

Editorial: Fires Burning, Draw Nearer

Like the girl on the cover, we look back in this issue on flames — flames that seem an appropriate metaphor for the fury that fed the Holocaust, that engulfed innocent people, that drove children into hiding and to their deaths. This girl seems one of the few children to escape the flames. An estimated one million children did not. “Fires burning, draw nearer,” writes Deborah Schnitzer in a hypnotic refrain to a stunning poem about horror and the struggle against despair. The imperative, “draw nearer,” reminds us of the oppressor’s demonic command at the same time as it sounds like the friendly voice of the storyteller: come sit by the fire, and listen to a tale.... The cruel irony of that refrain, as well as the terrible necessity to look back on the flames, is embraced by this issue of *CCL* in which we gather around a fire of sorts and listen to the tales of those who are, and have been, touched by it.

Holocaust actually refers to a sacrificial consumption by fire, as some of my surprised students discovered when, in an eighteenth-century literature class, they read a love poem wherein a woman promises her lover that she’ll “make a holocaust to thee.” What an insanely inappropriate term to use! they said. But how appropriate is the term “holocaust” to describe the persecution and murder of so many people? *Holokostos* for the Hebrew *olah*, in reference to a burnt offering, first appears in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. As a term to describe the tragedy of World War II, “holocaust” achieved currency in the 1950s and has remained the most common appellation in the English-speaking world, in spite of its troubling connotations. The term most commonly used in Israel is *Sho’ah* — the Hebrew term for “catastrophe.” We have used both terms — Holocaust and *Sho’ah* — to entitle this issue, feeling acutely, however, that no term will ever suffice to describe the tragedy of Jewish persecution in Nazi Europe.

With the girl on the cover, then, we look back on the devastation the Shoah brought and try to record her perspective on the flames: what was she feeling? How will she cope with her knowledge? What will she one day tell her own children? Our first section on family storytelling pursues these questions as it tries to tell the child’s story: what hidden children know; what children of survivors don’t know but find out; what children with survivor grandparents learn; and how all of these children grow up with their knowledge. Kertzer, Robertson, Naves, Solomon, and Stein all contribute a different sense of how one’s family tale can sometimes seem a toxic legacy: the site of childhood fear and shame, the source of adult rage.

Storytelling, as an issue in both history and pedagogy, is the subject of two subsequent papers: Deborah Britzman's on how we tell the story of Anne Frank to young people, and Zohar Shavit's on how German writers tell the story of the Holocaust to their young audiences. Both papers suggest that a culture's master narratives about the Holocaust often avoid the truth, avoid the trauma that would result from confronting the truth, and avoid seemingly obvious facts: Anne Frank and most of her family did die; ordinary German citizens did cooperate with the Nazis. Such investigations of narrative add political and pedagogical dimensions to the psychological and philosophical ones our family storytelling section develops so sharply.

Our section on Literature continues the investigation of narrative strategies used to represent psyche, political state, and spiritual condition, accenting the kinds of choices writers make to capture the world of children and young adults during the Holocaust. Rosner highlights Wiesel's use of the double to convey the kind of split consciousness a victim inhabits, while Zack concentrates on Rhoda Kaellis's *The Last Enemy* and its evocation of a hidden child's psyche .

This issue's treatment of narrative and the Shoah would be incomplete without the voice of the artist, and so I have sought to include more stories: those Deborah Schnitzer tells in her haunting poems, those Lillian Boraks-Nemetz relates in her moving reflections, those Miriam Bat-Ami tells about her startling research, and those that four painters — Rita Briansky (who gave us the girl on the cover), Amy Ainbinder, Frances Ferdinands, and Geoff Butler — tell us in both words and pictures.

This issue of *CCL* has had a long gestation from plan to print — four years, approximately — that resulted from a protracted, unprecedented scramble for funding. At times, it looked as though it would never gain the support it needed, but during those times my contributors' patience and support compelled us to look under one more rock. I am grateful for their encouragement. I am grateful, too, to Sam Aberman of Montreal and Beatrice Fisher of Toronto, who were generous in their financial support of this issue, and to SSHRC, without whose special grant this issue would have sunk. To my overtaxed referees, my overworked and underpaid administrator, my determined co-editors: thank you.

Our next issue on Children and the Shoah will focus on autobiography, museums and pedagogy.

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