

PROLOGUE

The Rise (and Fall?) of the Myth of the 'Holocaust'

It is a simple fact that in New Haven, the Jewish community of 22,000 spends about ten times as much money on the Holocaust memorial as it does on all the college students in New Haven. I think that is shocking ... The community is saying: 'We have money for Holocaust, and that's all' ... It seems to me the Holocaust is being sold ...¹

At the end of the twentieth century, the 'Holocaust' is being bought and sold. \$168 million was donated to pay for the building of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on a plot of Federal Land in Washington, DC. Millions of dollars more have financed memorial projects throughout the United States, ranging from the installation of Holocaust memorials to the establishing of University chairs in Holocaust Studies. Steven Spielberg's 1993 movie *Schindler's List* netted over \$221 million at foreign box offices and seven Academy Awards. In short, 'Shoah* business' is big business.

And yet, as the above comments of Rabbi Arnold Wolf reveal, there is some disquiet over the priority accorded to the 'Holocaust' within the American Jewish community. That priority within American Jewish circles, and the more general contemporary obsession with the 'Holocaust', are indeed relatively recent phenomenon. Within the American Jewish community – where 'Shoah business' is the biggest business – there was a noticeable time-lag between the end of the war and the emergence of the 'Holocaust' as the central community myth. Nathan Glazer in his definitive book on *American Judaism*, expressed surprise – with the benefit of hindsight – in his 1972 second edition that 'the two greatest events in modern Jewish history,

* The Hebrew term for the Holocaust.

the murder of six million Jews by Hitler and the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine, had had remarkably slight effects on the inner life of American Jewry up until the mid-fifties'.²

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, those Jewish survivors who arrived in Britain, Israel, Canada and the United States tended to remain silent about their experiences. Silence was a shared reaction to the trauma of the events which were 'too close, too painful to be confronted'.³ In part, this may have been a 'natural' collective reaction of suppression. 'Consequently' – suggests Edward Linenthal in his book on the history of the Holocaust museum in Washington, DC – 'the Holocaust had not been constructed as a discrete "event", because the motivation to forget was too strong for survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders, the implications of what had happened were too threatening for public analysis, and the underlying guilt for not having done more was too great among some Americans, Jews and non-Jews alike'.⁴

In that context of forgetting, academic interest in the Holocaust was as limited as popular interest. Perhaps the most authoritative Holocaust scholar, Raul Hilberg, has written about the lonely task that research on the Holocaust was when he first began in 1948.⁵ His ground-breaking scholarly work *The Destruction of the European Jews* – undoubtedly the single most important academic text on the Holocaust – was rejected by publisher after publisher, and was only eventually published in 1961 after being subsidised by a survivor family.⁶ It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that the nature of the Holocaust began to be grasped by both the academic community and the general public in the United States and Europe.

From a relatively slow start, we have now come to the point where Jewish culture in particular, and Western culture more generally, are saturated with the 'Holocaust'. Indeed the 'Holocaust' has saturated Western culture to such an extent that it appears not only centre stage, but also lurks in the background. This can be seen in the remarkable number of contemporary movies which include the 'Holocaust' as plot or sub-plot. As the novelist Phillip Lopate – who like Rabbi Wolf, has questioned the 'Jewish preoccupation with the Holocaust'⁷ – is prompted to ask: 'where would the contemporary European art film be without the Holocaust? As a plot device it is second only to infidelity'.⁸ And yet it is not simply the European art film which offers us a filmic 'Holocaust'. In the last two decades, the 'Holocaust' has come to Hollywood.

The 'Holocaust' is so familiar that we don't even need to hear the word spoken; the sight of tattooed numbers triggers a whole stock of mental images. In the Academy winning film *Shine*, it is even enough

for David's father to roll up his sleeve and we realise that a number is tattooed on his arm. This is sufficient for us to relate the behaviour of this Jewish family in the present to a 'Holocaust' past. And yet – as a story recounted by Dorothy Rabinowitz reminds us – tattooed numbers on someone's arm meant little in 1950s America. She tells of a survivor at a dinner dance in San Francisco who

... noticed one man in the room staring curiously at her from time to time; finally he came over, introduced himself, and confessed that he had seen the numbers on her arm. 'I was wondering,' he said, 'why you were wearing your laundry numbers on your arm?' What were they really, he wanted to know, some sort of decoration? I told him no, that's my telephone number.⁹

Such an exchange is inconceivable in contemporary America. The image of tattooed numbers has become one of several which have come to represent the 'Holocaust'. It is an image which appears not only in the movies, but also towards the end of the permanent exhibition in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. Here, opposite a pile of shoes, hangs a number of photographs of tattooed arms taken at a meeting of survivors held in Los Angeles in 1991. And even if someone in contemporary America was to be unaware of the significance of these tattooed numbers, it is unlikely that a survivor would seek to explain them away as simply their telephone number. From a position of relative ignorance about the Holocaust on the part of non-survivors and relative silence about the Holocaust on the part of survivors, the Holocaust has emerged – in the Western World – as probably the most talked about and oft-represented event of the twentieth century.

This book seeks to explore how and why this is the case. It is therefore not so much a book about the historical event we call the Holocaust, but rather a book about the emergence of the myth of the 'Holocaust' over the last three decades. Taking three people – Anne Frank, Adolf Eichmann and Oskar Schindler – and three places – Auschwitz, Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – by way of a focus, I want to examine how and why the myth of the 'Holocaust' has emerged in Europe, Israel and the United States. Rather than this 'myth' being homogenous, it is possible to discern shifting concerns and meanings over both time and space.

I admit that 'myth' is a highly problematic term, given that it has been used by those who suggest that the 'Holocaust' is little more than war-time atrocity stories and post-war Jewish propaganda.

However, by using the term 'myth' I do not suggest – as the so called 'revisionists' and Holocaust deniers do – that six million Jews were not murdered during the course of the Second World War, many of them by gassing. The historical reality is that around six million Jews were murdered in Second World War Europe. I would echo Liebman and Don-Yehiya's words – who also use the term 'the Holocaust myth' in their study of Israeli Civil Religion – that 'by labelling a story a myth we do not mean it is false'. Rather, 'a myth is a story that evokes strong sentiments, and transmits and reinforces basic societal values'.¹⁰

The term myth of the 'Holocaust' – for all its problematic connotations – is useful for distinguishing between the historical event – the Holocaust – and the representation of that event – the myth of the 'Holocaust'. It is a distinction noted by the writer Lawrence Langer who points out 'the two planes on which the event we call the Holocaust takes place in human memory – the historical and the rhetorical, the way it was and its verbal reformation, or deformation, by later commentators'.¹¹ Lopate goes further than Langer and admits, 'in my own mind I continue to distinguish, ever so slightly, between the disaster visited on the Jews and "the Holocaust"'. Sometimes it almost seems that "the Holocaust" is a corporation headed by Elie Wiesel, who defends his patents with articles in the Arts and Leisure section of the *Sunday Times*'.¹² While perhaps not being as cynical as Lopate, I think he is right to point to the emergence of something which appears to have a life of its own. The myth of the 'Holocaust' may have drawn on the historical Holocaust, but it now exists apart from that historical event.

This emergence of the myth of the 'Holocaust' has parallels with the emergence of the 'Myth of the War Experience' in post-First World War Europe, a term introduced by the historian George Mosse.¹³ Historian Jay Winter describes how the mass slaughter of the First World War impacted upon both society and culture to the extent that 'Europeans imagined the post-war world as composed of survivors perched on a mountain of corpses' and questions of 'how to relate to the fact of mass death, how to transcend its brutal separations and cruelties, were universal dilemmas'.¹⁴ In this context of trying to make sense of the past, Mosse argued that 'the reality of the war experience came to be transformed into what one might call the Myth of the War Experience, which looked back upon the war as a meaningful and even sacred event'.¹⁵ And just as the First World War experience was transformed into the 'Myth of the War Experience', so – it seems to me – the Holocaust has been transformed in the last fifty years into the myth of the 'Holocaust'. That transformation has

been undertaken in response to the sheer horror of the mass murders, to meet contemporary needs, and as an attempt to find meaning in the murder of six million Jews.

Mosse examines the construction of the 'Myth of War Experience' in terms of the defeated nation state drawing meaning from the meaninglessness of the war through a process of sanctification. And while there have been Jewish attempts to draw meaning from the meaninglessness of the Holocaust through a process of sanctification in Israel, it is in the United States that the myth of the 'Holocaust' has been particularly important during the last two decades. Thus the myth of the 'Holocaust' has emerged within an international context, rather than simply in the context of the political nation state. Moreover, while Jews have played a crucial role in transforming the Holocaust into the myth of the 'Holocaust', the 'myth' is one embraced by Jew and non-Jew alike. Indeed, as Wolf's comments at the beginning of this chapter make clear, some of the strongest critiques of the mythical status of the 'Holocaust' come from within the Jewish community. At the end of the twentieth century, the myth of the 'Holocaust' cannot be restricted to a purely Jewish ethnic marker. As Linenthal argues, 'on April 22, 1993, the Holocaust became an event officially incorporated into American memory' when US President Bill Clinton opened the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as the Holocaust museum 'for all Americans'.¹⁶

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at the heart of the Mall in Washington, DC, represents the official face of the myth of the 'Holocaust' within contemporary America, but it is not the only expression of remembrance. More or less every large city in the United States has its own Holocaust memorial, and a number of cities have major Holocaust museums. In some way, that response parallels the erecting of stone monuments and plaques in almost every village, let alone every town, in Britain after the First World War. And yet, as we stand at the end of the twentieth century, the 'Myth of the War Experience' (of the 1914-18 war) described by Mosse appears rather distant, and the war memorials which dot the British landscape have come to mean less and less to each new generation. There is a sense perhaps, in which the immortalisation of memory in stone lends towards a process of distancing and forgetting. Rather than memory being alive and fluid, it becomes dead, fixed and forgotten. As the literary scholar Andreas Huyssen points out

... the promise of permanence a monument in stone will suggest is always built on quicksand. Some monuments are joyously toppled at times of social upheaval; others preserve

Eichmann trial was intended to provide the opportunity both to begin to understand the Holocaust and in some ways identify with its victims.

It seems rather surprising from the perspective of the present, that in 1960-61 the Israeli government saw the need to educate Israeli youth about the Holocaust. However, this decision marked a change in Israeli attitudes, which up until then had been characterised by distinct ambiguity. The early years of Israeli state-building were marked by a reticence in talking about the Holocaust, which was an event seen by 'early statistes like David Ben-Gurion ... as the ultimate fruit of Jewish life in exile' and therefore 'represented a diaspora that deserved not only to be destroyed, but also forgotten'.²⁶ While 'the state ... recognised its perverse debt to the Holocaust',²⁷ this sense of ambiguity resulted in effectively a veil of silence up to the time of Eichmann's trial. In 1961 that silence was broken as survivor after survivor took to the witness stand in the Jerusalem courtroom and spoke of their Holocaust experiences.

It is ironic to think that in some ways Eichmann, who was a central player in perpetrating the Holocaust, also played a part in the emergence of the myth of the 'Holocaust'. He did the former from his desk in Section IV of the Reich Security Head Office, and the latter from his bulletproof-glass encased dock in a Jerusalem courthouse. In both cases he was a pawn of more major players – Hitler and Himmler on the one hand, and Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on the other. His arrest – in controversial circumstances – and trial can be seen as ushering in a new awareness of the 'Holocaust' in the public domain. James Young, a literary scholar, suggests that with this renewed exposure, the 'Holocaust' became an 'archetype', 'an independent icon', 'a figure for subsequent pain, suffering, and destruction'²⁸ and 'began to inform all writers' literary imagination as a prospective trope'.²⁹ Thus he points out that in the poems 'Mary's Song', 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Daddy' written at the end of 1962, Sylvia Plath uses the 'Holocaust' to express her own despair after discovering her husband's infidelity.

From the day that Eichmann's arrest was announced to the astonished Israeli parliament, a host of 'instant biographers'³⁰ started writing on Eichmann. A bibliography on the trial compiled in 1969, reveals that more than a thousand works had been written on Eichmann and his arrest and trial, and that Hannah Arendt's book on the trial alone had resulted in over 250 reviews.³¹ This torrent of publications ranged from the scholarly to the sensational, making clear that the trial had sparked debate and focused attention on this period of history.

However, writing about Eichmann did not necessarily mean writing about the Holocaust. Indeed for Hannah Arendt – whose trial reports for the *New Yorker* had a dramatic impact in America – writing about Eichmann was more about totalitarianism. In the context of the Cold War, this Eichmann – characterised by the ‘banality of evil’ – stood as the archetypal ‘desk killer’ in the pay of totalitarianism. Thus in the United States, Eichmann came to symbolise far more than simply *the* ‘Holocaust’ perpetrator. When American anti-Vietnam War protesters daubed his name on banners, they were thinking of ‘the issue of individual conscience: whether the individual had a duty to refuse obedience to a system which perpetrated crimes against humanity’ rather than the Holocaust.³² And when Eichmann’s name was used in the context of Stanley Milgram’s controversial experiments into the relationship between authority and acts of cruelty – which were seen as proof that the ‘latent Eichmann’³³ lay hidden within most of us – the reference was far from Holocaust specific. The complicity of Eichmann which was revealed in Jerusalem became – in the United States in particular – a universal object lesson.

A similar universalising of Eichmann can be seen to have taken place in West Germany. There is a sense in which in 1961 the silence in West Germany over the Nazi past was broken as witnesses spoke out in Jerusalem. The deliberate overlooking of the recent past in post-war Germany was questioned by radical youth engaged in generational struggle, who started to ask an entire generation the questions asked of Eichmann in Jerusalem. However, these questions lost their specificity when, by the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, the new-left broadened their attack into one over American involvement in Vietnam and the position of the Palestinians in Israel. The questioning in Germany became less about the ‘Holocaust’ than about the perceived faults of capitalism and the establishment.

Thus while the arrest and trial of Adolf Eichmann at the start of the 1960s did do much to bring the ‘Holocaust’ as a specifically Jewish tragedy to public attention in Israel, there was a greater time-lag elsewhere. I think that the theologian Jacob Neusner is right to suggest that it was not until the late 1960s that the myth of the ‘Holocaust’ emerged within the Jewish community in the United States. His argument is that in 1967 American Jews took hold of the Holocaust in direct response to the geo-political situation in Israel, and created ‘the American Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption’. This – Neusner suggests – involved ‘the transformation of the mass murder of European Jews into an event of mythic and world destroying proportions’.³⁴

In mid 1967 it seemed that Israel's very existence was threatened, raising fears that what had happened before was about to happen again. The Holocaust provided the most obvious parallel to the precarious situation faced by the new Jewish state. The Jews who had been threatened with extinction in the 1940s were once again threatened with extinction. In the United States in particular, the parallelism of the 1940s and 1967 had a powerful impact upon a Jewish community which had in many ways kept silent about the Holocaust for the last two decades. In 1967 that silence was broken as American Jews visited the recent past.

However, during 1967 a position of Israel under threat was turned round with Israeli victory in the Six-Day War. It is the euphoria of victory – with Israeli troops arriving at the Temple Wall in Jerusalem – which Neusner sees to be even more significant than the dark days when it seemed that Israel would be defeated. In the aftermath of the Israeli victory, the 'Holocaust' provided an unexpected antithesis to the contemporary situation in Israel, rather than a doom-laden parallel to the contemporary situation in Israel. Neusner suggests that after Israeli victory it became safe to reflect on the 'Holocaust' and bring that period to a sense of completion. Indeed Neusner goes so far as to suggest that

... the extermination of European Jewry could become *the* Holocaust only on 9 June [1967] when, in the aftermath of a remarkable victory, the State of Israel celebrated the return of the people of Israel to the ancient wall of the Temple of Jerusalem. On that day the extermination of European Jewry attained the – if not happy, at least viable – ending that served to transform events into a myth, and to endow a symbol with a single, ineluctable meaning.³⁵

Deborah Lipstadt, an historian, argues in very similar terms, pointing to the importance of the 'redemptive victories of the Jewish State' in shattering 'the silence of the previous decades' over the Holocaust within American Jewry. Like Neusner, she suggests that 'now that the Holocaust was "history" and not "probability", it could be confronted'.³⁶

Whereas Neusner and Lipstadt see the emergence of the 'Holocaust' in American Jewish consciousness during 1967 in terms of the closure (happy ending) offered by Israeli victory, Norman Finkelstein has controversially claimed that the motivation was solely political. Like Neusner and Lipstadt, he notes that in the wake of Israeli victory, American Jewish intellectuals 'suddenly discovered

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the Nazi genocide', and what had been 'a tiny cottage industry before 1967' was transformed as 'Holocaust studies began to boom'. However, 'this was not a coincidence. Basking as they were in Israel's reflected glory, American Jews had also to contend with increasing censure of its repressive policies. In these circumstances the Nazi extermination proved politically useful ...'

Thus Finkelstein claims that American Jews 'seized upon and methodically marketed' a 'Zionist account of the Nazi holocaust' precisely 'because it was politically expedient'.³⁷ According to this 'Zionist account', he suggests, 'the Nazi genocide marked ... the ineluctable culmination of Gentile anti-Semitic hatred' and therefore 'the Nazi extermination both justified the necessity of Israel and accounted for all hostility directed at it: the Jewish State was the only safeguard against the next outbreak of homicidal anti-Semitism and, conversely, homicidal anti-Semitism was behind every attack on, or even defensive manoeuvre against the Jewish state'.³⁸

It would be simplistic, however, to see the emergence of the Holocaust in America in the aftermath of 1967 as simply a tool in the hands of Zionism. As journalist Judith Miller argues

... there was nothing *inherently* exploitative in the Jewish push for monuments, memorials, and public tributes to the period of their most intense suffering. *But* the linkage of the Holocaust with campaigns to raise money and enhance support for the State of Israel marked the beginning of serious abuse and misuse of the Holocaust.³⁹

Miller is right to acknowledge that while 'American Jews discovered that the Holocaust could be used as a weapon not only for garnering sympathy at home, but also for insisting on unquestioning support for Israel abroad', it is mistaken to see the emergence of the myth of the 'Holocaust' as wholly political. After all, the 'Holocaust' can be seen to be emerging in both non-Jewish as well as Jewish America. Moreover, the American telling of the 'Holocaust' – while often containing Zionist elements – differed quite radically from the Israeli version.

I think that Neusner and Lipstadt's suggestion that the 'Holocaust' could only emerge once there was a sense of closure is more persuasive than Finkelstein's political explanation. Zionism could provide that 'happy ending', but there were in fact a number of alternative happy endings that emerged both before and after 1967. What all of these have in common is a sense of discerning meaning in the historical event which has become known as the 'Holocaust'. And it is this

sense of seeking to find meaning in this event which warrants the use of the term the myth of the 'Holocaust'.

The 'Zionist' myth of the 'Holocaust' was – as Finkelstein recognises – important, but it was far from the only meaning given to the murder of Europe's Jews by American Jews at the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s. Perhaps more importantly, the 'Holocaust' was emerging as one of the – if not *the* – primary ethnic markers for the American Jew. The historian Michael Berenbaum argues that 'in the seven years between the Six Day War [1967] and the Yom Kippur War [1973], the Holocaust became a central part of Jewish consciousness'.⁴⁰ Yet this shifting concern needs to be seen not simply in the context of what was happening in Israel, but also in the context of what was happening in America. In a period during which ethnic assertion reversed the earlier process – experienced by all ethnic minority groups in the United States – of assimilating in silence, American Jews discovered the 'Holocaust'. It was an event made all the more attractive by fitting into the popular American model which shapes ethnic distinctiveness around a history of victimhood.

It is in this context that NBC's nine-and-a-half-hour 1978 TV mini-series *Holocaust* became to American Jews what the 1977 TV show *Roots* was to African-Americans.⁴¹ The parallel is one noted by Yosefa Loshitzky, a scholar of Holocaust films, and seen as pointing to 'the new status of victimhood in American society'.⁴² *Holocaust* became required viewing for American Jews, with the Jewish monthly magazine *Moment*, suggesting 'that for Jews, the watching [of *Holocaust*] has about it the quality of a religious obligation'.⁴³ This nine-and-a-half hour TV representation of the 'Holocaust' played a part in cultivating 'the idea that being Jewish is primarily an ethnic rather than a religious category and that Jewish identity can be affirmed through the Holocaust'.⁴⁴ As a 1989 American Jewish Committee survey discovered, while only 46% of American Jews said that it was important to practice Jewish rituals, 85% said that the Holocaust was important.⁴⁵ There is little question that in the 1970s and 1980s the 'Holocaust' assumed a critical role in self-definition as Jewish.

However, to see the myth of the 'Holocaust' simply as a Jewish ethnic marker and as part and parcel of an 'American Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption', fails to explain why the 'Holocaust' has emerged as an icon for the non-Jewish imagination as well. At the end of the twentieth century, the 'Holocaust' is central to modern consciousness. The TV mini-series had a considerable impact in non-Jewish America. It wasn't simply American Jewry who was tuning in with almost religious devotion. The NBC mini-series was watched by a total of more than 120 million Americans over four consecutive

'Holocaust' may in reality be less about a concern with the Holocaust than about other, more internal matters.

Whatever the explanation – and there are surely many – there is little doubt that at the end of the twentieth century the 'Holocaust' is being made in America. The result – a number of critics have suggested – is that a process of trivialisation is taking place. Writers have pointed to the transformation of 'Europe's most searing genocide ... into an American version of kitsch',⁵⁸ and that a process of 'gentrification'⁵⁹ of the Holocaust is taking place over the course of the last two decades. And they are surely right to signal that there is plenty of 'Holocaust' trivia around at the end of the twentieth century. As Finkelstein notes, 'a veritable Holocaust industry has sprung up. The recent publication of a Holocaust cookbook [in 1996 in New York] – to rave notices, no less – points up the marketing possibilities of Holocaust kitsch'.⁶⁰

The response of creating kitsch is one which Mosse signalled when he examined the reaction of Europeans to the horrors of the First World War. He suggested that they reacted to war in two 'radically different' ways: sanctification – which characterises for Mosse the making of the 'Myth of the War Experience' – and trivialisation. This trivialisation of the war experience was the response of 'those who had stayed at home or were too young to have fought', who 'distorted and manipulated at will' the realities of war, much to the horror of the veterans.⁶¹ Thus, the wartime division between the front and home-front continued after the war along the lines of a division between these different attempts at sanctification and trivialisation. Sanctification was a way of giving meaning to the war, while trivialisation involved 'cutting war down to size so that it would become commonplace instead of awesome and frightening'. Through the process of 'trivialisation'

... the reality of war was disguised and controlled, even if it was not transcended ... Trivialisation was one way of coping with war, not by exalting and glorifying it, but by making it familiar, that which was in one's power to choose and to dominate. Trivialisation was apparent not merely in kitsch or trashy literature but also in picture postcards, toys and games, and battlefield tourism.⁶²

Mosse's division between those with direct experience of the past event and those with none may provide us with a useful framework to adopt when thinking about the representation of the 'Holocaust' in the past three or four decades. It is too simple to suggest that the

response of the Holocaust survivor has always been to opt for 'sanctification', while the non-survivor has always opted for 'trivialisation'. There are too many exceptions to justify the use of such a clear cut division between the responses of the survivor and the second or third generation. However, Mosse's distinction is useful in pointing to the kind of differences of opinion in how to represent the 'Holocaust' articulated by for example the 'purist' Elie Wiesel – who acts as a self-appointed spokesman-of-sorts for the survivor generation – and the third-generation movie director Steven Spielberg.

Elie Wiesel – who has been particularly outspoken in his criticism of what he sees to be the trivialisation of a sacred event – has written of the impossibility of representing the Holocaust. He claims that 'whoever has not lived through the event can never know it. And whoever has lived through the event can never fully reveal it'⁶³ and famously asserts that in his own writing of this event, he writes to denounce writing. For Wiesel, therefore, there is something unapproachable and unknowable about this past. In particular, he sees Auschwitz – where he was taken as a teenager in 1944 – to be 'a kingdom of night' which is so 'other' as to be beyond imagination. For Spielberg, however, Auschwitz is not simply a place which can be imagined, but a place which can be reconstructed as a 'Holocaust' movie set. In taking his cameras into the reconstructed gas chambers of Auschwitz, Spielberg demonstrates the distance in reflecting upon this event which lies between him and Wiesel. That distance is in some ways the distance between the first generation of 'Holocaust' survivors, and the second and third generations who are the cultural producers and consumers at the end of the twentieth century.

Regardless of Wiesel's concerns, not only is it possible to buy a 'Holocaust' cookbook in the 1990s, but it is also possible to 'consume' the 'Holocaust' equivalents of the 'kitsch or trashy literature ... picture postcards, toys and games, and battlefield tourism', which Mosse points to as the products produced in the aftermath of the First World War. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, trashy literature, picture postcards, toys and games and death camp tourism are widespread. The 'Holocaust' has been visited by the comic superhero Superman, who 'travels back in time and witnesses the horrors of the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Poland' and utters the words 'I'm not one to interfere with the governments of the world, but I just can't turn a blind eye and let these fascist bullies exterminate everyone they don't like'.⁶⁴ It has been the theme of an Israeli TV 'Holocaust Quiz', shot "on location" in Poland ... participating in it were Jewish boys and girls who were asked questions about what took place in the camps, and they were awarded two points for each correct answer. Applause

was not allowed because it was judged to be in bad taste and to "desecrate the memory of the victims".¹⁶⁶ And it is – as I explore in this book – the focus of a type of tourism that is on the increase. Each year tourists flock Auschwitz, Anne Frank House, Yad Vashem, the museums in Washington, DC, Dallas, Houston and buy postcards (to send to friends at home with the message 'Wish you were here'). At the end of the twentieth century the 'Holocaust' is being consumed. When in Washington, DC, we 'consume' the 'Holocaust' on offer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; when in Amsterdam we 'consume' the 'Holocaust' on offer at the Anne Frank House and when in Kraków we 'consume' the 'Holocaust' on offer at the State Museum at Auschwitz. And then it is on to yet another stop.

Seeing as we were visiting friends in Amsterdam for the weekend, we followed the logic of 'Holocaust tourism' and decided to walk along Prinsengracht in search of the Anne Frank House. We knew we were there when we saw the line of people who – like us – looked unmistakably like tourists. And standing in that line we recognised a number of faces from our plane that morning. Obviously quite a few others had done what we had done. They – like us – had taken the train into Amsterdam from the airport, found where they were staying, eaten some lunch, and then walked to the first tourist attraction on the Amsterdam itinerary – the Anne Frank House. So here we all were, shuffling along in a line which stretches back – even on that Friday afternoon – round the corner. This line gradually creeps closer and closer to the sales desk where our admission money is taken, and we climb the stairs – still walking in this seemingly never ending line of tourists – to the house where Anne lived.

We shuffle around like this through the front-house where the helpers worked. Two little girls who are clutching a copy of Anne Frank's diary under their arms pause and smile for their father who takes a photograph of them standing in front of the bookcase which hides the stairs into the Secret Annexe. We all pause, and then once the camera has been packed away, continue to 'follow the leader' into the Secret Annexe. We walk through the unfurnished rooms – the furniture was confiscated when the Secret Annexe was discovered in 1944 – and into Anne's rooms with its collection of pictures of film-stars on the walls. It is here that we walk the slowest. And then the pace quickens and we go up through the top floor of the Secret Annexe and into the attic of the neighbouring house. Here we see the 'Holy Book' – Anne's first diary, and the last page written by Anne – a small exhibition about the diary and Anne's death in Bergen Belsen, and then shuffle down to the gift shop where I buy postcards of the 'Bookcase (open)' and the 'Bookcase (closed)' because I didn't

have my photo taken standing in front of this particular bookcase clutching my copy of Anne Frank's diary, but I wanted to consume all the same.

Judging by the crowds of tourists at the Anne Frank house on a Friday afternoon in August 1998, historian Yehuda Bauer is right to reflect that 'contrary to warnings by many writers and historians, the Holocaust is not receding into the background; quite the contrary.' Rather, as Bauer continues,

Whether presented authentically or inauthentically, in accordance with the historical facts or in contradiction to them, with empathy and understanding or as monumental kitsch, the Holocaust has become a ruling symbol in our culture. I am not sure whether this is good or bad, but it seems to be a fact.⁶⁶

And it is that fact – that the 'Holocaust' has emerged as nothing less than a 'ruling symbol in our culture' – which is the theme which I seek to explore throughout this book. By focusing on three people – Anne Frank, Adolf Eichmann and Oskar Schindler – and three places – Auschwitz, Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – my aim is to consider both the period from the late 1940s through to the present day, and to consider Israel and America as well as Europe. However, I am the first to recognise that the choice of these people and places does leave some noticeable absences. In particular, I devote relatively little space to the representation of the 'Holocaust' in Germany, preferring instead to reflect at greater length upon Israel and the United States. In large part this is motivated by a belief that those two countries, ironically, have been much more instrumental in creating the myth of the 'Holocaust'.

As I consider the representation of Anne Frank, Adolf Eichmann and Oskar Schindler, and reflect upon the nature of Auschwitz, Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I have given some consideration to the categories raised by Bauer. Thus I have pointed out what I consider to be 'inauthentic', historically inaccurate and 'kitsch' representations of the 'Holocaust'. However, my aim in doing this has not been to rank 'Holocaust' movies or museums in any sort of order of personal preference, or historical accuracy. Rather my aim in critically assessing the myth of the 'Holocaust' on offer in a particular movie or museum is to ask first how, and second why, the 'Holocaust' has emerged as a dominant icon at the end of the twentieth century. No doubt, as you reflect on the movies and museums that I am commenting on in this book, there will be times when we disagree. There can, however, be little disagreement over

the fact that the 'Holocaust' has emerged as an icon in the West. And it is perhaps worth going further than Bauer, and at least ask whether the centrality of the myth of the 'Holocaust' at the end of the twentieth century is a good or a bad thing.