

Montreal
April 5, 1981

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Jews, Catastrophe & Culture

My present time commitments

1. teaching, administration
2. editing
3. eating, sleeping, food shopping
4. attending Hol. Confs!

not by choice

Nov 3-5 Indiana: Thinking About the H.

Mar. 22-4 Van Leer: Meaning, Demanding

Jun 20-4 Jerus. Int Conf on Hol & Genocide

not to speak of

- Ntl Institute on the Hol; Littell's annual conf in Phila.
- ongoing Hol. seminar at CUNY Grad Center
- Zachor Liturgy Committee
- innumerable grant proposals for Hol. projects

Recent outpouring of articles attacking the phenomenon

Jan 1981 - Iamar Schorsch in Midstream (Shear Heshemeyin)

Feb 1981 - Robert Alter in Commentary

Feb 1981 - Neusser's Stranger at Home: Hol. Zionism & American Judaism

Outweighed by a spate of critical studies

In literature alone

Edward Alexander The Resonance of Dust, Essays on Hol Lit & Jew. Fate

Dorothy Bilik Immigrant Survivors: Post-Hol. Consciousness in recent Jew. American Fiction

Haniha Bosmajian Metaphors of Evil, Contemp. German Lit & the Shadow of Nazism

Sidra Ezrahi By Words Alone The Hol in Lit

Alvin Rosenfeld A Double Dying Reflections on Hol. Lit

Byron Sherwin & Susan Amert: Encountering the H

an Interdisciplinary Survey

more articles in Judaism, Midstream, NJR

We are witnessing a mass movement

shrines, rituals, liturgies, confs, rallies, ~~and~~ Lodges, newsletters,

Van Leer

Important points raised — use these as my own point-of-departure

1. Differentiated response to the Hol

- affecting diff groups in diff ways
- in each group: giving rise to new, unanticipated problems

ISRAEL

a) Period of Statehood 1948-61 deliberately downplayed survivors, tho 10% of pop., not at center of consciousness
 נשכחו אלו שרדו
 weren't allowed to mourn our losses; German Repudiation (Tal) Ben-Gurion was right

b) Eichmann Trial → 6m Kippur War
 first public occasion for bearing witness, mourning
 unlike USA, where public focused on Eichmann, pathology of evil —
 Israel focused on the witness
 (Harven) Katzetnik fainted

Wars: heightened sense of déjà-vu
 particularly on eve of 6-day war
 psychological reflex: unleashed the collective trauma

c) Present

(Wiesel) our politics paralyzed by our knowledge of the past
 H. stands in the way of effective analysis, action
 (Tal) religious fanaticism involving the Hol to further their apocalyptic world-view
 declaring holy war.

USA/Canada

rapidly becoming center of diaspora Jewry's self-identity
 displacing Israel
 Israel is exogenous
 Hol is ours (Friedlander)
 (Mankowitz) Galutization of Israel — portraying state in perennial position of isolated vulnerability

Non-Jews

terrible backlash setting in
 heady period of ecumenical embrace is over
 (of my own experiences)

(Wiesel) Hol. encourages anti-S
 makes unthinkable entirely possible

(Levine) Cudihy's new book

(Friedlander)

rise of neo-Fascism Grac

systematic attempt to discredit the documents

inversion of images

Jews → symbol of Evil

Nazis were tracked

omit

② The SURVIVOR

- whole session devoted to psychoanalytic treatment
- is their personal trauma a matter of public policy?
- Yoram Kaniuk's Adam Resurrected (= Marat/Sade)
- by dwelling on their pathology, are we not dehumanizing them further?

My Own Contribution

EVENT

predicated upon uniqueness of the Hol.

we dare not even utter the designated word

< Hol. commission report >

so ineffable, that like name of God, can be invoked
 only by double euphemism

∴ unique

∴ unknowable, except by someone who has been there
 Mystical Landscape

concentrationary universe

Hol. kingdom

Wiesel

most prominent witness among us

only someone who has been there has right

own experience → theology of paradox

The new
 theology

∴ his presence, person eclipse Event itself

A Double Dying - cult of the survivor

- thesis of double death
- even disabled
- mystically endowed;
- actually lived thru Hell

∴ more imp than real victims

- they couldn't have apprehended

∴ memoirs better than diaries

myth → ~~the~~ history

survivor → murdered millions

lit of survival → lit. of the Hol.

Why this is wrong

survival is individual experience

Hol. is not

Judaism never singled out the indiv. as worthy of commemoration

We have no Saints Days

Even if we did: a saint is dead!

we're about to create a new Christology ^{religion - and a Christological} _{we at that!}

survivor - as - witness - sacrifice - Everyman

~~the dead~~

their testimony as Scripture

The pain is great - there is no denying that

but we have been here before

a great deal to be learned from past experience

that is why I'm here today

① Traditional Response

② Emergence of a modern counter-tradition

③ All this transformed in the Hol. itself