

THE HEALING CAPABILITIES OF LANGUAGE IN POST-MEMORY AND TRAUMA

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ABSTRACT

The study of the Holocaust and post-memory refers to the pervasive, lasting legacy left in the wake of the Holocaust, and the representations of this traumatic event from the generations after. The driving force behind the concept of post-memory is that an event can impact others even decades after the event occurred, regardless of whether these people were present at the event. Post-memory rests on the notion that trauma from an event can be transmitted, thus creating this lasting legacy. Dori Laub attributes the transmission to an "imperative need to tell," which serves as a channel through which the trauma is transmitted while, simultaneously, relieving the compulsion through this telling(63). The act of producing literature on the Holocaust despite generational divides exemplifies both post-memory and Laub's imperative to tell. This essay traces language through various post-memory representations of the Holocaust, examining Laub's notion of the need to tell while revealing the capability of language to heal trauma.

INTRODUCTION

Inherent in the concept of post-memory is the fact that the legacy of the Holocaust and the memories associated with it are passed down and told to others, consequently forming the receiver's post-memory. Crucial to an understanding of this transmission, argues Dori Laub, is that, "survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus come to *know* one's story" (63). He suggests that language can be used to heal trauma associated with post-memory. While the imperative to tell transmits trauma as post-memory, the telling also serves as a channel through which those suffering attempt to heal their own trauma, thus forming a cycle and perpetuating the legacy of the Holocaust. The imperative to tell asserts that survivors, and others, feel the urge to release their trauma by talking about it. This understanding is fundamental to some literary texts, which are fictional, yet convey this sense of language. Language possesses a potential healing quality by giving victims of trauma a voice. Authors Bernhard Schlink and Anne Michaels both chose to write novels about the Holocaust featuring characters who seek to release their own trauma through writing. This framework of writers who incorporate the importance of writing within their texts reveals a deep-rooted understanding of this potential healing nature of language and the need to tell. While fiction allows the authors the ability to strategically craft their characters and consciously convey a message, the need to tell is also reflected in non-fiction. In the film *Because of that War*, two Israeli musicians reveal the effects that the Holocaust and their parents' experiences had on them, while using their music as an outlet. In studying non-fictional and fictional forms, one can see how the use of language as a potential source of healing is revealed in both deliberately conscious and subconscious ways. The significance of the need to tell is two-fold: first, Laub's statement suggests that the telling of the story relieves the trauma while satisfying the urge to tell, and second, in telling and momentarily relieving this trauma, the trauma is transmitted to the audience. The way in which trauma is transmitted through language over generations as a result of the need to tell is ultimately the basis for creating a sense of collective memory.

SILENCE AND ILLITERACY

In discussing the importance of language and its healing capabilities, this essay will first discuss the consequences of the opposite of telling: silence. If, as Laub states, Holocaust survivors "needed to tell their stories in order to survive," then keeping these stories untold signifies destruction from the inside

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(63). Laub further supports his claim by asserting, "None find peace in silence...The 'not-telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life" (64). Laub's discussion of the pervasiveness of the untold story includes strong diction, particularly seen through the words "invade" and "contaminate," which are reminiscent of the survivor being consumed by this unspoken presence, and as seemingly helpless in the matter. This life-consuming price to pay for their silence is not the full extent of the after-effects the survivors endure; survivors also suffer from distortion of their memories, causing them to question the reality of these events while the memories of the event continue to persist. Carol Kidron explores the effects of the Holocaust and the trend towards silence, explaining, "Trauma-related silence is discursively framed as the burial or repression of speech, resulting not from personal volition but rather from the unspeakable nature of an experience that is beyond narrative" (7). This view of silence differs from Laub's approach by addressing *where* this silence stems from. Instead of asserting that survivors choose to keep their stories untold, Kidron suggests that the content matter may be inherently beyond the scope of conveying. Unable to fathom just how to express these memories, some survivors find themselves trapped in silence, eventually suffering from the pervasive, internal effects Laub addressed. The survivor falls victim again to the tyranny in this silence, and unless he or she is somehow able to formulate the language to express their suffering, their internal terrors will persist. In this way, while silence cripples the survivor, language can provide an outlet for the painful repetitive memories.

United with the concept of silence is the concept of illiteracy, signifying a lack of healing. While silence reduces a survivor to a state of entrapment within his or her own mind by personal memories, illiteracy reduces a person to a state of dependency and ignorance. In his novel *The Reader*, Schlink explores the relationship of literacy to morality, freedom, and healing from trauma by incorporating an illiterate character who commits atrocious crimes. On the surface level, Schlink's novel explores the relationship between the narrator, Michael Berg, and a woman he later learns was a guard in the concentration camps. Upon closer reading, however, the novel carefully explores the complex relationship between information (literacy) and morality. A key motif throughout the novel is that of literature; the title of the novel itself, *The Reader*, implies a focus on literacy. Literacy manifests itself differently in each of the three parts of the novel- in part one, Michael reads aloud to Hanna as part of a routine, in part two, Michael learns that Hanna chose girls in the camps to read to her, and in part three, Michael begins to record himself reading aloud and sends these tapes to Hanna in jail, while Hanna learns to read. In her article entitled "Trauma in Children of Perpetrators," Gabriele Schwab discusses much of the guilt that Michael Berg expresses in *The Reader*, though she too takes the time to discuss the importance of language. She states, "Language is the first tool and mode of introjection...even the starving infant is less helpless once it finds a way to voice the feeling of hunger, or once 'the empty mouth can be filled with words'," quoting Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (Schwab 81). This statement introduces the assistive quality of language, asserting that language provides advances that inability to speak or illiteracy do not. Schwab further references Abraham and Torok's concept of the crypt, "a psychic space fashioned to wall in unbearable experiences, memories, or secrets" (78). This concept of the crypt can relate to Hanna in *The Reader*. Hanna's illiteracy is a controlling force in her life, and ultimately entraps her. While illiteracy is not exactly Hanna's choice, remaining illiterate is. Her avoidance of acknowledging the subject results in her not taking the agency to attempt to learn, leaving her trapped in this state. Michael Berg recognizes Hanna's self-inflicted entrapment, musing, "She was struggling, as she always had struggled, not to show what she could do but to hide what she couldn't do. A life made up of advances that were actually frantic retreats and victories that were concealed by defeats" (Schlink 134). Such victories may include any of Hanna's successful attempts at hiding her illiteracy, though these victories are also defeats, revealing the dominant role that her illiteracy exerts over the rest of her life. In this way, Hanna's illiteracy serves as her crypt. Using Schwab's definition of the term, Hanna's crypt clearly walls in the secret of her illiteracy. Michael, serving as a spectator during the trial, recognizes the great struggles Hanna endures in order to keep her secret, even confessing to crimes she did not commit in order to maintain this façade. Hanna's secret is strictly maintained, and thus, her crypt is dedicated to storing this secret, hiding a part of herself away from the world; consequently, she is unable to attain a sense of healing while in this crypt.

LANGUAGE AND LIBERATION

Illiteracy not only serves to entrap Hanna, both in the mental sense of the crypt and in the literacy sense of a prison, but also reveals, in contrast, the healing qualities of language. While Hanna learns to read, Michael begins to write his own story. In Michael's account, his writing begins the process of healing through language; he explains: "I wanted to write our story in order to be free of it. But the memories wouldn't come back for that...For the last few years I've left our story alone. I've made peace with it. And it came back, detail by detail" (217). Michael is able to make peace with his memories and the guilt he feels for loving someone who could commit such crimes, and it is this peace that allows him to write their story. Michael begins writing as a form of healing, but is ultimately only able to write after he has begun some of this healing process on his own. In Hanna's situation, literacy provides many benefits as well. After realizing Hanna is illiterate, Michael researches the topic, and reveals, "I knew about the helplessness in everyday activities... about how much energy it takes to conceal one's inability to read and write, energy lost to actual living. Illiteracy is dependence. By finding the courage to learn to read and write, Hanna had advanced from dependence to independence, a step towards liberation" (Schlink 188). This liberation is multifaceted, and can refer to her liberation from prison, as admitting to her illiteracy would have given her a shorter jail sentence, to her literal liberation from the dependence on others, or to her liberation mentally from her crypt. Hanna's literacy is spurred by Michael's recorded tapes, which he sends her as she is in jail. Sarah Liu comments, "With these tapes, Hanna begins to learn to read. As a reader, she seeks out books on the Holocaust (Primo Levi, Jean Améry, Arendt on Eichmann), raising the question of the link between textual literacy and moral awareness" (337). The warden reveals to Michael, "As soon as Frau Schmitz learned to read, she began to read about the concentration camps" (Schlink 205). These first choices for personal reading, as opposed to what Michael chose for her to hear as he read aloud, may indicate a growing sense of Liu's proposed moral awareness. Liu further states that, "Identifying with Michael's position brings [the readers] to see Hanna not as perpetrator but as victim, shrouded in moral ambiguity until literacy provides enlightenment" (338-339). Liu attributes a high level of importance to literacy as it can connect one with morals and the ability to function in higher society. In *The Reader*, literacy and literature serve various functions—liberation, a mechanism for healing, and moral awareness/enlightenment.

The importance of language and literacy further extends from the concept of healing to reflect the concept of morality, which, like healing, serves the function of bettering an individual. Schlink skillfully crafts Hanna as a character to consciously make a statement on literacy and illiteracy in relation to moral understanding. Liu states, "Bernhard Schlink uses illiteracy as a metaphor for ethical blindness" (336). Schlink asserts the old adage, knowledge is power, through literacy. In using illiteracy as a metaphor for ethical blindness, Schlink asserts that Hanna's literacy results in her liberation, not only in freedom from dependence, but also in her moral awareness. When Hanna learns to read, she focuses her reading on topics of the Holocaust and the camps. These choices may indicate guilt at her previous ethical blindness, signifying her enlightenment and moral awakening. While being illiterate did not force Hanna into her role as a guard at the camps, her illiteracy is symbolic of her ignorance or blindness to the situation. In learning to read, Hanna is able to come to terms with her actions, leaving her crypt which walled in her secret, and is able to confront all that she has done. *The Reader* serves to bridge the gap between concepts of silence and language, incorporating both into one text in order to reveal the possible gains.

If silence results in pervasive, life-consuming traumatic memories, and illiteracy entraps the individual, then what gains may using language hold? In response to this question, Laura Ahearn asserts "most linguistic anthropologists regard language as a form of social action, a cultural resource, and a set of sociocultural practices. People do things with words" (110). Language is thus seen as a powerful force, symbolizing personal agency and producing results. While silence is crippling, language can galvanize. Additionally, silence overpowers a single person, while language can reach the masses. In "do[ing] things with words," people are actively engaged, and use language to empower both themselves and others.

Healing, through language or other means, would not be necessary without trauma. While summarizing prominent theories on trauma, Richard Crownshaw explains, "it is not the event itself that returns in the...flashback...but rather the failure to process the event. Repetition is the attempt to master

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what was missed the first time around" (5). Here Crownshaw addresses a misconception of repetition: the traumatic event is not what recurs. He further provides an explanation for why the repetition occurs: because the victim was unable to fully process the event, the repetition results as an attempt to make sense of the memory. Similarly, many processes of language are rooted in repetition. In her novel *Fugitive Pieces*, Anne Michaels incorporates the repetitive processes of language by attributing the skill of writing to the protagonist, Jakob Beer. Jakob's role as both a poet and a translator deeply involves him in the process of repetition. The act of translating requires first reading and processing the story or poem in its original form, then writing this story in another language. The process of translating involves a frequent back-and-forth between the original text and the translated work in progress text; to translate, one must revisit the original text frequently in order to ensure accuracy in the translation. This process involves two other processes of language- reading and writing. A reader of a text is placed in a unique position. Dori Laub explains, "As an interviewer, I am present as someone who actually participates in the reliving and reexperiencing of the event. I also become part of the struggle to go beyond the event and not be submerged and lost in it" (62). His role as interviewer relates similarly to the role of the reader when reading a biographical work or memoir. The role of writing, however, relates to the process of the trauma victim repeating his or her life experiences in an attempt to make sense of the story while physically producing it in writing. While language and literacy are deeply rooted in the acts of repetition, they allow the writer to contemplate his or her own experiences and produce texts or poems in order to relieve the trauma, fostering a sense of healing.

Operating from a perspective that emphasizes how the nature of trauma can be expressed in writing, Anne Michaels carefully crafts the character of Jakob Beer to represent the healing quality of language as it is related to trauma; Book I of the novel serves as Jakob's writings, revealed to the readers, representing a traumatic story that has been released in writing. The novel begins with the night Jakob's family is murdered, while he hides in the closet, as this is the origin of his trauma. In the prelude to Book I of the novel, Michaels writes, "other stories are concealed in memory; neither written nor spoken" (x). These stories, remaining in silence, represent the root of trauma. Because these stories remain untold, they allow the trauma to fester and consume the mind, as Jakob's sister Bella frequently pervades his thoughts. Jakob himself recognizes this need to break the silence and avoid the fates of others, such as Hanna from *The Reader*, and instead share these stories. Jakob explains, "I already knew the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate. But poetry, the power of language to restore: this was what Athos and Kostos were trying to teach me" (Michaels 79). Jakob's recognition of this restorative nature of language reveals the power of language to heal trauma, and his belief in this. As Jakob becomes comfortable in his new life with his guardian Athos, even learning a new language, he claims, "The English language was food. I shoved it into my mouth, hungry for it. A gush of warmth spread through my body, but also panic, for with each mouthful the past was further silenced" (Michaels 92). Rather than feeling relief that his traumatic past is silenced, Jakob responds in panic, conveying his belief in the importance of expressing the traumatic events of the past. Unlike the other stories Michaels mentions in the beginning of the novel, Jakob aspires to communicate these experiences to others. Jakob reveals this desire through attempting to write. He confesses, "I still wasn't writing much poetry, but I did write some very short stories. They were always, in one sense or another, about hiding; and they only came to me when I was half asleep" (Michaels 134). As he is trying to express himself through language, he reveals the repetition of thoughts in his untapped memory. His writing reveals the trauma he is suffering from, but conveys the beginning processes of healing and attempting to make sense of the events. Jakob exhibits Laub's imperative need to tell, and uses writing as his outlet.

Writing is merely one aspect of literacy. Reading is a mechanism for communicating and potentially transmitting trauma; while a trauma victim may create a text through writing as a result of the imperative need to tell, the reader processes this text and can inherit the trauma as postmemory. Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as, "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before- to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up with" (5). Readers of texts that incorporate traumatic experiences are thus susceptible to the trauma. Readers who have personally experienced trauma, however, may receive this trauma differently: as a healing connection. Seeing their experiences mirrored in the experiences of others may assist readers in coming to terms with and healing

their own trauma. Reading elicits this personal connection response in *Fugitive Pieces*. In Book II, Jakob's narration ends and is replaced by that of Ben, a child of Holocaust survivors and a replacement child for two siblings lost during the war. After Jakob dies, Ben leaves his home in search of Jakob's, and finds Jakob's journals. Once he reads these journals, Ben decides to return home to his wife, signifying a sort of reconciliation. This reconciliation is enabled by Ben finding and reading Jakob's journals, which allow him to make sense of his own relationship to the Holocaust and his own trauma. The connection between reading and healing is related to Ben's personal relationship with the subject matter of Jakob's journals, and is explained by Laub: "the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility of bearing witness that previously the narrator felt he bore alone, and therefore could not carry out...this joint responsibility is the source of the emerging truth" (Laub 69). Writing is composed with a reader in mind, and this receiver processes this information in his or her own way and through a sense of connection to the writer's words. The understanding and healing that Ben experiences through reading Jakob's journals allows him the strength to return home. While reading can potentially transmit trauma, Ben's own experiences are similar to those of Jakob's, and it is these transmitted similarities which allow Ben to comprehend his own trauma and choose to reconcile him to his past and face his present.

Author Anne Michaels herself may be considered a supporting example in arguing that language assists healing. Her use of poetic language throughout her novel, despite the fact that some Holocaust scholars believe that poetic language should not be used when discussing the Holocaust, reveals her own belief in this concept. Theodore Adorno has offered one such critique, declaring, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34). Some critics argue that poetic language softens the Holocaust, or may even distract from its atrocities. Michaels not only infuses the work with poetic language, but further writes the main character of Jakob as a translator and poet, revealing a deep-rooted regard for language and its contributions to life. Michaels produces this text for the readers to convey a sort of collective memory, as trauma can be transmitted through reading, while also utilizing the work as a form of healing trauma through language. In an interview published in *The Guardian*, Sarah Crown questions Michaels on her opinion of the impact of World War II and the Holocaust. Michaels responds, "I think for everyone of my generation, this was the formative event...I have a profound resistance to the idea that a reader could say: 'Oh, well, that's her story.' We should all be interested, no matter where we come from, or who our parents are" (Crown 12). Michaels further exemplifies the relationship between memory and writing, "I started to write things down, as a very young child...wanting to find a way to remember - to keep close, somehow - moments that made an impression on me," as Crown further comments, "[Michaels] luxuriates in the power of words to reanimate the past" (12). Michaels, in utilizing writing as a form of memory, grants her writing the power to transmit memories, just as Jakob's writings commit his traumatic past to paper, while also satisfying the urge to write and the imperative need to tell. Not only does *Fugitive Pieces* serve to reveal the healing aspect of language, but also author Anne Michaels herself evidences this healing through her own incorporation of poetic language throughout the text.

As the need to tell projects traumatic memories into writing, language has the potential to transmit trauma and thus, create a collective memory. In her novel *And the Rat Laughed*, Nava Semel states, "the very act of committing the story to paper widens its circle of addressees" (7). When a story is produced in writing, it belongs to the readers as well. While writing helps to heal an individual, the reception of this writing can result in the inheritance of the memory, thus projecting the legacy of the traumatic event- in this case, the Holocaust. Just such an inheritance is received in The Israeli film *Because of That War*, which features two musicians and sons of Holocaust survivors. The film chronicles the two musicians, Ya'acov and Yehuda, as they make sense of and discuss their youth and the impact of their parents' experiences on their own lives, while featuring the parents as well. The stories of the first generation are interwoven with the stories of the second generation, allowing viewers to witness the transmission of trauma and the effects of trauma, while themselves receiving the transmission of trauma through the testimonies in the film. Throughout the film, there is a focus on the use of art forms to depict the Holocaust- Ya'acov's mother Halina translates and publishes poetry written in the ghettos, and also agrees to help Yehuda's father publish his story of survival. Halina also gives lectures to college students, revealing her own story. Ya'acov and Yehuda are musicians, and Yehuda particularly expresses himself through music. The way in which trauma is transmitted through language over generations as depicted in this film is ultimately the basis for creating a sense of collective memory.

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Collective memory depends on the shared ideas present in society. These shared ideas are mediated through media coverage, word of mouth, and shared texts, revealing the heavy influence of language on the formation of collective memory. In his article "The Shoah in Israeli Collective Memory," Idit Gil addresses the blending of language and cultural memory. Gil details the changes in the meaning of the word "Shoah," as it has now become a part of cultural, collective memory as referring to the Holocaust. Gil explains, "The word 'Shoah' appears seven times in the Bible, indicating a disaster, distress ...and destruction that strikes unexpectedly. The 'Shoah' can apply to individual persons or to a whole nation ...Until the 1930s, the word 'Shoah' was hardly used in everyday Hebrew" (77). Today, when looked up in the dictionary, the term is defined by Merriam-Webster only through a direct link to a specific definition of the Holocaust, defined as "the mass slaughter of European civilians and especially Jews by the Nazis during World War II" ("shoah"). Gil's focus on the etymology of this word reveals the effects of language on cultural memory. This word, which once was uncommon in everyday language, has now become synonymous with the Holocaust, in the United States (and the whole English language) and by the Yishuv, or the Jewish residents of Palestine prior to the establishment of Israel. The widespread integration of the transformation of the meaning of this word across boundaries of language, country, and experience reveals the intersectionality of the two concepts of language and collective memory.

The interrelationship between language and collective memory is further revealed in the film *Because of That War*. In relation to the film, Gil's point can be seen through the repetition of the word "Treblinka". Treblinka is the name of a place and, thus, maintains its name despite language barriers. Because this word resonates as the name of a place, foreign viewers of the film are able to isolate the word and recognize its repetition more easily than they would recognize the repetition of other words in the foreign language. Each time the word Treblinka is spoken, it is registered in the brain and the repetition is noted, because it is familiar as an isolated word to the English-speaking viewers of the film (and viewers of other linguistic background as well). The story of Treblinka is repeated in various ways throughout the film. First, Halina reads aloud from a poem she is translating, written in the ghettos during the war, entitled "A Small Station Called Treblinka". The act of translating itself signifies the transmission of memory and trauma through language- as the story passes from language to language, parts may change, if only slightly. This translation alters both the wide-spread interpretation as well as the personal; the translator gains personal memory from working with this piece, both receiving the writer's memories and then producing their own version of the original, while the readers now gain access to this translated, altered form. In discussing collective memory and individual impacts, Cronshaw states, "despite the particularity of an individual experience, the individual's memorative thoughts on past happenings exclusive to him or her will be, by their very nature, social" (1). The poet's personal experiences were shared socially through his writing. Halina then read the poem and felt a personal connection to it, and she chose to socially express this personal stake in the poem through her act of translating and publishing. The acts of writing, translating, and reading further reflect the concept of language as healing, just as Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* wrote and translated, while Ben read his works. Halina's interest in the subject matter, and her personal connection to the Holocaust, drew her to the poetry, while the need to tell serves as a driving force for her translating and her college lecturing.

The concept of language influencing collective memory implies effects on the second generation and generations after. Yehuda and Ya'acov represent this second generation in *Because of That War*. Yehuda, working with Halina's son Ya'acov, took Halina's translation and, through his personal ties to the matter through proximity and memory, expressed the content through song. Memory is transmitted despite borders of language or generation. Gil's focus on the diction aspect of language is more apparent in this example of Treblinka in the film. Yehuda, collaborating with Ya'acov, is filmed on stage, using this written poem as lyrics for a song. The poem is translated in yet another way- it is now translated into the language of music and song. Yehuda himself, in writing the music and performing this song, incorporates the story of Treblinka into his own memory, and those who listen to the song also gain access to this transmitted memory. The fact that these cross-generational examples are included in the film depict the way in which the example of Treblinka has been transmitted across generational boundaries, while their modes of expression further transmit the memory to different audiences. The

repetition, which stands out even to speakers of another language, reveals the legacy of the memory and trauma, embedding the memory as collective.

Collective memory is that which bridges past experience into the common knowledge of others. Gil defines collective memory as "employ[ing] the past in order to provide unity, uniqueness, and continuation, creating a collective identity" (77). The repetition of the Treblinka poem employs the past (the Holocaust as a whole) and provides unity by connecting the first generation, Halina, to the second generation, her son, as well as to others world-wide who view this film, regardless of their relation to the situation (even none at all). Uniqueness is exhibited through the varied modes of representation- Yehuda chooses to sing and create music, while Halina chooses to translate and also lecture to others. Continuation is exhibited through this very transmission of memory- as the stories are shared, others receive them, and either store them in memory or pass them on in some way as well. In this way, language, even to such a precise degree as diction, in terms of the word "Shoah" or the word "Treblinka" in the film, facilitates collective, cultural memories.

Dori Laub's declaration of the imperative need to tell as a driving force for Holocaust survivors to share their stories is the foundation upon which the argument for language as potentially healing is built. While survivors may experience temporary relief in telling their stories, the memories never truly leave them. For this reason, telling is not considered cathartic, but rather, an act which must be done. As Laub states, "[survivors] also needed to tell their stories in order to survive" (63). The need to tell is a compulsion; while telling may satisfy this urge or need, the traumatic memories still remain. Moreover, telling the traumatic memories may momentarily alleviate some of the pain, but the survivors may transmit this trauma to the readers or receivers of their stories. This negative outcome is refuted by the argument for collective memory. In telling their stories, Holocaust survivors ensure more than their own personal gain in potentially, provisionally healing. Survivors extend their stories into the collective memories of others. Just as the word "Shoah" has now entirely changed in meaning to represent the Holocaust, the telling of these painful memories can permeate into widespread knowledge. Telling their stories allows Holocaust survivors to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are learned, and never completely forgotten. While telling to heal may imply forgetting the tragic memories, as if laying the words down on paper will remove them from thought, the opposite is instead true. The telling is a compulsion: as Hanna reads one Holocaust text after another, as Jakob writes short stories and translates poetry, and as Halina lectures college students and her son participates in a band which sings about the Holocaust, messages of the Holocaust are perpetuated further. These characters satisfy the urge to tell while serving a greater purpose of spreading the word and informing others, forming a collective memory, so the lessons of the Holocaust can be learned rather than perpetuated ever in the future: this security is true healing.

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