

Invasive Memory and W G Sebald's *The Emigrants*

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Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to critically investigate the invasive nature of memory in W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*. Sebald chooses four Jews who experienced the terror of time characterized by the sinister anti-Semitism under Hitler. Dr Henry Selwyn, Paul Bereyter, Ambrose Adelwarth and Max Ferber escaped the Nazi terror but fell, unfortunately, prey to the reconstructive power of memory. Memory recreates the past. By recreating the past, it represents it. The representing of the past for the aforementioned characters was to remind them of the events which disfigured their sense of self, belongingness, family, etc. It was difficult for them to live in the post-holocaust period in a different country as emigrants under the unending reconfiguring power of memory. The growing sense of fear and isolation as Jewish emigrants was further exacerbated by the tormenting reincarnation of the vicious past in the domain of memory. This recurrent reconfiguration of the most terrible historical reality, which embodied complete obliteration of Jewish existence, invited derangement to the sensitive survivors. This repetitive resurrection of the events of the past in the territory of memory is called invasive because it precipitated acute restlessness among the survivors and engaged them painfully with the past. Much of their growing isolation and their suicidal tendencies emanated from the unending experience of pain occasioned by the restorative re-emergence of the past occurring in the field of memory.

Keywords: Memory, emigrants, anti-Semitism, trauma, suicide, history, holocaust.

Introduction

For the Jews, memory is extremely integral to their existence. It not only ties them tightly to their cultural roots but also makes them conscious of their history. The cultural oneness as God's chosen people corroborates with the unending suffering as a consequence of being chosen. The Jewish discontent that memory inflicted in the post-war conditions sprang from the fact of their

double isolation - from the people and the land. The land that they chose to embrace or were forced to accept far away from Jerusalem, where the Jewish destiny was inescapably anchored, was not the land that developed any true belongingness. In the book *The Emigrants* W G Sebald has quite remarkably captured the pain of being Jewish emigrants in the nations safe from racism of Nazi kind. By being driven out of the land, that was Biblically granted, under different political and cultural seize, they chose different nations in Europe and accepted them historically as their homeland. The rise of Hitler and his totalitarian format of politics completely changed the Jewish assumption of homeland other than the Biblically promised. The horror of incarceration, forced confiscation of Jewish property and the final solution disturbed the Jewish historical perception of Europe. The survivors of Hitler's death camps became the victims of their own memory. They were haunted by the memories of dying, torture, rape, hunger and helplessness at the unbearable sight of killing of dear ones. They could neither get rid of the memory of horror nor adjust with the traumatic resurfacing of the images of the brutal past. The cancerous memory ate them every now and then. The impressions of that merciless time were too fresh and too paralyzing that normalcy never became the routine. The only choice that seemed devastatingly convenient was that of suicide. The acute alienation resulting in increasingly incurable depression developed in them the suicidal tendencies. The desperation for exploring an exit from the burdens of that nerve-wrenching memory did not help them in any sense to overcome its wounding interventions. In the Freudian fashion they fell into the same pit more they attempted to turn away from it. Therefore, this paper discusses how Sebald captures those realities through his artistic lens and how successfully memory seems to have consumed the lives of those who could escape Hitler's concentration camps.

Dr. Henry Selwyn

Sebald's *The Emigrants* is a deep contemplation on the lives of four Jewish emigrants in the post-war period. He begins the book with Dr. Henry Selwyn, a Jewish emigrant who he describes "... Dr Selwyn was scarcely ever in the house. He lived in his hermitage, giving his entire attention, as he occasionally told me, to thoughts which on the one hand grew vaguer day by day, and, on the other, grew more precise and unambiguous" (Sebald 11). The war put life in complete discord. Those who survived the heat of the war also felt equally annoying to make a life amid rubbles and distrust. Primarily for a Jew who experienced the trauma of war, the world around seemed viscerally disfigured. Hitler's territorial ambition could directly hit the Jews as they seemed outsiders. He made the Jews of Germany the scapegoats to implant a feverish cult of nationalism. Dr Selwyn's experience of war seemed to have been so vivid that it was not dissipated by time. Under the weight of the memory of the most traumatic time, he failed to relish the possibilities of life. He embraced seclusion to escape the human routine of living with and living by. Trust as a highest human possibility was absent from his perception of life. The war could shake badly the foundation of human relationship. A film of mistrust and suspicion could settle on the surface of every relation. The cold war that succeeded the WWII could thicken the film. Increasing suspicion could suspend the possibility of regaining the trust. The sense of seclusion which Sebald intended to highlight with reference to Dr. Selwyn became evident from the photographs juxtaposed by him. The syncretism of the verbal and the visual made the case an interesting read. He chose to embrace the life of a hermit in the bunker of past from which exuded the odor of blood, stench and assault. The forgetting dimension of time did not affect the flame of memory. His engagement with past intensified as he found no other avenue to invite distraction for his mind. The mist of aging with its increasing indistinctness did

not contribute anything towards gradual erasure of his memory. They still obstinately flooded his mental landscape and disturbed his self-evident physical need for quietude. The depth of that experience was so acute and agonizing that only a Jew could appropriately make a sense of it. It is impossible to appraise the intensity of that neurosis which a Jewish survivor underwent in the post-Auschwitz time. The thought that disturbed him did not bear any quotidian character. Amid these perplexing experiences the most demonic one was the acute sense of alienation and loneliness. A cumulative effect of these dismal experiences impacted his life severely and forced him to remain withdrawn. He embraced the archival remnants of his past. He could build a homeless home from the mnemonic materials of his past. In the syncretic sweet-sad memories of his past, Vladimir Nabokov found himself at home as he writes in his autobiography, Chapter 5, *Speak, Memory* that “One is always at home in one’s past ...” (101). That is what constitutes “a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness” (01). For Dr Selwyn too, memory was that brief crack of light. He clung to it and got crushed by it. In “Buried Homeland”, Aharon Appelfeld explains the nature of memory a Jewish survivor negotiates with: “Czernovitz expelled its Jews, and so did Vienna, Prague, Budapest, and Lemberg. Now these cities live without Jews, and their few descendants, scattered through the world, carry memory like a wonderful gift and a relentless curse.”(48) The ‘relentless curse’ of the past that a Jewish survivor had to bear had a gnawing impact.

The years of the Second World War were inarguably most devastating and the years that followed the war were equally harder. Sebald chose the time that came subsequent to the war. The pessimism and adversity of the war years were not surveyed so painstakingly by Sebald in *The Emigrants* as was the post-war years. The racist and homicidal war time ideology which found its headquarters in Germany was so ingrained in the European mind that much of its

residual shreds were noticed to have intermittent visibility. Dr Selwyn found it harder to adjust in that climate. Estranged by the agony of war it was difficult for the natives to accommodate the strangers. Therefore, to make a living on a foreign soil as an emigrant in the absence of any kind of commonality and more disappointingly in the absence of the people whom he desired to live with seemed terribly hard:

The years of the second war, and the decades after, were a blinding, bad time for me, about which I could not say a thing even if I wanted to. In 1960, when I had to give up my practice and my patients, I severed my last ties with what they call the real world. Since then, almost my only companions have been plants and animals (Sebald 21).

The effects of the war did not cease to exist immediately after the formal closure of the war. The war cleared the way for another passive war – the cold war. The last vestiges of human trust got further deteriorated owing to the cold war. Increasing espionage activities, strict surveillance and scaremongering became the routine. The racial hatred against the Jews and the non-cooperation towards them did not evaporate so swiftly in the post-war time. The ideological scum was hard to get removed from the minds of many. The air still remained charged with the anti-Semitic animosity. The damage done required certain length of time to normalize. The traumatic experiences of the war and mnemonic visuals of suffering flooded their minds so vividly to such an extent that it paralyzed their power of resilience. It was difficult for them to initiate the process of re-establishing their faith in humanity. The victimhood that was imposed upon them without any substantial reason justified their fear of possible repetition. It became extremely difficult for those Jewish survivors to gather strength to develop trust towards those people who did not share any racial and religious sameness with them. Therefore, Dr. Selwyn renounced his

profession and dissociated himself from the world in order to live in seclusion in companionship with the plants and animals.

The choice of befriending with the plants and animals seemed apparently productive but a short-lived one. The seclusion from the external world of human association and activity did not mean his disengagement from the battle within. His obstinate preferences for alienation from the human environment drifted him closer to the constituents of those hysterical memories. More dissociative he became from the human attachment more invasive and vehement became the memory. The error in his choice further worsened his life. His imprudent distance from the human contact out of sheer anger owing to the fact of what humanity did to him and his community forced him to stitch alliance with memory and to accept self-annihilation. His memory did not ensure any assurance of consolation but assured him of an urge for necessary conclusion of his life: “A few weeks after, late that summer, he took his own life with a bullet from his heavy hunting rifle” (Sebald22). Dr Selwyn as a moral witness to a horrendous instance of history died absolutely of not adjusting with the time that succeeded that event. Therefore, he found in suicide a befitting culmination of a tasteless and hopeless and wounded life. Broken by history, suicide seemed to be a significant choice.

Paul Bereyter

In the second part of the novel Sebald shifts his attention to the case of Paul Bereyter, his school teacher. Paul Bereyter’s suicide drew Sebald’s attention to investigate the probable causes of his sudden decision to end his life. Being Bereyter’s student, the tragic demise of his teacher sought his exclusive attention to the facts of his teacher’s self-negating thoughts. The loss that he experienced was above any possible remedy: “There is a mist that no eye can dispel” (Sebald25). It was a shock that no therapy could heal. It was the most painful piece of information which

struck him so hard that he steered his critical lens upon the climate which forced his teacher to decide such a hardest ever to do. The obituary in the local newspaper remained so silent on the cause of his death. The general assumption rested upon the facts of chronic self-destructive tendencies. The life-negating urge that was so seriously felt by him was never confronted with. The sense of exile and the memory of his disturbing past, that was so full of anti-Semitic horror and the utter uneasiness for not being what he aspired once to be, had a terrible cumulative impact upon him. He could visualize so vividly the decay of his dreams.

The intervention of war into his life and its crushing pressure destroyed his dreams. Unlike Viktor Frankl who found motivation from his search for meaning in life which could save him from the terror of torture and the sly monstrosity of memory, Paul could hardly find any such aid to re-organize his life in a meaningful way. In the absence of any pursuit of a meaningful kind as was logotherapy in Frankl's context Paul got trapped in the blind alley of memory. Paul perhaps failed to invent the resources of involvement in some way higher than the opposing forces both within and outside during the hostile post-war time. Paul was not Frankl to embark on something greater such as logotherapy to transcend the limits of history. However, Paul's happy life got interjected by the rising tides of anti-Semitism during the preparatory times of the war. The photographs of Paul and his family which Sebald juxtaposed to provide a visual supplement to the verbal conveyed substantially much of Paul's happy life. The war took away everything from him. It orphaned him. His delightful childhood days and his loving family got permanently frozen in the photographic reality. The war consumed the referent. It reduced the living to the photographic signs. His happy times were fossilized in the frames:

... looking at the pictures in it, it truly seemed to me, and still does, as if the dead were coming back, or as if we were on the point of joining them. The earliest photographs told

the story of a happy childhood in the Bereyter family home in Blumenstrasse, right next to Lerchenmuller's nursery garden, and frequently showed Paul with his cat or with a rooster that was evidently domesticated (Sebald 46).

Paul's dream of becoming a teacher was suddenly amputated because of the introduction of a draconian new law which disabled the Jews in Germany. It stripped them off of their social, political and property rights. The life of the Jews became no one's concern. With the rise of Nazi there appeared several new measures and laws which confirmed the Jewish enmity to the land. The Jews got crushed by the juggernaut of nationalism in Germany. Hitler invented his enemy to unify the Germans by the thread of nationalism. The new laws were made to deprive the Jews of their right to possess property and to get employment etc. Paul could feel the heat directly of those oppressive new laws. He was forced to quit his job because the directive of the new law denied the Jews of joining any profession. The sad part of Paul's professional career was that before he could get acquainted with the names of his students he was fired from the job. With the enforcement of the new law under Hitler the Jews were denied of any financial access. Their access to economy was first nipped and subsequently their right to live. By making the Jewish existence impossible by enforcing restrictions of all kinds Hitler could bundle them up and sent them to the concentration camps. Sebald chose a perfect simile of the proverbial house of cards to describe the dramatic destruction of Paul's dreams:

... Paul took up his first teaching post in the remote village of W. There, before he had had the time to do more than remember the children's names, he was served official notice that it would not be possible for him to remain as a teacher, because of the new laws, with which he was no doubt familiar. The wonderful future he had dreamt of that summer collapsed without a sound like the proverbial house of cards. All his prospects

blurred. For the first time, he experienced that insuperable sense of defeat that was so often to beset him in later times and which, finally, he could not shake off. (48-49)

He internalized the sense of defeat so much that nothing could rise him up again. His resilience against all odds both circumstantial and socio-political got deeply wounded. Therefore, he could not re-organize himself to lift himself above the constricting forces. This organizational disability to mentor his self in order to cope with the changing situations circumscribed him to certain phenomena of the past. Hitler's normative and punitive leviathan destroyed Paul's carefully crafted prospects of future. His dream of being a teacher was lost in the mist of anonymity. The vortex of haunting memories of humiliation and defeat debilitated his will to life. Paul's was a problem of adjustment. In that atmosphere of despair and discomposure Paul received the news of the deportation of his beloved Helen and her mother to Vienna. And then no information that he received thereafter. Such a sad piece of information broke him completely as he himself felt guilty of having failed her and letting her down. More he contemplated on the fact of deportation of his mother and his beloved, more sinister images flooded his mind. For him, to seek distraction from the whirlpool of disturbed images of torture and death conjured up by his imagination was a form of betrayal. However painful they were, they gave him some kind of tragic satisfaction. Eva Hoffman in *After Such Knowledge* explains inescapability from the tangle of memory as it involves guilt inspired by ethics: "Memory is the act of contemplating others through the significance of their lives ... in the case of those who died unjustly, through the significance of their deaths" (148).

Paul being a teacher and a knowledge enthusiast could collect much of atrocity literature on Jews primarily during Hitler. A vast repertoire of information, which explicitly projected the savagery under Hitler, was gathered by him. The event named Palm Sunday of 1934 and otherwise known

as Kristallnacht devastated his faith in humanity. The destruction of Jewish properties and houses, public humiliation, and physical assaults on them in the broad day light in front of the panic-stricken crowd, the murder of seventy five year old Ahron Rosenfeld and thirty year old Siegfried Rosenau and the loot at the Jewish shops froze him in fear and depression. A sea of crowds quietly observed the incidents and chose to seal their lips. With the approach of 1939 he was conscripted into Hitler's military and served in the motorized artillery stationed in German-occupied countries. Being a three-quarter Aryan he was bundled up in the muster as a low-grade soldier. He did not fulfill Hitler's racial requirements to be recruited as a soldier with some rank. He ended up as a subaltern in Hitler's monstrous military. Hitler's Nazi was quite sophisticated in whitewashing their abrasive cruelty. They buried the evidences of much of their criminal deeds in order to come clean after the closure of the war. Those survived the Nazi panopticon found their shelf-life in museums and achieves. The surviving sediments were enough to collapse any sensitive human being in shock. Much of Paul's miscalculation lies in his decision to return to Germany after the war knowing well the war-beaten environment. He returned to the people who turned him down during the implementation of Hitler's anti-Semitic new law which crippled the Jews professionally and confiscated their properties. The quality of his life drastically deteriorated after his return to S as he became increasingly conscious of his identity as an emigrant. He failed to find any compatibility with those dubiously duplicitous people around him: "... and day by day, hour by hour, with every beat of the pulse, one lost more and more of one's qualities, became less comprehensible to oneself, increasingly abstract" (Sebald56). He closed himself from the external world as he found literally more masks than men. He found no sideways to walk away from the sting of predatory memory. This reminds one of Marcel's Proust's perceptions of memory in "The Captive", *Remembrance of Things Past*: "We are able

to find everything in our memory, which is like a dispensary or chemical laboratory in which chance steers our hands sometimes to a soothing drug and sometimes a dangerous poison” (02). Paul not only touched the poison but also got drifted by its content. More he fought with it, more trapped he felt in its hostile circles. Such intense engagement with the spectres of past ruined the quality of his life and crushed his vitality. The battle with memory was inarguably self-defeating. The unending sense of defeat weakened his grit and mental immunity. Walter Benjamin in “Chronicle 6” while explaining his reflective understanding of memory writes that “He who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments; no image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded and only in its folds does the truth reside” (491). Every curve of memory couches the uncomfortable truth. The conflagration of memory which stays supine in a potential state, if fanned, occupies the dimension of unending circularity. Paul got chained in that subtle web of circularity woven by memory.

Paul was no less a patriot and nationalist. His love for Germany was evident from his decision to return to it. Though he never liked S and its people and their narrow localism but the love for the land was the compelling force behind his return:

What moved and perhaps even forced Paul to return, in 1939 and in 1945, was the fact that he was German to the marrow, profoundly attached to his native land in the foothills of the Alps, and even to that miserable place S as well, which in fact he loathed and, deep within himself, ... would have been pleased to see destroyed and obliterated, together with the townspeople, whom he found so utterly repugnant (Sebald 57).

He knew the possible problems he would meet during his stay at S and in the daily go of things with the people whom he despised and the vice-versa. Before his uncompromising love for the

nation, other considerations seemed petty to him. The choice taken far away from the site of reality proved to be disastrous as time passed by.

It's not only the racial hatred that troubled Paul but also his rigorous investigation into the facts of his identity made him realize his existence in S as an outsider. Paul was not a simpleton to be satisfied with anything that came on his way. He possessed that Jewish intellectual rigour. He studied the German people and his own root. He tried to make sense of the German mania for racial monism inspired by the ideological rhetoric of a neurotic. It was not the inflated and incendiary demagogy that inspired the Germans to demand a racially exclusive status. Racial exclusivity seemed to him as a fundamental German character. This kind of conclusion which he arrived at injured his self-cultivated lofty thoughts about the land. Above all, his memory of the traumatic war-years as a petty soldier and the violence and destruction enveloped him in the increasing sense of fear, insecurity and lack of belongingness. His growing sense of exile rose to a disproportionate height when he found it impossible to adjust with the people: "... Paul had been gathering evidence, the mounting weight of which, as his investigation proceeded, finally convinced him that he belonged to the exiles and not to the people of S" (Sebald59).

Past became Paul's preoccupation. He could not lift himself above his past. Too much had happened and too shocking and too sinister for Paul to overcome. The sting of memory was too deep and too uncontrollable that Paul got chained by them: "Paul's flat was cold and dusty and full of the past" (Sebald160). The past of Paul's kind cannot be confronted but needs to be obeyed. And by obedience alone it can be partly overcome. He chose to confront and got crushed. He followed the path which his literary stalwarts once trod: "He read and read – Altenberg, Trakl, Wittgenstein, Friedell, Hasenclever, Toller, Tucholsky, Klaus Mann,

Ossietsky, Benjamine, Koestler and Zweig: almost all of them writers who had taken their own lives or had been close to doing so” (Sebald58). All the above writers expressed their inability to withstand the societal pressure and therefore showed their resistance by taking very fatal decisions in terms of concluding their lives abruptly. By such actions of courage they disclosed the fact of the oppression and suffocation that the political dispensation of their time could enforce and encourage. Paul started incubating upon the idea of negating his existence during those days and months of acute depression and loneliness. And finally, he got determined to destroy that damn little life at the face of increasingly unbearable inundation of past which came in conjunction with the acute depression.

Unlike Reilly in T S Eliot’s *The Cocktail Party* who suggests developing the human ability to acceptance of the memories of the past and only by accepting, however dreadful the past may be, the past may be endured, Paul failed to accept and move on. He was locked in the past. And his past consumed him gradually. Eliot in the above play writes, “You will have to live with these memories and make them into something new. Only by acceptance of the past will you alter its memory” (126). The transition that Paul could have made to bring difference to his life by virtue of accepting his past, in the sense in which Eliot seems to suggest here, may have shifted the spotlight from his past to some other direction inhering some possibility of difference.

Ambrose Adelwarth:

Ambrose Adelwarth was another Jewish emigrant who lost his mental balance in the post-war situations. He was repetitively administered electric shock treatment in order to restore his mental health. The therapy did not improve but caused a dramatic change in his behaviour. This repetitiveness of shock treatment made him docile. This apparent docility in his behavior was in

fact his choice to support the shock treatment in order to expedite the process of extinction from the curse called life:

So to his mind the docility of Ambrose was a result of the new treatment. Ambrose was one of the first of our patients to undergo a series of shocks, over a period weeks and months; but that docility, as I was already beginning to suspect, was in fact due simply to your great uncle's longing for an extinction as total and irreversible as possible of his capacity to think and remember (Sebald 113-114).

Thought and memory were Adelwarth's enemies. Thought in Keatean fashion is not a solution but a source of disquiet: "... where but to think is to be full of sorrow/ And leaden-eyed despairs, ..." (Keats248). Normality for Adelwarth was a difficult condition. Harrowing presence of the past in the present under the auspices of mental agencies destabilized his mental health and finally deranged him. The Jewish trauma during the war years was too much for a too little life to adjust.

Memory disabled him to the degree of dumbness, "Memory", he added in a postscript, "often strikes me as a kind of dumbness" (Sebald145). It inflicted a kind of paralysis from which he could never recover. He could not unburden his past. He lost his sanity due to the over-involvement with the events of the past. For the creation of a Germanic State uncontaminated by other racial impurities isolated the Jews as the unnecessary other and inevitably the enemies. The myth of racial purity was deliberately implanted in the minds of the people to construct national unity. After the successful invention of the myth, Hitler engaged his sinister creativity to forge the technology of elimination. Hitler's homicidal tendencies got fueled by the overwhelming public support. He manufactured a series of unpleasant lies against the Jews in order to receive continuous support from the people for the successful extension of his program. He not only

imposed victimhood upon the Jews but also made all preparations to exterminate the Jews from Europe. He unleashed with impunity much of his savage passion for violence upon the Jews. It was not easy to maintain sanity after experiencing the technology of torture invented by Hitler. Past imprisoned him. In the absence of any exit he got suffocated in the ill-ventilated house of memory. In the house of memory he heard the helpless human cries. With the movement of attention towards certain condition of life and temporality he began his journey pastwards. He started re-enacting the events. Avishai Margalit writes in *The Ethics of Memory* that“... it is hard to remember a past humiliation without reliving it” (130). To remember is to revive the past. This process of representing corroborates with the course of reliving. Recollection means participation. Objective recollection is not human. The reconstruction of the past coincides with the concomitant participation in the same. The continuity of past beyond its actual temporal territory proved to be invasive for Adelwarth. These mnemonic items were fossilized remains of the past. The heat within remained unextinguished. It got rekindled under varying situations. For Adelwarth, memory emanated the referent as “The photograph”, for Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, “is literally an emanation of the referent” (80).

Max Ferber:

In the autumn of 1943 Max Ferber, a Jew who escaped the flame of anti-Semitism in Germany, was taken to Manchester under the pretext of pursuing his education. Sebald being settled in Manchester found the story of Ferber interesting as he met him multiple times in the city. Ferber’s life in Manchester as an emigrant got unfolded to the world because of Sebald’s literary attention towards it. The experiences of the war and the hard treatment from the Gentile in Europe and the residual hatred both verbal and gestural, which prolonged into the post-war

times, percolated into every sinew of his being. It made Ferber passive and introvert. He lost his ability to draw as much charm as possible from the life and the places around:

As I expected, I have remained in Manchester to this day, Ferber continued. It is now twenty-two years since I arrived, he said, and with every year that passes a change of place seems less conceivable. Manchester has taken possession of me for good. I cannot leave, I do not want to leave, I must not. Even the visits I have to make to London once or twice a year oppress and upset me. Waiting at stations, the announcements on the public address, sitting in the train, the country passing by (which is still quiet unknown to me), the looks of fellow passengers – all of it is torture to me (Sebald 169).

He perceived no meaning in transition. He adjusted himself with the life and time in Manchester. He neither complained nor sought happiness from the condition he found himself in. His life seemed strangely quietened over the years. Any movement outside Manchester seemed to him a kind of torture and perilously burdensome. Some kind of opaque silence seemed to have had surrounded him. For Ferber, mental suffering knew no finality. Mind never forgets what hurts the self. The history of suffering has never found a satisfying conclusion. The war may have ended formally owing to the exertion or the excessive human casualty but the germ remains. The cause remains silently rooted in the post-war deep soil to reappear with its violent energy. Its reappearance just requires some favorable conditions. Human order is extremely brittle and a sort of patchwork and is subject to easy breakdown. Ferber's assumption of the nature of evil was equally logical. The end of the war did not mean the end of anti-Semitism. The closure of one chapter of violence marks the beginning of another. Its circularity is permanent. Samuel Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* expresses the human predicament under the unending shadow of evil that "The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere

else another stops. The same is true of the laugh” (25). The human history can never rise above the convoluted nexus of evil: “What is certain, though, is that mental suffering is effectively without end. One may think one has reached the very limit, but there are always more torments to come. One plunges from one abyss into the next” (Sebald170-71). What seemed certain to Ferber was the certainty of suffering. All the grand human illusions of compassion, togetherness and mutual respect were mere bubbles which floated momentarily to meet their end at each curve of the flow. There may be a pause to violence that is consensually arrived at owing to sheer self-interest. In Freudian psychoanalysis it is evident that the noblest human qualities hide beneath its assuring surface the human instinctual elements. Instinct is as permanent and primordial as its opposing forces. Peace is human helplessness at the site of uncontrollable violence. Ferber realized that the carpeting of ethics got soiled by the dirt of instinct. His sense of human history and its nature of unending repetition crippled his ability to strike a new beginning. Knowing the human nature he could not anticipate any difference of living outside the familiar compulsively chosen. He planted himself very strongly in Manchester and saw no substantial difference in relocation. The entire buzz around multiculturalism and human cohesion in the European metropolis hardly attracted him as he began to know the reality of human nature.

The grim memory of his parents’ deportation from Munich to Riga in November 1941 and their murder by Nazi deteriorated his ability to calm himself. More he tried to establish a pact of non-interference with his memory, more trapped he felt in the boggy memory. As Haruki Murakami rightly wrote in *Kafka on the Shore* that “Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart” (362). Ferber had almost the similar experience as he found no respite from the tearing aspects of memory. The warm memories of his parents were conjoined with the facts of their torture and murder in a Nazi concentration camp. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer

in *Ghosts of Home* explain the irreparability of loss and its unending repetition among the surviving in the context of the Eastern European Jews in Czernowitz: "... a loss so deep that it remains forever incarnate, and forever uncommunicable, within the survivor" (287). It is not easy to make peace with those memories however traumatic they are. They are not the dispensable items to get rid of. In the words of Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "Remembering is an ethical act ... Memory is achingly the only relation we can have with the dead" (115). To remember is to reconnect with the dead. It is to imaginatively reconfigure the past. Remembering is a duty. By this act of duty, the gift of the dead is acknowledged (Panda 125). However aching the memory may be, the survivor nourishes it as an act of responsibility. Remembering therefore for a Jew is a not a choice. It is an ethical act, a duty and a commitment to the dead.

In Ferber's opinion Manchester was England's sanctuary for emigrants. He confessed the disquiet in his soul living as an exile in Manchester. The place held no past and future for him. Much of his disquiet sprang from the excessive involvement with the past. It in the process became an obsession. In *Kafka on the Shore* Murakami expresses the impossibility of dissociation with the past: "But still, no matter how much time passes, no matter what takes place in the interim, there are so many things we can never assign to oblivion, memories we can never rub away. They remain with us forever, like a touchstone" (91). The thought of Germany made Ferber go insane. His hesitation to visit Germany was evident from the fact that he might encounter with that visage of Germany which seemed buried in the contemporary technological makeover. He might see the surreal side which remained unseen to the common perception of the contemporary time:

... indeed it is nothing but a disquiet of the soul. There is neither a past nor a future. At least, not for me. The fragmentary scenes that haunt my memories are obsessive in character. When I think of Germany, it feels as if there were some kind of insanity lodged in my head. Probably the reason why I have never been to Germany again is that I am afraid to find that this insanity really exists. To me, you see, Germany is a country frozen in the past, destroyed, a curiously extraterritorial place, inhabited by people whose faces are both lovely and dreadful (Sebald181).

The parting words exchanged with his parents remained within him in the form of an echo and a murmur. In the absence of any correspondence thereafter those few words permeated every atom of his being. The residue of that final conversation became the sad music of his being. Throughout his life he strived to protect that significant residue against the forces of time and oblivion and the loss of language.

When he recollected his childhood days in Munich prior to 1939 his memory was primarily anchored on those pounding processions, marches and parades:

I think the grey lady understands only her mother tongue, German, which I have not once spoken since I parted from my parents at Oberwiesenfeld airport in Munich in 1939, and which survives in me as no more than an echo, a muted and incomprehensible murmur. It may possibly have something to do with this loss of language, this oblivion, Ferber went on, that memories reach no further back than my ninth or eighth year, and that I recall little of the Munich years after 1933 other than processions, marches and parades. (Sebald182)

The language reminded him of his childhood, his alienation and death. Unlike Paul Celan, Ferber chose not to remain committed to the language when all fell away from him. That language

fuelled his memory to reveal his past. It was a paradoxical revelation – charming and painful. It lacerated him. Paul Celan remained committed to the German language though he could never forget the extermination camp to which his parents were sent and he to a labour camp in 1942. His commitment to the German language gets the finest manifestation in his poem “You were my Death” and in which he writes that “You were my death:/ you I could hold/when all fell away from me”(90). Celan committed suicide in 1970. To quote Sebald’s finest and extremely poignant statement given in his novel *Austerlitz* on memory seems pertinent, “No one can explain exactly what happens within us when the doors behind which our childhood terrors lurk are flung open” (33). For the Jews this act of flinging open of the past was not an occasional occurrence. It was a permanent recurrence.

Ferber witnessed the rise of a new species of humanity of Eichmann type in Germany. With their uniforms and parades they became the visible representatives of power. They became heartless agents to execute order. They were so slavishly obedient to the military structure of Hitler that no other considerations seemed important to them to pay attention to. That was the manner in which they functioned inattentive to the ethical dimensions of life. Humanity was put to rest when they mercilessly packed the Jews in those suffocating train compartments like the livestock and crushed them in the concentration camps. The famous Eichmann defense emphasized upon the importance of obedience to order not ethics. They restrained from thinking therefore they failed to see the cruelty in their action. Commenting on evil Hannah Arendt wrote in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that “ ... it (evil) can spread like a fungus over the surface of the earth and lay waste the entire world. Evil comes from the failure to think” (7). Under Hitler’s dispensation thought was exiled. Hitler’s crew quarantined their thinking in order to execute the orders diligently with guiltless precision. Hitler normalized evil and made it a civil norm. It

might not be Eichmann's sadism or perverted mentality or instinctual urge that forced him to be an anti-Semitic predator but his absolute and irreversible submissiveness to the top-down structure of power. Ferber as a child could see the pain of the Jews who lost everything to the Germans as they were declared foreigners. Ferber's grandmother committed suicide as she could not stand the threat of poverty, hatred and humiliation. The loss of all that they had acquired over the years with hard work to make a decent life inflicted depression and psychological unsteadiness. As a child Ferber had to view the burning of books, the dismissal of the Jews from the jobs and the confiscation of their property. Life got derailed in his daily battle with such awful images of the past. During these extremely sensitive times Ferber's father could procure under immense difficulty a visa for Ferber. He gave away everything he had to the English consul to obtain a visa for his son. Owing to the absence of resources Ferber's parents failed to escape Nazi Germany. Whatever they had they thought it meaningful to liquidate in order to save the life of their son. Ferber survived the Nazi savagery but hardly found any respite from the hacking of his conscience and the onslaught of memory. Forgetting was not easy. Those memories could not be brushed aside as yesterday's language or reality. Last year's words do not just belong to the last year's language. They penetrate the present. Eliot seems to have given different trajectory of memory and their archival characteristic in "Little Gidding" when he writes that "For last year's words belong to last year's language. / And next year's words await another voice" (204). But for Ferber, time does not seem sequential. It is intersectional. The three dimensions of time are bound by the inescapable tringularity of dependence and their intersectional interpenetrability.

Conclusion:

Sebald as a sympathetic outsider has remarkably penetrated the deeper aspects of the psychology of the Jewish survivors of the holocaust. Though they did not feel the heat of the holocaust as they escaped the Nazi homicidal hysteria, but their sufferings as survivors were no less severe. The death of the Jews under Hitler was inarguably tragic but the lives of those who survived were also equally tragic. Life was never pleasant under the bitter burdens of memory. It was equally tragic to deal with the guilt of living at the cost of many who died. In other words, the lives of the survivors were the gifts of the dead. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer in *Ghosts of Home* find the most interesting response from one of the Ukrainians upon enquiring the persecution of the Czernowitz Jews: “Their persecution and suffering is a stain in our memory” (178). The Ukrainian explained his anguish and helplessness over the persecution of the Jews by the anti-Semitic forces during the WW II. His helplessness echoes the helplessness of the Jewish survivors whose lives were the gifts of the dead. The ‘stain’ of guilt was indelible so was suffering. It was not easy for the survivors to confront the invasive tides of memory. In most of the cases as Sebald too has expressed similar view, the survivors succumbed to suicide, a morbid substitute of life. Many of the survivors could not tune to the normality of things in life and became prey to the paranoid delusions and finally landed in psychiatric institutions. To conclude, the Jewish emigrants whose lives that Sebald studied were perished by the restorative power of memory. Their predatory past recurrently reappeared with the aid of memory and put them in the most helpless situations full of remorse, guilt, anger and frustration. Such mnemonic engagement with the coercive past vitiated their present.

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Bionote:

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