303] In January 2008, the library in

[303] College Charlotte Delbo. 12 Feb. 2008 <http://college-tronget.planet-allier.com>.

the second arrondisement of Paris was named after the former political prisoner who survived the Shoah. Most recently, in March 2008, Delbo's portrait, surrounded by seven others, like those of Marie Curie and Simone de Beauvoir, adorned the entrance to the Panthéon in a special ten-day exposition held on the occasion of *La Journée internationale de la femme*. This day finds its roots in the signing of the Charter of the United Nations in 1945 which included an acknowledgment of gender equality. In 1977, the UN adopted a resolution declaring a "United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace" to be observed by member states on a day of their choosing and in a style analogous to their own national traditions. According to the UN, "International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities."[304] While the French did not officially commemorate this day until 1982, the 2008 observance was a collaborative effort on the part of the city of Paris and the National Monuments who sought to pay homage to a select group of women they considered "emblématiques des luttes pour l'égalité."[305] While the Panthéon is a memorial to France's great "men," like some have suggested, this time it was the women who were being recognized.[306] That Delbo would be included amongst those women deemed "emblematic of struggles for equality" might seem strange since her life's work and

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[304] "International Women's Day 2008: Investing in Women and Girls," United Nations, 30 Jan. 2008 <http://www.un.org/events/women/iwd/history.shtml>.

[305] "Journée de la femme: Elles s'affichent au Panthèon" Paris e vous, 4 March 2008, 30 Jan. 2009 <http://paris.evous.fr/Journee-de-la-femme-elles-s,1203.html>.

[306] Danielle Brick, "Neuf femmes au Panthèon," Radio France International, 7 March 2008, 29 Jan. 2009 <http://www.rfi.fr/francefr/articles/099/article_63617.asp>.

writing is scarcely "feminist" in tone, but it is not surprising that she was honored for the "extraordinary role [she played] in the history of [her] country."

Delbo was honored but like her testimonial voice, this commemoration was rather obscure and went unnoticed by the majority of the public. While her notoriety has not achieved the status of Marguerite Duras or Irène Némirovksy, it is encouraging that her voice does still have the possibility of arising from the shadows of of *les Années noires* to illuminate and guide us into the future.

In Auschwitz et Après Charlotte Delbo addresses the specificities of having been a woman in the Nazi camps and of trying to rebuild her life upon returning. As Hutton suggests, her texts are "politically correct" in that they do not privilege the experience of prisoners of different genders, races, religions or nationalities. Delbo does not seek to depict the French "in laudatory terms" nor does she wish "to single out resistants as morally superior" to any other deportee. Hutton explains:

> Delbo's accounts represent a highly inclusive concept of community with none of the fractured solidarities seen in the majority of accounts. When Delbo states that 'aucun de nous ne reviendra,' the first person plural embraces all deportees, or whatever nationality, gender, class, political or religious affiliation.[307]

Delbo's testimonial voice is transcendent and delivers a universal message about the suffering of *all* the victims of the Shoah and the post-traumatic stress disorders experienced by *all* those who returned. Therefore, in spite of the atypical circumstances of her deportation, as one of only 230 French women on her convoy, her account gives us a much broader impression of a universal hell. As such, this story is not just *hers*, but also emblematic of the 11 million who perished under Nazi ideology, as well as of those who returned from the camps.

[307] Hutton, 218.

In addressing how she survived Auschwitz, Delbo points to the strength she and others drew from her "small, tightly knit" group of friends. She explains:

> Nous nous aidions de toutes les manières, souvent bien humbles: se donner le bras pour marcher, se frotter mutuellement le dos pendant l'appel, et aussi que nous parlions. La parole était défense, réconfort, espoir. En parlant de ce que nous étions avant, de notre vie, nous continuiions cet avant, nous gardions notre réalité. Chacune des revenants sait que, sans les autres, elle ne serait pas revenue.[308]

These words highlight the power of language and the human voice. During their imprisonment, "la parole" was all these women had left of their humanity. By finding strength in who they were before becoming prisoners, the women used speech to ward off losing this last piece of their being, the human voice. In many ways, speech was Delbo's self-defense mechanism that sustained her even in the darkest hours, perhaps even still providing some "comfort" and "hope." Her words have now become our legacy, and we are called to respond by answering, "We will!" when asked by Delbo, "Who will carry the word?"[309] But why and how, one might ask, shall we carry it? Lamont attempts to clarify this duty:

> The most terrifying discovery in the last years of the previous century is that the Holocaust has become a plural event. There are many new holocausts all over our planet (Cambodia, Africa, Bosnia). Does this mean that writers like Charlotte Delbo have failed? Many people of good will still believe that we need the Delbo vision and courage more than ever before. We need conscience and consciousness in order to retain our humanity.[310]

In order to carry the words of those we encounter through her text we must understand the "presence of absence."[311] Delbo's conscience compels her to remember all those who died, all those whose voices silenced during the war. While not all would agree with Lamont's use of the

[308] Delbo, Le Convoi du 24 janvier, 17.
[309] Charlotte Delbo wrote a play, "Qui rapportera ces paroles?" (P.J. Oswald, 1974).

[310] Lamont, "The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo."

[311] Langer, introduction to AA, xviii.

term “new holocausts” to describe current global calamities, the point she is trying to make is clear. Terrible injustices still plague humanity. Perhaps it would be better to target the symptoms of intolerance, hatred, and rage that give rise to such occurrences. Just as Delbo and friends rely upon their words to communicate the tragedies they experienced, so too shall we rely upon words to fight the symptoms that threaten our humanity. These testimonies have taken us through a harsh, incomprehensible past, and now they impel us to action.

Like Lamont, I find myself in the category of “people of good will,” and while some might scoff at this position calling it naïve or unrealistic, I believe that by striving to embrace our fellow brothers and sisters in this life, we can fight against, and hopefully triumph over, the forces of evil that still menace our humanity. This does not mean that we should all join the Peace Corps or fly to Africa to engage in major humanitarian aid projects, although that would be ideal. Rather, a good, feasible start would be identifying indicators of intolerance in our own lives. We do have the power and ability to transform our vision of the world, and thanks to voices like that of Charlotte Delbo and her friends, we have a compelling, courageous example to follow.

Chapter 5---The Legacy of the testimonial voice

"There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."-Elie Wiesel

One of the contributing factors in my decision to take on this topic of "Illuminating *les Années noires*" stems from the misconception that many average Americans have of France and their role in the Second World War. When discussing my interests in France and this project with others, I have often been met with responses like the following: "The French allowed the Germans to march right into Paris." Or "The French owe a debt of gratitude to the allied forces for saving them." Indeed, these are limited, ignorant views of the complex reality of the situation, but they are perceptions that still linger, and whose residue we see in strained Franco-American relations. We must be cautious in casting stones at others, especially at those whose histories we do not fully understand. Furthermore, we must continually examine our own historical and cultural complexities and ambiguities in our efforts to avoid hypocrisy and, ultimately, work toward the more ethical goals of unity and peace.

The events of the Second World War extinguished countless human lives. Fortunately, it is through the testimonial voices of survivors, like Charlotte Delbo and Marguerite Duras, and sometimes through the voices of those who did not survive, like Irène Némirovksy, that we come to know these individuals' stories, and, by extension, the stories of some of those who did not live to tell. Because the Second World War played a primary role in shaping the history of the twentieth century, we must seek to understand the evolution of its consequences in our lives today. While the scope of this study has focused specifically on three French women writers who testified about their wartime experiences, their example serves as a paradigm for continuing the

exploration of *les Années noires,* which represent a central, defining moment in France's national history and identity, and more broadly, the Second World War.

To reiterate what so many have said, and what is a central point in my study, "the evils of Vichy are still a national obsession."[312] Henry Rousso echos this in writing that "la période obsessionnelle n'est pas close." He concludes Le Syndrome de Vichy by questioning how future generations will deal with this past.[313] As Julian Jackson suggests in the closing lines of his history of *les Années noires,* historians alone cannot settle battles over memory or national identity. It is no longer fruitful to engage in the debate "over a France of Vichy or DeGaulle" because the quarrel has grown "stale and misleading." He elaborates*:*

> The solution to the problem cannot be to build identity around the utter repudiation of the one or the uncritical embrace of the other. If there is one lesson to be learnt [. . .] it is that the French past must be faced in all its contradictions and complexity. Only then can it be critically evaluated, and instead of serving to salve the conscience of the present, it can become a usable memory for the future." [314]

Therefore, it is only by attempting to elucidate the "complexities" and "contradictions" of life during the Dark Years that we will be able to make sense of the enigma that historians, writers and others have been trying to decipher for over sixty years. Furthermore, it is only by considering the particularities of the fragmented history of the Second World War that we will arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of its influence in our lives today and hopefully transform it into a "usable memory for the future."

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[312] Patrick Henry, We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France during the Holocaust (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007) 3.

[313] Rousso, Le Syndrome de Vichy, 344.

[314] Jackson, 632.

Some have not accorded much credence to learning from the past, especially those events centered on the Shoah. Lawrence Langer wrote an article, "The Alarmed Vision: Social Suffering and the Holocaust," in which he gives a very grim view of the legacy of testimonial voices that carry stories of atrocity, specifically Holocaust testimonies. He is perturbed by "the tiresome cliché about [those] who do not learn from the past being doomed to repeat it" claiming that this "persists as our favorite buffer against facing human and historical truth." He continues by suggesting "it is time to admit that atrocity in the past does not discourage but in fact *invites* atrocity in the future."[315] Because other atrocities often equated to the Holocaust, like recent events in Rwanda, have occurred in our lifetime, he maintains that "our age of atrocity slips into and out of consciousness with the casual appeal of a transient news item" as "we fail to decipher the clues that would rouse us to an alarmed vision."[316] This all seems very disheartening and severe until he offers: "I am not sure we can find a way of sensitizing this numbness, in whose protective custody we live [. . .]. But I am sure that one useful beginning is with the voices of those who were plunged into a death-in-life milieu from which survival did not bring escape."[317]

While Langer is addressing "Holocaust" survivors' testimonies like Delbo's, it is fair to claim that other testimonial voices from other past atrocities also help bring us out of "the protective custody of numbness" that shelters us from a difficult past. With the constant presence of lethargy and apathy in our world, especially when it relates to topics of atrocity, it is indeed challenging for us "to decipher the clues that would rouse us to an alarmed vision" of the world.

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[315] Lawrence Langer, "The Alarmed Vision: Social Suffering and the Holocaust," Daedalus 125.1 (Winter, 1996) 59.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Ibid.

No one wants to revive the horrible, unimaginable facts linked to past crimes against humanity. Yet, Elie Wiesel reminds us that we have a prominent role to accept in bearing the responsibility of such a burden. He once said, "I have learned two lessons in my life: first, there are no sufficient literary, psychological, or historical answers to human tragedy, only moral ones. Second, just as despair can come to one another only from other human beings, hope, too can be given only by other human beings."

In the introductory chapter, I mentioned Ross Chambers' work on "untimely interventions." In many ways, his beliefs coincide with Langer's assertion that we cannot prevent the reoccurrence of atrocities like the ones I have enumerated in this study, but I find that Chambers' thoughts present this notion in a somewhat more promising light. He emphasizes that reawakening to the trauma of the past is painful, but necessary because these situations can and will reoccur in our lifetime.[318] He points out the necessity of the witness' ability to transgress culture in order to have one's story heard, which he considers a necessary step in "coming to witnessing." He goes on to say:

> It is worth noticing, I think, that witnessing texts very rarely fall into the easy moralism of "this atrocity must never be allowed to happen again." They are too realistic and perhaps too honest for that. Their point, and occasionally their explicit burden, is rather that such an atrocity—the same or another—*can* always happen again; it can happen any time, *now* or *now* or *now* (As Amy Hoffman puts it), and it does. *That* is what we need to know and acknowledge---if only we can be awakened sufficiently from the effects of Cutlural Dalmane to take it in; *that* is why the untimely interventions of testimonial are needed, *again* and *again* and *again.*[319]

[318] Chambers, preface, xx.

[319] Ibid.

The voices of testimonial writers thus become transformative agents and bring us to an awareness that allows us to hear the voices of the dead. [320] Most importantly, testimonial voices have the power to arouse us from the sleepy stupor that inhibits our recognizing that "such an atrocity . . . can happen any time."

As I hope to have illustrated in the preceding chapters, testimonial voices not only illuminate the past but also invoke our participation in the witnessing process. Annette Wieviorka references the Holocaust as the event from which the majority of 20th century testimonies originate. The number of testimonies stemming from this event is "so vast and long-lasting that no researcher can pretend to master it in its entirety."[321] The fact that the testimonies from the Holocaust, and might I add the era of the Second World War, are so numerous and variable and simply cannot be "mastered" stresses the inherent need to keep our ears open to continually emerging voices which often come to us in mediated, sometimes unexpected testimonial forms, like literature. While we cannot be certain what the term "master" means in relation to testimony, the implication might be linked to the notion of transforming what we hear, experience, and feel after reading a testimony into what Jackson called "a usable memory for the future." By opening our ears to other testimonies, perhaps we can begin to sift through the millions of voices calling out from the past. While it may be considered futile to try and "master" all of the testimonies we have inherited from this era, it is also irresponsible and insensitive to remain indifferent to those stories we encounter. We must learn to read them with care so that we can respond to their call to assume our role in the witnessing process.

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[320] Chambers, preface, xii.

[321] Wieviorka, introduction, Era of the Witness, xi.

The messages inscribed in the testimonial voices of Irène Némirovsky, Marguerite Duras, and Charlotte Delbo are relevant to our present lives. In The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider have made related points on the discussion of a reader's role in the witnessing process and the ability of past events to inform our present and future. Their discussion centers on the belief that in this global age, we need to redirect our focus to the interrelatedness of the global and the local. In their study on the effects of globalization on the reconfiguration of memory, they suggest that "national and ethnic memories are transformed in the age of globalization rather than erased."[322] In relation to this inquiry, the most pertinent insight they offer is the way in which the Holocaust has come to represent other tragedies like colonialism and slavery. They claim, "It is the universal nature of evil associated with the Holocaust that fuels its metaphorical power and allows it to be appropriated in referring to human-rights abuses that bear little resemblance to the original event."[323] In subsequent chapters, these scholars go on to address the processes by which the Holocaust, in discussions among Native Americans, African Americans, and other minority groups in the United States, is often "reformulated, reinterpreted, discussed, evoked, and at times, even denied."[324] Granted, I do believe that the Holocaust was a unique event in the history of the world and the Jewish people, but I also sense its capacity to be a "touchstone for a disoriented, de-territorialized humanity searching for moral clarity amid constant uncertainty."[325] Entering these thoughts into my

[322] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, introduction, The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age, trans. Assenka Oksiloff, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006) 3.

[323] Levy and Sznaider, 5.

[324] Levy and Sznaider, 24.

[325] Ibid.

argument may seem off-base, but I believe that they provide a model for looking at the relevance of the collective memory of *les Années noires* in our lives today. For those of us who did not live through the Second World War and have virtually no "real" connection to the era, or to France, for that matter, we must strive not only to understand, but also to apply to our lives, the messages that these voices impart. As Suleiman suggests:

> To recognize aspects of one's own life story in another's is no doubt easier for one who has undergone some of the same experiences, in the same time and place; but it would be far too restrictive, and wrongheaded, to suggest that *only* one who has undergone a certain experience can respond to another's story, and to its telling, 'properly'—or, in my terms, autobiographically.[326]

We have much to learn from the lived experiences of global brothers and sisters. In this international age, we would be remiss if we did not consider the vast chorus of voices waiting to be discovered, particularly women's voices, which have been traditionally marginalized. How many other stories similar to Irène Némirovsky's are hidden in a suitcase somewhere? How many have already been written or recorded but never made public? A recent article that appeared in France-Amérique suggests that indeed there are other witnesses of whom--for various reasons, like their inability to tell or our apathy to inquire--we have no knowledge.[327] In 1942, Monique Saigal was merely a child when her Jewish grandmother, fearing Nazi persecution, put her on a train bound for Dax, France. When she arrived, she was sheltered by a young French woman with whom she remained until 1950. As fate would have it, Monique's grandmother, Rivka Leiba, did not escape the persecution she feared and was gassed at

[326] Susan Rubin Suleiman, "War Memories: On Autobiographical Reading," New Literary History 24.3 (Summer, 1993) 563-575. This quote comes from page 566.

[327] Marie-Amélie Fauchier-Magnan, "En 1942, ma grand-mère m'a mise dans un train pour Dax et je ne l'ai jamais revue," France-Amérique 29 Jan. 2009. 9 Feb. 2009 <http://www.france-amerique.com/articles/2009/01/29>.

Auschwitz shortly after her deportation from France in 1942. Saigal's mother, who was a *résistante*, kept her silence about her wartime experiences. Discovering that women's voices were virtually absent from the history of the Resistance, and given her mother's own silence about the mater, in 2001, Saigal was incited to seek out responses in other survivor's testimonies, whose stories she presents in Héroïnes françaises, 1940-1945.[328] This is only one example of many that are potentially left unvoiced, unnoticed, and understudied. While I have not yet read Saigal's work, I look forward to what its contents might contribute to the research I have completed.

We cannot deny the fact that the consequences of the Second World War are still evolving. During the time that I have been working on this project, I have noticed an increase in public attention to this historical time period. On both sides of the Atlantic, an abundance of stories have surfaced. A glance at recent cultural and political events in France supports this claim. One example comes from the film Indigènes, released in 2006. Speaking clearly to the ongoing racial tensions in France, this film depicts the cruel exploitation of Algerian soldiers who, duped into believing their service was of great value to the Free France effort, in reality, only fought and died in vain. To this day, these surviving soldiers are still fighting for official recognition and recompense, which they most certainly merit. This is not the only example of current struggles to acknowledge overlooked past realities. Other recent stories have surfaced in The New York Times pointing to the unresolved mystery of Dr. Heim, one of Nazi Germany's most notorious killers and to the painful struggle of Holocaust survivors battling the SNCF (Société Nationale

[328] Monique Saigal, Héroines françaises, 1940-1945: Courage, force et ingéniosité. (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 2008).

des Chemins de Fers, or the National Railroad in France) in American courts for their complicity with the Nazis and Vichy in the deportation of thousands of Jews and others.[329]

As I brought to light in the previous chapter on Delbo, the opening of le Mémorial de la Shoah in 2005 substantiates the claim that the battles against what Chirac referred to in 1995 as "les forces obscures" continues. Perhaps the opening of this memorial is connected to what seems to be a new momentum in France to attempt to right past wrongs. Recent efforts by the country's newly-elected president, Nicholas Sarkozy, are connected to an educational mandate requiring French schoolchildren to learn about Jewish child-survivors of the Shoah.[330] His surprise initiative calls for a child-survivor to share his/her story with French schoolchildren in CM2 (the equivalent of 5th grade in America). Some find that this partnership is a valid and necessary act of witnessing and of negotiating the past to better understand and navigate the present and future. On the other side of this polemical issue, opponents are appalled that the government is trying to force ten-year-old children to face such trauma, and furthermore, that the government is isolating the Shoah from the larger context of past atrocities like the Algerian war, colonialism, and the Armenian genocide, to name a few. Even though President Sarkozy's efforts have met with resistance by those like Simon Veil who feel that the memory of the Shoah is too difficult even for its survivors to carry, his mandate has been accepted and integrated into the

[329] James Barron, "Holocaust Survivors Seek Congress's Help in Court," The New York Times 2 Nov. 2008, 6 Feb. 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/03/nyreligion/03holocaust.html>; Nicholas Kulish and Souad Mekhennet, "Uncovering Lost Path of the Most Wanted Nazi," the New York Times 5 Feb. 2009, 6 Feb. 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/05/world/africa/05nazi.html>.

[330] "Le Parrainage d'enfants juifs en CM2 écarté?" Le Figaro. 27 February 2008. <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualites/2008/02/27/01001-20080227ARTFIG00557-le-parrainage-d-enfants-juifs-en-cm-abandonne.php>

CM2 curriculum.[331] Because individual witnesses reference and represent the traumatic experiences of more than just their personal lives, they hold the keys that unlock the past and shed light upon the lives of the masses that are no longer here to share their stories. Their voices can also serve as beacons of light helping us to navigate the precarious, uncertain waters upon which we find ourselves today.

Witnesses' voices, often concretized in literary writing, form a discourse that not only informs history but also transcends it by exploiting emotional truths often absent in traditional historical discourse. The testimonial voices I have examined carry a powerful legacy capable of transforming the present. What all of these voices invite us to do is discover the universal in the particular. They encourage us to explore our role as individuals within the smaller context of our communities, and the larger context of the world. Némirovksy, Duras, and Delbo adopted attitudes of responsibility to fight against the "obscure forces" of injustice and intolerance that threatened their humanity. Not only have they witnessed to us, but they have written themselves into our future. Their testimonial voices implore us to listen and to do so in such a way that we actively assume our role in the witnessing process.

In these testimonies, we have inherited a legacy that is deeply complex and, at times, impossible to understand. In reading them, we become witnesses to the witness. Dori Laub explains:

> While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma--as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock--has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of. The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to--and heard--is, therefore the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the

[331] Jean-Louis Nembrini, "Instructions pedagogique: Enseignement de la Shoah à l'école élémentaire," Bulletin Officiel, N. 29, 17 juillet 2008. <http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2008/29/MENE0800541N.htm>

> "knowing" of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.
>
> By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes partially to experience the trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels. He has to address all these, if he is to carry out his function as a listener [. . .]. The listener, therefore, by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past.[332]

When reading the works I have explored in this study, I could not help but feel the very presence of these writers whose messages of strength, courage, and love spoke to me so clearly. The testimonies they rendered are not only etched in my mind but now weigh on my heart. While my frame of reference will never allow me to relate fully to these women's experiences, I am now, as Laub suggests, a "co-owner" of the legacy of "the traumatic event[s]" of their lives. And while it is unpleasant to experience (only if partially) this trauma, it is part of the process by which we fully inherit this legacy. Indeed, it is one that leaves us bewildered, confused, disturbed, yet at the same time, inspired and hopeful.

In spite of the agony that Némirovsky, Duras, and Delbo endured during *les Années noires*, they did not relinquish their desires to make their mark on humanity. Part of their legacy teaches us to recognize the ambiguity in every single life. While their personal stories are excruciatingly painful to read, there are moments in their works where their valorization of love, friendship and human kindness leave us with a lasting impression of hope. Their inner-strength and determination serve as light for the future. All of them were women of conviction who stood up against the injustices of *les Années noires*--Delbo and Duras through resistance activities, and

[332] Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness," in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (New York: Routledge, 1992) 57-58.

Némirovsky through her persistence to keep publishing, to keep rolling that rock up the hill just like Sisyphus. These women overcame great adversity by giving meaning to their lives during a time when all meaning seemed lost. While it is delicate to include Némirovsky in the former statement, I do believe that she too found purpose in her writing, even in spite of her imminent, tragic fate.

Through the discourse in their works, these writers bring to life the personal battles that many women of their day fought so that we too might attempt to feel what it was like not to know the fate of a loved one, to be faced with confronting the perpetrator of a crime, or to grapple with one's own desires for revenge, as Duras movingly illustrates in La Douleur. Némirovsky, through her text and metatext, reveals her own raw emotions toward a country that she loved, but which rejected her. And in Delbo's writing, we discover the self-effacing battle of a woman with an extraordinary sense of self-worth who was committed to preserving and transmitting the memory of her friends to future generations.

Although we cannot understand the forces of sheer evil still at work, we can and must hope for the transformative powers of these testimonies to take effect. For all who take the time to accept their role in the witnessing process, these testimonial voices have the power to broaden perspectives, to change hearts and minds, to open eyes to past realities so that those eyes might see the world with greater clarity in the future, and to incite us to examine the ways in which their stories serve as metaphors for our own human condition. For, as Elie Wiesel so poignantly said, "A destruction, an annihilation that only man can provoke, only man can prevent." In this case, we must not forget that "woman" should also be included. In examples of suffering and

loss, may we also find strength to channel our thoughts and deeds to be forces of good for humanity.

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Vita

Julia Allison Hope Weems was born August 24, 1977, in Greeneville, Tennessee, where she attended Hal Henard Elementary and Greeneville Middle School. Upon graduating from Greeneville High School in 1995, she completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1999 in French and Economics at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. After working as an Admissions Counselor at Wofford, she taught French at Pauline-Glenn Springs Elementary School in Spartanburg from 2000-2002. In 2003, she completed her Master of Arts degree in French at Middlebury College in Vermont. She currently holds a Tennessee state teaching license in French. Allison returned to the classroom at Dobyns-Bennette High School where she taught French III, IV and AP French from 2003-2004. In 2004, she returned to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where she has been pursuing her doctorate in Modern Foreign Languages with a first concentration in French and a second in Linguistics. Her particular literary interests are rooted in the twentieth and eighteenth centuries and medieval French studies. In addition, she is passionate about teaching French language and Francophone cultures. At UT, she has had the distinct privilege of teaching various levels of French language and literature courses as a Graduate Teaching Assistant.