



## Introduction

“We wanted to survive so as to live one day after Hitler, in order to be able to tell our story,” Helen K. tells interviewers at the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University.<sup>1</sup> This book attempts to listen to such stories and, in doing so, to explore the relationship between narration and survival, between a desire to survive in order to tell and the equally intense need to tell—and to be heard—in order to survive.<sup>2</sup> The book is also, more enigmatically, an effort to listen to stories carried by the survivor that exceed his or her capacity to access and relate.

It is this element of excess and the impact of these *untold stories* upon the lives of Holocaust survivors and their children that is at the heart of Art Spiegelman’s *MAUS: A Survivor’s Tale*, discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3. The subtitle of the first volume of *MAUS*, *My Father Bleeds History*, conveys a sense not only of physical injury, but of psychological wounding and emotional anguish. It suggests that the literally unbearable pain of the first generation will have spilled over somehow into the next, that the still unassimilated historical experience of the father will have bled through the pages of the “survivor’s tale” drafted by his son. Spiegelman’s highly resonant and unsettling metaphor draws our attention, in other words, both to a certain hemorrhaging of his father’s story and to the spaces between the frames of his own Holocaust “comix,” to openings in the body of his work where something else appears to be going on—something that could not be contained as an object of narration, that could not

be framed in pictures or in words, that could not be communicated as the discrete content of an eyewitness account, be it the account of the father or the son.

The following chapters seek to develop ways of attuning ourselves to this element of excess in Holocaust writing, to that “something,” in the words of Jean-François Lyotard, that “remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined.”<sup>3</sup> The book seeks in this way to reorient the study of Holocaust literature and survivor testimony, shifting the focus from the often sacralizing and awestruck language of the “unspeakable” toward an investigation of what transpires in the unstable borderland between speech and silence, body and text.<sup>4</sup> Such an approach, I argue, enables us to tune in to those between-spaces in Spiegelman’s work—and in Holocaust writing more generally—associated with the fluid language and silent outpourings of the body as witness.

In what follows I examine the ways in which such bodies are transfused with and mutely driven by historical energies that have yet to be metabolized, how they are inhabited by memories painfully lodged in particular openings, organs, tissues, and cavities.<sup>5</sup> In the context of this examination we will have occasion to deal with what I would call the “uneven development” of the traumatized body, a psychosomatic economy that manifests itself in some instances as a reorganization of corporeal space—a redistribution of psychical investments in the body—around the open wounds it bears; in others it may appear as a withdrawal of such investments and be associated with the deadening of particular bodily spaces. In the latter case, the benumbed area seems out of synch and out of touch, as though its development had not kept pace with the rest. Seemingly frozen in time, such underdeveloped regions of the body appear to speak a language or idiolect different from the rest.

### The Witness to the Witness

In order to begin to attend to these bodies in pain, to learn their languages, and to attune ourselves to the untold stories they bear—to stories which all too often have been unconsciously lived out and silently passed on by survivors—it is necessary to cultivate not only another, more analytically informed mode of listening but a different, more ethical way

of responding, a way of assuming co-responsibility for the act of bearing witness.

To bear witness to the degrading and dehumanizing atrocities of the Holocaust is not simply to address one's story to others. It is more fundamentally—and more tentatively—to speak in search of “an addressable you.” As the poet Paul Celan, whose parents were murdered by the SS, and who was himself condemned “to haul stones” in the Ukraine during the war, said of his own poetic testimony, “a poem, as a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue, can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the—not always greatly hopeful—belief that it may somewhere and sometime wash up on land, on heartland (*Herzland*) perhaps. Poems in this sense are always under way: they are making toward something. Toward what? Toward something standing open, occupiable, toward an addressable you perhaps, toward an addressable reality.”<sup>6</sup>

I return at length in subsequent chapters to the metaphor of the poem—and of the testimonial act—as a message in a bottle, a figure Celan borrows from Osip Mandelstam, the Russian writer with whom he felt a keen sense of poetic and existential kinship. For the moment I want only to stress the place made for the other, for “an addressable you,” in his poems—for another, indeterminable and unpredictable *place* which these errant poems are themselves said to be “making toward.” As drifting messages in a bottle, Celan's poems leave themselves essentially open to chance, letting themselves open with an unprecedented sense of vulnerability, exposure, and woundedness in the direction of an unforeseeable encounter, in the direction of “something standing open” which perhaps, in its turn, might open in them the possibility of speaking otherwise while still speaking German. Celan's poetry bears witness to his lifelong struggle not only to orient himself in the German language after “that which happened,” but also to open it—this language which “had to pass through the thousand darkneses of deathbringing speech”—to a different heading.<sup>7</sup>

For Celan, who continued to write in his mother tongue after emigrating in the late 1940s from the Eastern European province of Bukovina via Vienna to Paris, where he would commit suicide in 1970, it was never simply a question of the “working of language itself, language as such, but always of an ‘I’ who speaks from the particular angle of inclination which is his existence and who is concerned with outlines and orientation.”<sup>8</sup> “Reality is not simply there,” he stressed in his 1958 Bremen speech, “it must

be searched for and won.”<sup>9</sup> It is this search for “an addressable you,” for “an addressable reality,” that not only destines the speaking “I” of his poetic testimony toward “something standing open” but defines its own essentially *dialogical* structure. In other words, there will have been no “I,” no witness, without a witness to the witness, without an opening of that dialogically constituted “I” to and by the essential *possibility* of address. This is why Celan speaks of “an addressable you, an addressable reality” (emphasis added). Like this “reality,” the “I” destined to search for it “is not simply there.” It, too, must be “searched for and won.” Only in its orientation toward the other, toward the *weak* possibility (Celan’s “not greatly hopeful belief”) of a *chance encounter* it cannot, by definition, be assured of in advance, does this “I” dialogically constitute itself first and foremost as an act of language, an act of witnessing, which must be performed each time anew.<sup>10</sup> As a performative speech act, witnessing is structurally open to the possibility of failure, to the possibility of *not* reaching its destination, of *not* washing up on that shoreline of the heart (*Herzland*) of which Celan speaks.

“If someone else could have written my stories,” writes Elie Wiesel, “I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. My role is the role of the witness . . . Not to tell, or to tell another story, is . . . to commit perjury.”<sup>11</sup> Whereas the notion of a witness is traditionally defined by his or her singular status, by his or her irreplaceability with regard to the truth of an experience which has been lived through or seen firsthand, the notion of bearing witness that is developed in the following chapters focuses more on the singularity of each act of witnessing itself, on an illocutionary speech act which must be performed each time, as though for the first time, on the contingency of an act that in each instance tests—and contests—the limits of narration. My focus is thus less on the stories *already* in the speaker or writer’s possession, less on the constative dimension of his or her testimony, than on what *happens* in the very act of testifying, on what untold and unpossessed stories are *unwittingly accessed and unconsciously performed* in the very process of speaking toward another in the fluid space of transmission opened between the precariously fluctuating positions of the witness and the witness to the witness. The precariousness of these fluctuations is at once a sign of danger and an indication of the risks necessarily incurred in opening the act of witnessing to the

chance of a dialogically transformative encounter.<sup>12</sup> What then are these risks and why must they be taken?

“The listener to the narrative of extreme human pain,” writes the analyst and cofounder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Dori Laub, “faces a unique situation.”

While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma—as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock—has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of. The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the “knowing” of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.

By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels. He has to address all these, if he is to carry out his function as a listener, and if trauma is to emerge, so that its henceforth [*sic*: possibly, *heretofore*?] impossible witnessing can indeed take place. The listener, therefore, by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past.<sup>13</sup>

While it is important not to conflate Celan’s notion of “an addressable you” with the position of the analytic listener or testimonial interviewer assumed by Laub, it is useful to begin by noting how in both cases the focus has shifted from a traditional notion of the speaker qua witness to the other’s necessary implication in the act and *transaction* of witnessing; from the witness viewed as a privileged locus of knowledge, as someone *independently* capable of translating his or her firsthand experience of a traumatic event into a “knowing” of it; from the witness as owner of a story *already* in his possession and at his disposal to the space of transmission as the place where such “knowing” first takes place, where cognizance of the event is *belatedly* “given birth to.”<sup>14</sup>

### The Hazards of Listening

While Spiegelman's description of his father as someone who "bleeds history" and Celan's metaphor of the poem as a drifting message in a bottle both implicitly draw attention to the fluidity of this space of transmission, Laub explicitly describes the hazards of listening to survivor testimony as "a threat of flooding." In all three cases what is implied is a relationship in which the boundary separating the speaker from the listener is always in danger of dissolving, a situation in which, as Laub says, "the fear of merger with the atrocities being recounted" may bring about a sense of total paralysis on the part of the audience. The listener, he adds, may experience a "flood of awe and fear." We tend, in other words, to endow the survivor with a kind of sanctity, both to pay our tribute to him and to keep him at a distance, to avoid the intimacy entailed in knowing.

Insistently privileging a language of inundation and overflow as though to emphasize an elemental fear which all the various modes of audience response analyzed by him may have in common, Laub also addresses the danger of hyperemotionality, a response, he says, "which superficially looks like compassion and caring." In such cases it is the testifier who is "flooded, drowned and lost in the listener's defensive affectivity" (72). Fears of engulfment may also prompt the listener to overidentify with the victims, to *drown out* in effect the intolerable otherness of their stories. "These are some of the ways," Laub concludes, "in which the listener feels the need to protect himself from the offshoots of the trauma and from the intensity of the flood of affect that, through the testimony, comes to be directed toward him" (73).

Fraught with numerous and incalculable hazards, the act of transmission threatens not only to overwhelm the listener to survivor testimony but also to retraumatize and re-silence the returning witness. "They speak . . . among themselves," Primo Levi says of his indifferent audience, "as if I was not there."<sup>15</sup> Such risks of deferred or repeated annihilation cannot be avoided, however, if the heretofore "impossible witnessing" of which Laub speaks is to be given a chance to "take place belatedly as though retroactively" (85).

## Toward an Addressable You

“To bear witness,” Shoshana Felman writes, “is to take responsibility for truth: to speak, implicitly from within the legal pledge and the juridical imperative of the witness’s oath.”

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

The present study seeks to develop the notion of responsibility discussed by Felman through an examination of the role played by the listener, interviewer, or reader in the testimonial act. Such a *supplementary* witness, I argue, implicitly commits himself to the task of assuming *co-responsibility* for an intolerable burden, for an overwhelming charge, for the crushing weight of a responsibility which the witness had heretofore felt he or she bore alone and therefore could not carry out.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as the clinicians Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart have observed, it is the intensely isolating quality of traumatic memory that distinguishes it from narrative memory. Whereas the latter is a social act, the former is inflexible, invariable, and monologic. “Traumatic memory,” they note, “has no social aspect; it is not addressed to anybody . . . it is a solitary activity.”<sup>17</sup> In seeking to assume co-responsibility for the act of testifying, the witness to the witness helps to transform such traumatic memories into social acts, into narrative memories addressed to others—to others who are not simply located *outside* the self. Indeed, as Laub remarks, “The testimony is . . . the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness; reconstitutes the *internal ‘thou,’* and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself” (85).

Yet why the necessity of this internal “thou”? Why must the possibility of such a listener inside the witness be *reconstituted* in the first place? According to Laub,

one has to conceive of the world of the Holocaust as a world in which the very imagination of the *Other* was no longer possible. There was no longer an other to which one could say “Thou” in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered. The historical reality of the Holocaust became, thus, a reality which extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another. But when one cannot turn to a “you” one cannot say “thou” even to oneself. The Holocaust created in this way a world in which one *could not bear witness to oneself*. The Nazi system turned out therefore to be foolproof, not only in the sense that there were in theory no outside witnesses but also in the sense that it convinced its victims, the potential witnesses from the inside, that what was affirmed about their “otherness” and their inhumanity was correct and that their experiences were no longer communicable even to themselves, and therefore perhaps never took place. This loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one’s history is abolished one’s identity ceases to exist.<sup>18</sup>

The “imagination of the *Other*,” whose historical foreclosure is so poignantly sketched in this passage, is ultimately for Laub the imagination of the Other as *another Self*. It is a Self imagined as a speaking subject dialogically constituted through its relation to someone else, as an “I” that addresses itself to a “you,” “in the hope . . . of being recognized as a subject” (emphasis added). For Laub, the “you” is itself but another “I.” Indeed, it is the *mutual recognition* of speaker and listener, and the essential possibility of the one dialogically exchanging places with the other, that maintain within each “I” the space of an internal “you,” that hold open the space of an inner dialogue in which one can “say ‘thou’ . . . to oneself.” While I agree with Laub’s contention that the “historical reality of the Holocaust became . . . a reality which extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another,” I argue that his conception of the Other as *another subject*, of the “you” as a kind of *alter ego*, prevents us from seeing some of the more radical ways in which the question of address is reposed and rethought in post-Holocaust writing—specifically in the work of Spiegelman, Wolf, Ozick, and Celan discussed in the following chapters.



In contrast to Laub, I argue that what is “reconstituted” in the testimonial alliance forged between the witness and the witness to the witness is not merely an “internal ‘thou,’” but something which was never exactly “there” in the first place, something on the order of what Lacan refers to as “the discourse of the Other.” In developing the notion of a testimonial contract, which is related to Laub’s sense of “the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener,” while differing from it in important ways, the following chapters ask: How is it possible to assume co-responsibility for the emergence of such a discourse? How can one open oneself to the possibility of speaking—and of listening—otherwise? How can one begin to heed Celan’s strange injunction voiced in his poem “The Trumpet’s Place” to “listen in with your mouth”? How, in other words, might it be possible in listening at the very limit of the “you’s” addressability, at what might be described as the mouth of the ear, to leave oneself open to the chance of being surprised by the foreignness of what happens in the fluid space of testimonial transmission?<sup>19</sup>

To begin to respond to these questions, it is necessary to return to the text “On the Interlocutor,” from which Celan derives his figure of the poem as a message in a bottle. There Mandelstam writes:

When I speak to somebody, I do not know with whom I speak, and I do not wish to know him. There is no lyric without dialogue. Yet the only thing that pushes us into the arms of the interlocutor is the desire to be surprised by our own words, to be captivated by their novelty and unexpectedness. The logic is ineluctable. If I know to whom I speak, I know ahead of time how he will regard what I say, whatever I might say, and consequently I shall manage not to be astonished by his astonishment, to be overjoyed by his joy, or to love through his love.<sup>20</sup>

The dialogic relationship outlined here is developed by Celan in his “Meridian” speech. Regarding the poem’s relation to the Other, he says, it “wants to move toward an Other, it needs this Other, it needs this interlocutor. It seeks it out, speaks toward it. For the poem making toward an Other, each thing, each human being is a figure [*eine Gestalt*] of this Other.”<sup>21</sup> “A poem,” he says later in the same speech,

becomes conversation—often desperate conversation. Only the space of this conversation can establish what is addressed, can gather it into a “you” around the naming and speaking I. But this “you,” come about by dint of being named and addressed, *brings its otherness into the present*. Even in the here and now of the

poem—and the poem has only this one, unique, momentary present—even in this immediacy and nearness, the otherness gives voice to what is most its own: its time.<sup>22</sup>

The complicated syntax of Celan's speech does not lend itself to easy paraphrase. Nevertheless, important differences between his notion of address and the notion proposed by Laub begin to emerge. Whereas for Laub the "you" is addressed by a speaking "I," "in the hope of being recognized as a subject," for Mandelstam and Celan the dialogic relation to the interlocutor is one that opens a space of *self-distance*, a gap through which an "encounter," as Celan calls it, might emerge. Whereas for Laub the "you" is ultimately another "I," another person, for Celan each human being is instead a figure, *eine Gestalt*, of the *impersonal* Other toward which the poem is making and speaking. For Celan it is less a question of the specular relation which may obtain between an "I" and a "you," less a matter of their respective identities being mutually recognized, than of according a place to the otherness which the "you" "brings with" it (*bringt mit*) and which it in a certain sense impersonates. It is a question, moreover, of listening to the other voices and the haunting silences which the poem itself—in its very self-estrangement—*lets speak through it* (*läßt es das ihm, dem Anderen, Eigenste mitsprechen*). In short, Celan's use of the prefix *mit-* in the pivotal verbs *mitbringen* and *mitsprechen* shifts the focus in this passage from the "I" and the "you" conceived of as intact identities engaged in a dialogic exchange to the *parasitic others* they bring along with them, to the way the host bodies of the "I" and the "you" leave themselves open to that which speaks with and through them as the uncanny otherness of their own voices.<sup>23</sup>

"There is no lyric without dialogue," Mandelstam asserts. Yet, as we have seen, it is no longer dialogue in the sense of a reciprocal exchange of words and of illocutionary positions, of taking turns speaking and listening, but rather in the sense of *mitsprechen*, in the sense, that is, of voices speaking with and through one another, *at the same time*. It is dialogue in which interruption is no longer the exception but the rule, in which one speaks in the hope not merely of being recognized as a subject but rather of being interrupted, provoked, and "surprised by one's own words." To bear witness to the witness in this context is thus to assume co-responsibility for that which *mitspricht* in the discourse of the witness, for that which re-

mains adrift on its surface as a floating message in a bottle, as a letter in sufferance, as the flotsam and jetsam of unconnected and still unassimilated memory fragments.

### The Compulsion to Repeat

The act of bearing witness to traumatic experience has often been conceived of as an act of procreation, as a process, in Laub's terms, of "creating knowledge *de novo*."<sup>24</sup> Yet, it is important to emphasize that both the knowledge given birth to and the process of its delivery are themselves traumatic. In what follows I explore the relationship between the act of bearing witness and the figure of birth trauma, a figure which is itself often associated in the texts under discussion with the witnessing of a traumatic death. Indeed, it is this uncanny configuration of birth and death—of birth *as* death trauma—that plays a crucial organizing role in all the texts examined in this study. In an effort to account for the peculiar frequency with which this configuration recurs, I suggest that the act of witnessing be viewed as a process of *Entbindung*—that is, as a way of giving birth that is also at the same time a struggle to *unbind* fixed psychological energies, to reopen closed, static, and fatally repetitive cycles of compulsive return.

As for the "knowledge" given birth to in such moments of unbinding, I argue that it is itself available only in the mode of repetition. The following chapters therefore pay particular attention to moments of repetitive stammering, labored breathing, and breathless panting in the texts under discussion. Like Spiegelman's father, Vladek, who is often shown pedaling a stationary bike while telling his story to his artist son, the testimonies in question seem themselves *to move in place*, to go in circles, to "proceed" in an apparently stagnating manner "from threshold to threshold" (Celan).<sup>25</sup> It is as though these testimonies were themselves trapped at the very frontier of speech and silence, as though the "knowledge" they seek to give birth to were caught in the act of transmission, remaining somehow stuck in the throat above or suspended in the cervical opening below.<sup>26</sup> Incommunicable and undeliverable as such, this traumatic knowledge is all too often left to resonate not only in the painfully congested narrows of the witnessing body, in a place Celan refers to as that of an *Engführung* or straitened passage, but also in the body of the witness *to* the witness, where

it is left to wander—like a summons one cannot simply heed or ignore—in the labyrinthine passageways of the inner ear.<sup>27</sup>

It is therefore necessary to invent new ways of listening to this “knowledge,” which is articulable and indeed only audible in the mode of repetition. To begin to attune ourselves to that which perseverates at the very threshold of speech and silence, insisting like an unlaidd ghost—or a specter of what is yet to come—at the limit of life and death, we must also begin to treat the question of repetition in a different way. The following chapters therefore seek to view repetition as a movement that is never one with itself, as a *compulsion* that is not only internally divided but doubly driven, impelled by *competing impulses* at work within it. Indeed, what comes together and insists in the mode of repetition, I argue, are both a drive to return obsessively to the same place and a driving, desperate search for someplace different—for an uncanny difference that might emerge in the place of the same.

It is this inherent otherness of the very movement of repetition, this internal dislocation and reorientation of its trajectory, that is silently accentuated by Dominick LaCapra in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, when he strategically hyphenates the term *re-petition*. Making a place for the other impulses silently and unwittingly at work in the repetition compulsion, LaCapra invites us to view it not merely as a process of “acting out” but also as a stammering movement of *petitioning again*, which he associates with the process of “working through.”<sup>28</sup> While my own understanding of repetition is indebted to LaCapra’s work on trauma, I view “acting out” and “working through” not as different *stages* in a process of coming to terms with the past, as he often does, but rather as two moments *simultaneously* inhabiting an internally divided and doubly driven movement.<sup>29</sup> To claim, in other words, that re-petition *is* repetition is to say that there is one impulse silently at work within another, one which seeks to alter the very spacing of repetition, to open *in it* a space of self-difference, a space marked by LaCapra’s hyphenation of the term *re-petition*. To better grasp what is to be found in such a space—or, to be more precise, in the *spacing out* of re-petition—it is necessary to return for a moment to Celan’s “Meridian” address, where the competing impulses inhabiting the compulsion to repeat may be said to go by the names of “poetry” and “art.”

And poetry? Poetry, which still has to take the path of art? . . . Perhaps—I'm just asking—perhaps poetry, in the company of the I which has forgotten itself, travels the same path as art, toward that which is mysterious and alien. And once again—but where? but in what place? but how? but as what?—it sets itself free. . . .

Can we now, perhaps, find the place where strangeness was present, the place where a person succeeded in setting himself free, as an—estranged—I? Can we find such a place, such a step? . . .

Is perhaps at this point, along with the I—with the estranged I, set free . . . —is perhaps at this point an Other set free?<sup>30</sup>

Celan's extremely tentative, stammering effort to locate such a place, to find where the "I" is unbound in its very self-estrangement and where, along with it, an Other is set free, is, I would suggest, itself the drive to open the movement of compulsive repetition to the otherness it bears, to the movement of re-petitioning silently at work and unconsciously insisting within it. Insofar as this movement is associated in Celan with that of "poetry" still obliged to travel the same path as "art," its re-petitioning should be viewed as the poem's "own" uncanny and erratic path, as its uncertain *way* of blindly searching out "something standing open," of stutteringly speaking toward the very wound around which the "you" will have gathered, toward an opening of that "you" to the petitioning address of an as yet "unbound" and still undeliverable Other.

### Uncanny Configurations

In Spiegelman's *MAUS* the question of compulsive repetition is articulated with the language of birth-as-death trauma through the figure of a tightening umbilical cord, a figure that appears in the text at the very moment that Art's mother, Anja, is about to commit suicide. Chapters 2 and 3 trace this passage opened at the limit of life/death, a passage which is not only enacted at various points *within* the text—most notably in the story of Art and his brother's own births—but also in the publication history of the text itself, in the story of its own traumatic *Entbindung* as text.

My reading of Christa Wolf's *Patterns of Childhood* in Chapter 4 is similarly focused on a moment of birth alluded to at the end of its opening chapter, in which a child is said to begin to stir—or rather "to bestir herself [*sich . . . zu regen beginnt*] independent of certain promptings."

These stirrings are accompanied by a feeling of anxiety that suddenly seizes the narrator—"the feeling," she says, "that overcomes any living being when the earth starts moving underfoot." Losing her footing as the ground seems to open beneath her and as the lost child of her youth begins to emerge unsummoned from the depths of memory, the narrator associates this anxiously ungrounding moment with the birth of her own text—or, to be more specific, with the emergence of that in it which writes itself otherwise in the very lapses of authorial control. The chapter examines how "writing otherwise" in Wolf involves the negotiation of a certain passage at the very "limits of the expressible," a passage which silently connects the "sentences that stick in our throats" above to a more fragmentary, stammering mode of articulation associated with the stirring of a certain *infans* below.<sup>31</sup>

In Cynthia Ozick's two-part narrative *The Shawl*, discussed in Chapter 5, the struggle to bear witness to a traumatic past is once again associated with an act of procreation. Here the intertwining of birth and death trauma is particularly complex, in part because the small child the protagonist, Rosa Lublin, loses in an unnamed camp is herself apparently conceived as the result of a rape. Not only does Rosa's strangely silent child first belatedly come to life, "spilling a long viscous rope of clamour," obviously evocative of an umbilical cord, at the very moment of her impending death, but this birth-as-death itself repeats the mother's own sense of having died at the moment of her daughter's violent conception. Traces of these intimately related traumas wash up in bits and pieces at various points in the second part of *The Shawl*, set in Miami Beach. It is here, moreover, that the inverted doubling of birth and death and the temporal structure of belatedness associated with it in the first part return as a movement of deferred parturition, as the very structure of the survivor's struggle to bear witness to—and from—her own indefinite suspension at the limit of life/death.

Whereas, in Ozick's fiction, the question of what it may mean to bear witness to and from this moment of suspension is explored through the figure of a belated birth which is itself already the repetition of a premature and unacknowledged death, in the poetry and life of Paul Celan these questions and figures assume a tragic literality. Chapter 6 discusses two poems written by Celan in fall 1953, both of which are contained in the 1955 volume *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* (From Threshold to Threshold). The first,

entitled “Die Winzer” (The Vintagers), was written at a time when the poet’s wife, Gisèle, was pregnant with their first child. The second, “Grab-schrift für François” (Epitaph for François), written approximately a month later, was composed in commemoration of the loss of this infant, who died shortly after birth. The chapter examines the structure of belatedness through which these poems are linked and the traumatic break inscribed in their uncannily intertextual relationship.

To begin to tease out the implications of this configuration of birth-as-death trauma for a theory of belated witnessing, we turn now to Spiegelman’s *MAUS: A Survivor’s Tale*.