Nowhere does the Holocaust inspire more sympathetic interest and remembrance and also more shame and revulsion than in Israel. The majority of the survivors live in Israel; the major centers of Holocaust research are in Israel; most of the world’s museums devoted to remembering the victims and their destroyed cultures are in Israel. Israel is surely the only country in the world in which a national television audience will have its attention riveted to a “This Is Your Life” program that re-creates the life of a survivor of Auschwitz and introduces, among the hero’s old friends, a woman who recounts the slow killing of her child in one of Dr. Mengele’s experiments. It is the only country in the world that annually honors, in formal ceremonies throughout the country, the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis with siren blasts, flags lowered to half-staff, and the prime minister delivering a formal address on the historical and moral relation between the Holocaust and the people and State of Israel.

Yet there is another side to the picture. The Day of Remembrance is called not only Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Day) but also Yom Hagevurah (Heroism Day), as if the action of a small handful of ghetto fighters were needed to counterbalance the passivity with which the vast majority of the victims went to their deaths. According to the Israeli writer Matti Megged, most sabras have thought of the European Jews contemptuously, as having gone like “sheep to the slaughter.” The formal title of the ceremony that takes place at Yad Vashem, as if aware of the omnipresence of this slur in Israel, is “Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day,” implying that the millions who were not heroes can be made acceptable only if they are thought of as martyrs. Yet martyrdom traditionally implies a choice of death
rather than abasement of oneself or desecration of God, whereas the victims of Hitler had no choice at all; conversion to Christianity or even, if that were possible, to Nazism would not have saved them. The speech of the prime minister on this day generally insists that the State of Israel has changed both the Jewish character and the external conditions that made the Holocaust possible, so that today Jews have both the internal fortitude and the external means with which to defend themselves against danger from the outside.  

This mixture of contradictory Israeli attitudes toward the Holocaust is an extreme version of the general Israeli ambivalence about the relation between Israel’s present and the Jewish past in the Diaspora, in Exile. Nowhere are these contradictory attitudes and the emotions that underlie them more brilliantly illuminated than in Haim Hazaz’s short story “The Sermon” (1942), from which the epigraph to this chapter comes. The story does not touch explicitly on the Holocaust. Rather, it conveys, through a lengthy speech given by a man named Yudka to his fellow kibbutz members, the whole problematic relation of Israelis to Jewish history. But since the Holocaust represented the culmination and also the end of Jewish history in Europe, it is safe to assume that the mixed attitudes of revulsion and affection that pre-Holocaust Jewish history inspired in Israelis like Yudka would be drawn out into their most extreme form by the Holocaust itself.

Although cast in the form of a dramatic monologue in the style of a Browning in prose, the story directs attention not to the presentation of character but to the exploration of “issues.” On the surface, Yudka appears to have nothing positive to say, nothing to praise either in the Jewish past in Diaspora or the present in Israel. Much of his speech is an embittered complaint about the past, and yet when, in the final pages, he comes to speak of the Zionist present, he is resentful at the way in which it has cut itself off from the (deplorable) Jewish past.

In the first part of his speech, this generally silent man pours out a long-pent-up revulsion from Jewish history, to
which he declares his "opposition." Strictly speaking, he maintains, Jews have no history at all because they have always been mere instruments of the Gentiles, who were the great movers and shakers of the world. Jewish history, so-called, is an unending tale of misery and woe, of passive suffering; it has no heroes, and endlessly chronicles the consequences of powerlessness. It then has the gall to take pride in just how much suffering the Jews have undergone and perversely to make a kind of ersatz heroism out of despair, as if it were somehow a virtue to have suffered. "'See what great torments I withstand! See what untold shame and humiliation I suffer! Who can compare with me?"' Some Jews, he says, even have come to the conclusion that persecution itself keeps the Jewish people alive, and that without it they could not exist.\(^4\) Such Jews, Jews with the Diaspora mentality, believe that "a Jew without suffering is an abnormal creature, hardly a Jew at all, half a goy. . . ." For Yudka the Jewish attachment to suffering is a badge of final degradation, self-degradation, because in truth "everything is rotten around suffering. . . . History, life itself, all actions, customs, the group, the individual, literature, culture, folk songs . . . everything!"

The Jewish attachment to suffering, the Jews' belief that there is even a kind of greatness and heroism in their suffering that raises them in stature above those who act within history, is, according to Yudka, the foundation stone of the Exile. So debased are the generality of Jews that they have inverted their own theology and fallen in love with Exile, which is to them sacred, "more Jewish than Jerusalem." If martyrdom is the base of the pyramid of Exile, then the belief in the Messiah is its peak, the crowning, fantastic myth that for two thousand years has given the Jews their justification for doing nothing to forward their redemption. "If not for this myth it would all have been different. For then, they would finally have had to go right back to Palestine, or . . . pass on out of the world." As it was, the messianic myth convinced them that they were prohibited to "force the end" and must remain in Exile until Heaven chose to redeem them. If any further
proof than the myth itself were needed that the Jews do not really want to be saved and to return to the land of their fathers, it would be the folk tradition grafted onto the myth that says that a great catastrophe must immediately precede the redemption. What could better show forth the underlying fear of redemption, of returning to the land of Israel?

All of these tortured complaints against his people and their traditions would seem to make Yudka a spokesman for Zionist self-affirmation at the expense of Diaspora Jewry, self-fascinated by its very degradation. But here Yudka veers off in the opposite direction. Maybe Diaspora Jewry is right to be afraid. "What if it's true that Judaism can manage to survive somehow in Exile, but here, in the Land of Israel, it's doubtful? . . . What if this country is fated to take the place of religion, if it's a grave danger to the survival of the people, if it replaces an enduring center with a transient center . . . ?" If Judaism before survived for all the wrong reasons, perhaps now that all those external pressures and the suffering they brought and the kind of character they formed are removed, the Jewish people will cease to exist. Yudka now, to the considerable surprise of his fellow-kibbutzniks, launches into an attack on Zionism as the real uprooting of the Jewish people. If Zionism has at its base a revulsion from the experiences and values of the Diaspora, which has encompassed Jews for two thousand years, is not Zionism itself anti-Jewish? "To my mind, if I am right, Zionism and Judaism are not at all the same, but two things quite different from each other, and maybe even two things directly opposite to each other! At any rate, far from the same. When a man can no longer be a Jew, he becomes a Zionist."

Ironically, when Yudka charges that the land of Israel already is no longer Jewish, he is complaining precisely about the removal of all those aspects of Diaspora Judaism he had declared reprehensible during the first part of his speech. But the irony, we must remember, lies not only in Yudka or in the Palestinian Jews whom he represents but in the paradox that is Israel itself, all the more so in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Zionism had its roots deep in
Jewish tradition, yet predicated its success on a repudiation of the unworthy culture of the ghetto and shtetl that it held, in any case, to be doomed by the acrid dissolvents of Western culture. It sought to weaken the idea that the return to the land of Israel had to wait upon some great catastrophe that would bring the end of days, but it succeeded in establishing a state only after (though not because) the Jewish people suffered the greatest catastrophe it had ever known and not merely the culture but most of the inhabitants of the ghetto and shtetl were destroyed. Somewhere between Yudka's extreme revulsion from Diaspora culture and his extreme insistence that a Zionism which rejects this culture is no longer Jewish the whole range of attitudes we shall meet in Israeli Holocaust fiction is encompassed.

Yehuda Amichai's novel of 1963, *Not of This Time, Not of This Place*, is not only the first major example of Israeli Holocaust fiction but, to judge by what has followed it, seems to contain within itself almost the whole potentiality of the genre. There are few important themes of Israeli Holocaust novels subsequent to Amichai's that are not adumbrated in this book: the desire of the German-born but Israeli-bred hero to recover his past and to avenge the murder of his family and friends; the frustration of revenge due to the Jewish incapacity for normal hatred; sabra (native-born Israeli) shame for, and disgust with, Jewish survivors of the Nazis; the distraction from historical mission into personal relations, especially sexual ones; the conflict between the longing to forget, and the compulsion to remember, the past; the paradoxical relation between the German death-factories producing Jewish corpses and the peacetime factories producing the German "economic miracle"; the nature and extent of German guilt. Amichai made available all these themes for those who have followed him: Bartov, Gouri, Ben-Amotz, Kaniuk. Most important of all perhaps, Amichai initiated the practice of concentrating attention on the moral questions that arise in the aftermath of the Holocaust while tacitly assuming that imaginative re-creation or simulation of the victims' unique
experience is beyond the reach of art. “Ruth had seen many horrors before she died. Those who died like her removed many of the horrors from the world; they had seen these horrors and taken them along into their great oblivion, the scenes of carnage and the images of their murderers.”

*Not of This Time, Not of This Place* tells the story of Joel, an Israeli archeologist of German birth, who, as the novel opens, finds himself in a state of spiritual dryness and vacillation. He is faced with the necessity to decide whether to spend his vacation at home in Jerusalem pursuing love (and forgetfulness), or in Germany seeking to recover his buried life and to take revenge against those who buried it. This seemingly trivial decision is in fact symbolic of the two paths open to the Israeli who would know the truth about his moral and spiritual relation to the Holocaust. Amichai approaches the question through a technical device that symbolizes and tries to represent the two choices available. He splits his hero into a narrator, who returns to Germany in search of his childhood and of revenge against those who mutilated it, and a third-person incarnation, also Joel, who stays behind in Jerusalem and falls in love with an American doctor, a Christian. This technical device is clever and enables Amichai to render more successfully than most of the Israelis who have followed him the Israeli reality, which in Bartov and Ben-Amotz, for example, comes, and very feebly, through flashbacks coursing through the minds of characters who are in Italy and Germany.

But the device has its drawbacks as well as its advantages. Having multiplied his hero, Amichai cannot resist the temptation to multiply other things as well, and to imply symbolic parallels at every turn. Joel’s wife is named Ruth, and so was the childhood sweetheart whose story he seeks in Germany; he himself insists on renaming yet a third character Ruth. In Jerusalem, we meet an Israeli concentration camp survivor who partially conceals his blue numbers with a mermaid tattoo, the concealment expressing his wish “to forget the past,” its partiality expressing his wish “to remember the past.” In his home
town of Weinburg, Germany, Joel assaults a supposed Nazi whose tattoo turns out to be this very same mermaid. Melvin, the husband of the Jerusalem Joel’s American mistress Patricia, was the commander of the American unit that destroyed Weinburg during the war. The Joel who goes back to Weinburg now meets Melvin in his new role as director of a film about the Holocaust. To the Weinburg Joel, Melvin seems the potent man of destruction, he himself the impotent, vacillating Hamlet-figure; to the Jerusalem Joel, seducer of Melvin’s wife, Melvin appears in quite another guise. This merciless proliferation of symbolic linkages, intended to demonstrate what George Eliot once called the interconnectedness of all human fates, sometimes comes close to obliterating the main lines of the novel (which are complicated enough). One reason why this novel can stand as a kind of paradigm for all Israeli Holocaust novels is that it is overly busy.

There is a wry humor as well as significance in the fact that Amichai’s protagonist is an archaeologist by profession. It is a well-known fact that archaeology is virtually the national pastime of Israel. This would seem to imply a national recognition that the fullness of present life is a function of its continuity with the past. But the past that Israeli archaeologists dig up is the past of ancient Israel, a civilization buried for thousands of years, rather than the past of their own parents and grandparents, whose dust lies in quite a different place. The deep-seated resistance to knowing this immediate past is epitomized early in the novel by a girl named Einat. She does not recognize the numbers half-concealed on Yosel’s arm by the mermaid tattoo. “Born among the orange groves of Sharon,” she is contemptuous of girls with “Jewish” names like Leah or Rachel or Ruth: “‘They remained in the Diaspora.’” Einat is proud of herself and much beloved of tourists because “‘she doesn’t look Jewish at all.’” Einat represents Israeli rejection of the yoke of Jewish identity, the burden of the Jewish past that is not to be found through Palestinian archaeology or the Negev excavations she wants Joel to show her. “She was fed up with the talk about the Jews of
Europe—all this literature about the heder and synagogue and Feierberg and Mendele that she had been made to study as a child. She was almost an antisemite, she said, and had her reasons, for she was employed afternoons in an office of former concentration-camp inmates.” She too will reappear, with another name, in Germany.

The Joel who returns to Germany, like the Israeli archaeologist he is, searches for his roots, but in a different time and a different place from ancient Israel. His return to Germany is a return to his childhood. He wants to find out in all its terrible particularity how his childhood love Ruth, an amputee, was arrested, deported, and burned. He also learns, through investigation, how many of his other classmates, now “attached to my heart with terrible hooks,” had been killed. But soon he feels that it would be a sacrilege to turn this trip into just one more archaeological expedition. “Archaeology consists only of digging and restoring. A destroyed city is uncovered and soot is found on the bricks and stones, and one says that this city has been conquered; this city has been burned; slaughter was done in this city. But there is neither compassion nor desire to avenge. I, too, had reached this point, as if the purpose of my coming here was merely to reconstruct Ruth’s last years.” Catharsis cannot come through knowledge but requires action as well, for memories, unless they issue in action, become an acid that consumes the rememberer.

Joel’s inability to carry out vengeance arises not, as in other novels dealing with this subject, from the alleged difficulty of distinguishing guilty from innocent Germans. On the contrary, he assumes that everybody in Weinburg except the American tourists could have been involved in burning Jews. The much-praised politeness of the Germans does nothing to blur the recognition that “if my father hadn’t taken us out of the city in the early thirties, these courteous people would have sent us to the crematoria.” When Joel questions a railroad official about his role in the transports of Jews, the official cracks under the questioning, “like the evil king in Hamlet.” Both literally and figuratively, the German economic “miracle” is built on the
ruins of the Jewish world. A supermarket is being built on the site of the Weinburg Jewish school and synagogue, in whose ruins this vacationing archaeologist finds the sermons of Ruth's rabbi father. A film of the Holocaust, complete with deportation scenes and mass shootings staged at gravesides, provides the ultimate example of industry and art living off the dead, and thriving in the process.

What paralyzes Joel and causes procrastination and inaction is not uncertainty but incapacity, the incapacity to hate. A sympathetic nun who says of the Germans, "'All are guilty,'" asks him, "'Have you learned to hate?'" "'Not yet,'" he replies. Does he too, despite his Israeli experience of combat, suffer from the inherited Jewish disability? He goes into a hotel and notices people eating from big platters of venison, rabbit, and other hunters' delicacies. "'Me, I eat only sheep led to slaughter, submissive cattle bellowing, stupid chickens. . . . '" This has been his nourishment; he cannot be other than he is. He cannot exact the vengeance that he had hoped would enable him "to return to Jerusalem strengthened and unraveled like a complex riddle that had been solved."

The ultimate meaning of Joel's experience in Weinburg may rest in his encounters with another German-born Israeli (or ex-Israeli) named Leonora. She is the Weinburg version of Einat, the antisemitic sabra. She too is the beloved of tourists, and in fact models for posters that urge people to "Visit Romantic Germany." Also like Einat, she does not "look Jewish," and in fact was saved, at age six, by a German officer because of her "Nordic" features. She competes in the Weinburg skating tournament in the category of "stateless participants" who come in the wake of the standard-bearers of the different countries. She will not return to Israel: "'I have nothing there. I like it here.'" For her devotion, she is rewarded with a role in the aforementioned movie: she makes love to a Gestapo commander while beyond the wall a Jew is shown being tortured. This is the fate of the spiritual counterpart of Einat, the "non-Jewish" Israeli who believes herself to have
been born not from the Jewish people but from the sand of the desert. The Israeli who cuts herself off from the European Jewish past does not thereby join the past of ancient Israel, but the world of the Gentiles, which in a very imperfect universe may well mean the world of the Nazis.

The Joel who stays in Jerusalem immerses himself in his love affair with Patricia. He seeks to escape the burden of the Holocaust past, and even the burdens of consciousness itself, through sexual passion. The love affair, as Robert Alter has pointed out, is intended to cover over ugly reality in the same way that the tattooed mermaid covers the blue numbers on the arm of the concentration camp survivor. Yet the detail with which Amichai traces the development of this romance seems excessive, and in a curious way analogous to the insufficiently intense concentration of the hero himself on the task of revenge, which does often get in the way of personal relations.

But the Joel who stays in Jerusalem, pursuing pleasure and averting his gaze from his own past and that of his people, is destroyed. Within a few hours of that moment in his affair with Patricia where “they attained perfection in their love,” this Joel goes off to do some work in the Archaeology Building of the now largely abandoned campus of the Hebrew University on Mt. Scopus, which between 1948, when Jordanian forces overran East Jerusalem, and 1967 was in occupied territory and was accessible only to a few Israelis with permission from the UN. As he is wandering through the overgrown botanical garden, he looks out at the Dead Sea and feels at peace with himself and with the world. “Just then a mighty explosion rocked the mountain and a cloud of dust and smoke rose. . . . When they reached Joel, he was already dead.” For the Joel who takes refuge from the specters of Hitler’s war against the Jews, for any Israeli who does so, there is also no peace and no immersion in sheer presentness. Joel has been killed by stumbling over “‘an old mine . . . from another war apparently . . . not of this time. . . .’”

The Joel who goes back to Jewry’s European experience to reconstruct the last years of his childhood sweetheart’s
life discovers that digging up the past can be enlightening but also dangerous. Nevertheless, it is the Joel who stays in Jerusalem rather than confronting his and his people's past who is destroyed. Jerusalem, itself, moreover, is inherited by the Joel who has left it, who has delved into the past because that is the only way of living fully and honestly in the present. He has left, but left only in order to return, for "he who does not go forth cannot return."

But if the Jerusalem Joel's death by a mine left from Israel's War of Independence is a symbol of separation between himself and his alter ego, it may also be viewed as a symbol of the paradoxical union between the age-old Jewish experience in Diaspora and the Israeli experience in the homeland. Amichai's own sense of the relation between the Jews of Israel and their European past is expressed in his poem entitled "Jews in the Land of Israel," which begins with a reflection, of a sort very common in modern Israeli literature, on the signification of the names of Israeli citizens:

We forget where we came from. Our Jewish
Names from the exile reveal us,
Bring up the memory of flower and fruit, medieval cities,
Metals, knights that became stone, roses mostly,
Spices whose smells dispersed, precious stones, much red,
Trades gone from the world.
(The hands, gone too).

The poet then stumbles over, and is momentarily halted by, a recognition that in some sense the Jews are strangers in their homeland, to which they have brought as baggage mainly their suffering:

What are we doing here on our return with this pain.
The Longings dried up with the swampland,
The desert flowers for us and our children are lovely.

But here too, as Israelis have long since discovered, Jews live, just as they did in Europe, in the most precarious state, without ease, without happiness, without peace. The poet therefore comes to rest in the conviction that Jews have taken root in their homeland precisely because their centuries-long experience of suffering in the Diaspora is
being continued in the land of Israel, and is an unsettling confirmation of the Covenant itself, whose original marks were the blood and pain of circumcision:

Spilt blood isn’t roots of trees,
But it’s the closest to them
That man has.

*The Brigade*, by Hanoch Bartov (1965), is a novel that tries, albeit without sufficient concentration and single-mindedness, to penetrate to the heart of Israel’s continuing crisis of national identity by studying the response of Palestinian Jews to the just-completed slaughter of their Diaspora brethren when they enter Europe as part of the army of occupation upon the victory of the Allies in June 1945. Here, as in Amichai’s novel, we are concerned with the moral and metaphysical relations between the Israeli (strictly speaking, the Palestinian) Jew and the Jewish victims and German perpetrators of the Holocaust. But here the Israeli is epitomized not by the archaeologist but by the soldier, who has been defending his homeland by force of arms while his fellow Jews in Europe have been (or so it seems) the passive victims of genocide.

The spiritual background of this novel may be provided by two stories emanating from the Warsaw Ghetto, one little known, the other virtually an Israeli sacred memory. The first, recorded in Emmanuel Ringelblum’s *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* and also in Chaim Kaplan’s *Warsaw Diary*, is an account of an eight-year-old Jewish girl in a refugee center who screamed with a mad frenzy: “‘I want to steal, I want to rob, I want to eat, I want to be a German.’” In extremity, the anecdote implies, the victim can survive only by emulating his torturer; the atmosphere of barbarism infects even the primary victims of the barbarians. The second story is the account of the uprising of the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, an uprising unprecedented in modern Jewish history; for after two millennia of submission to their fate, the Jews, on 19 April 1943, were using force against their enemies.

The Warsaw uprising was, to be sure, very belated. In
September 1942, shortly after the children of Janusz Korczak's orphanage were taken away, 310,000 Jews were deported from the ghetto to the death camps. In mid-October, Ringelblum asked himself in bitter reproach: "Why didn't we resist when they began to resettle 300,000 Jews from Warsaw? Why did we allow ourselves to be led like sheep to the slaughter? Why did everything come so easy to the enemy? Why didn't the hangmen suffer a single casualty? Why could 50 S.S. men (some people say even fewer), with the help of a division of some 200 Ukrainian guards and an equal number of Letts, carry the operation out so smoothly?" In November, he wrote in a similar vein: "The Jews . . . calculate now that going to the slaughter peaceably has not diminished the misfortune, but increased it. Whomever you talk to, you hear the same cry: The resettlement should never have been permitted. We should have run out into the street, have set fire to everything in sight, have torn down the walls, and escaped to the Other Side. The Germans would have taken their revenge. It would have cost tens of thousands of lives, but not 300,000. Now we are ashamed of ourselves, disgraced in our own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, where our docility earned us nothing." 

Yet even after the recognition became widespread that Jewish powerlessness, rather than mollifying the enemy, encouraged him, many opposed physical resistance as antithetical to the Jewish character, a desecration. We recall Alexander Donat's friend in the ghetto who argued: "For two thousand years we have served mankind with the word, with the Book. Are we now to try to convince mankind that we are warriors?" By the time people chose to resist, eighty-five percent of the ghetto Jews were already dead. What made the uprising unique, according to Donat, was that it was undertaken without any hope of victory whatever. Its purpose was not so much to save lives as to return the Jews to history, to make of them something other than victims. "Although we were all doomed to a terrible death, we were gripped by a strange ecstasy. . . . I felt we were going to die but I felt a part of the stream of Jewish
That the Warsaw resistance was an epoch-making event for Jewish history became clear not at that time nor at that place, but five years later in Palestine. In 1948, the kibbutz named after the leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Mordecai Anielewicz, held out—against all expectation and probability—for five days against an invading Egyptian army, and as a result the recently born state was saved. As Emil Fackenheim has pointed out, “The battle for Yad Mordecai had begun in the streets of Warsaw.”

The Warsaw Ghetto uprising, teaching the lesson that in the long run nothing undertaken from a sense of justice is practically useless, became to the Jews of Palestine the crucial event of the Holocaust years, outweighing the horror and “shame” of the fate of the great majority of the victims, who did not resist.

The Palestinian Jews who form the brigade of Bartov’s novel have been sent to Europe officially for the purpose of rescuing the survivors and expediting their movement from the displaced persons camps to Palestine. But many of them in fact give priority to revenge over rescue. One character says that from the time his family fled Europe hedreamt only of returning through the battle lines and turning the tables on the Germans. Another, named Giladi, says that the Jewish Brigade has come “‘not for Roosevelt’s freedoms or the British Empire or Stalin. We’re here to take revenge. One wild Jewish vengeance. Just once to be like the Tartars. Like the Ukranians. Like the Germans.’” Even the chaplain of the brigade insists that the dead cannot be remembered nor their honor redeemed except through vengeance, “‘for he that avengeth blood hath remembered them; he hath not forgotten the cry of the humble.’”

But the brigade’s leader, Tamari, keeps insisting that revenge distracts the brigade from its true mission, which is rescue. The ten commandments for a Hebrew soldier on German soil piously proclaim that the very act of coming into Germany as part of an army of occupation, with the Jewish flag and emblem as military insignia, constitutes vengeance; and the ninth commandment particularly enjoins the soldiers to “‘remember your mission: The rescue of Jews, immigration to a free homeland.’” Every act of revenge, Tamari warns, will interfere with their central
purpose of bringing the survivors to Palestine, where they can become a part of the only future left to Jews as Jews.

The idea of a collective act of revenge against the German people is not merely the fantasy of the novelist, nor was it in actuality the impulse of a mad sadist or two. Yehuda Bauer, in his study of the Brichah movement, the underground organization that worked to bring 300,000 Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, through illegal immigration, from Europe to Palestine, has described in detail the conflict between those whose sole commitment was to flight and those committed both to flight and revenge. The faction led by Abba Kovner was revolted by the way in which the remnants, the inheritors, of the destroyed Jewish community were now investing all their energies in the establishment of committees, the shuffling of papers, the tedious paraphernalia of organized community life. Kovner and his group of partisans had for some time considered suicide, believing that once the war was over they could best show their solidarity with the victims, their respect for those tragic experiences, by joining the dead. Only the prospects of revenge and flight—in that order—could validate existence after the destruction:

Life seemed justified only if some attempt was made to take revenge on the German people in such a way as to leave a lasting impression on its history and show that Jewish blood would not be spilled in vain. There was no point in simply killing a few, or even a few hundred, known Nazis. In the darkness of the despair of men and women who had seen their people—practically all their people—brutally massacred, the only meaning of revenge, and therefore of life, could be the mass destruction of Germans in the same way that the Germans had murdered Jews. The Germans had given rise to Nazism. Millions of Germans must have known, millions therefore should suffer. This could only be done by using poison.¹²

This poet's vision of death and revenge (not unlike the catastrophic fire dreamed into being by the poet Mordi in Haim Gouri's *The Chocolate Deal*) had considerable support within the Brichah movement (although it could not be spoken of openly) but it failed to win the majority, who moved away from Kovner and his followers toward more "practical" objects.
In *The Brigade*, the continuing debate between rescue and revenge hinges less on the desire of the would-be avengers to find a *raison d'être* than on their need to separate themselves from the Jews who have been victims. Their hatred for the Germans is real, and they have a strong and immediate sense, again rather like Mordi’s in *The Chocolate Deal*, of Germany as Sodom and Gomorrah, a country of “‘butchers and their henchmen, . . . the people who applauded them, . . . who welcomed the slaughter and grew fat on the spoil. . . .’” But it is the Germans’ victims by whom they feel themselves to have been tainted, the centuries-long Jewish “‘nightmare of helplessness’” from which they desire to awake. These would-be avengers have come back to Europe to destroy Germans, but before they can reach the battle lines, the Germans have surrendered. Yet what they fear is that it is less this accident of timing than their own Jewish character that frustrates the desire for revenge. They measure their success in separating themselves from the pacific and passive ethos of European Jewry by their ability to retaliate the injuries inflicted upon the very people from whom they wish to distinguish themselves.

By a strange paradox, the Jews of Palestine, who did far more than any other segment of world Jewry to save the remnants of European Jewry, are the most eager to separate themselves from European Jewry’s life-principle. Elisha Kruk, the novel’s narrator-hero, meets one of his relatives among the survivors and is astonished to find that this man managed to survive by working in the crematorium of a death-camp. “I was filled with revulsion at the thought of being connected with him.” Covered with shame at the thought that he is related to such a creature, Elisha flees him as quickly as possible. Later, he confesses, of his relation to the survivors in general, that “‘I want to love their burnt faces, but I can’t. I walk among them and I don’t recognize a one. They’re all strangers to me.’” If these people are Jews, can he be one? If these people are Jews, does he want to be one?

To Jews who believe they have reentered history because they belong to the first Jewish community in two thousand
years to control its own fate, the shattered Jews of the European Diaspora must seem strangers. The Jews of Europe, especially of Eastern Europe, which contained the great reservoir of Jewish population before the Holocaust, had indeed been, as the speaker in Hazaz’s story says, a collection of wounded, hunted, groaning wretches. But according to their ideal conception of themselves, they had managed to thrive, not merely in spite, but in a way because, of their difficulties, suffering, dependence. This ideal conception expressed itself, according to Irving Howe, in the great themes of Yiddish literature: “the virtue of powerlessness, the power of helplessness, the company of the dispossessed, the sanctity of the insulted and the injured. . . .”¹³ “Normality” and self-sufficiency were for the majority of these Jews fantastical notions, notions suitable to, for example, Zionists, who could contemptuously be dismissed (in happier days than ours) as “those people [who] wish to be happy.”¹⁴

Growing up in the beleaguered yishuv, Elisha had sought to leap backward over Diaspora Jewry to his biblical ancestors, and had on one occasion voiced his disgust with the Jewish tradition and literature of martyrdom, entreating: “‘Let’s be just a little like we are in the Old Testament for once. . . . A little “eye for an eye,” amen. A little of “the sins of the fathers on the children,” amen. A little innocent blood under our fingernails so that for once we can have something to be sorry for, to really be ashamed of.’” Nevertheless, Elisha declines every opportunity that presents itself for revenge against the Germans. He and his friend Brodsky take a room in the elegant home of the family of an S.S. man but are unable to wreak vengeance on the defenseless women. When some of the brigade do attempt a rape, Elisha actually saves the women from his comrades by gunpoint. “I couldn’t do it, couldn’t stand to see a girl raped. Couldn’t take it—my delicate Jewish soul.” Elisha finds that he is saddled with the traditional Jewish disabilities, tied more closely to his immediate ancestors in Europe than to the heroes of the Bible: “We were soft weaklings, warped Diaspora Jews.”

Elisha’s reaction, and presumably Bartov’s, to this
discovery of the continuity between Israeli and Jewish identity is a complicated one. There is no attempt to hide the sense of frustration at being unable to take revenge, or to soften the awareness that this failure to take vengeance will plague him like an incubus for the rest of his days. Neither does Elisha follow his Eastern European ancestors in interpreting impotence wholly as a virtue and an occasion for self-congratulation; it is even called a sickness at one point. But Elisha recognizes that chosenness involves distinction, and that no distinction can be more important than that between Jew and German. Jewish identity offers no way out, but only a choice between two curses, the curse of history and that of God. If the Jews can take revenge only by thinking and acting like the Nazis, "'that would be more than ironic,'" says one character, "'it would be history's curse.'" Instead, the Israeli must live with the paradox of chosenness: "'Now I knew: such were we, condemned to walk the earth with the image of God stamped on our foreheads like the mark of Cain... Like a camel’s hump, beneath which I and all of us would have to walk forever as beneath the coat of arms of a knight: 'How can we beat them if we become like them?'" The Israeli is still a Jew, and the Jew is forbidden to become a German. The voyage of the Jewish Brigade to Europe was after all a test not of the ability to take revenge but to resist temptation: "'Thank God I did not destroy myself in Germany, thank God that was beyond me. I am what I am.'"

The main problem with this formulation is that the Israeli’s recognition of his indelible Jewish character grows less out of his experience of actual European Jewish survivors of the Holocaust than out of a revulsion from the act of vengeance against helpless Germans. The survivors have already departed from the novel when the hero comes to recognition of his ultimate identity with them. Nevertheless, Gouri has succeeded in making this encounter with the Holocaust an instrument for understanding the difficulties inherent in the Israeli’s self-definition as a Jew. For it is not just the members of the Jewish brigade but all the Jews of the State of Israel who
can find no resting place between the two extremes: the Diaspora worship of the purity of powerlessness and the prophet's injunction to uproot Amalek "utterly."

Compared with the other examples of Israeli Holocaust fiction, Haim Gouri's *The Chocolate Deal* (1965) is a novel of almost ascetic severity. Gouri does not indulge in explanations, or atmospheres, or descriptions, or even coherence. The world of circumstantial reality has only the barest existence in this book, which is so bleak and abstract as to make it nearly unrecognizable as a novel. It is the one Israeli work of Holocaust fiction that carries to its logical and perhaps absurd extreme the view that a literary work that seeks to embody a world from which coherence, order, and logic have fled should itself be incoherent, disordered, and illogical. If one's subject is supreme disorder, Gouri assumes, that subject should not be contained within an orderly framework. The frustration experienced by the writer who seeks to encompass the Holocaust within an imaginative mould should be felt by his readers as well—and there can be few readers of *The Chocolate Deal* who have not felt frustrated by the elusiveness of the story, dialogue, and ultimate meaning of this remarkable book. The tentativeness with which the setting, characters, and story are set forth is such that any description of the novel must be hedged about with "apparently," for there is here little that is certain, tangible, definite. The temptation is strong to dismiss Gouri's book with Matthew Arnold's sensible dictum: "One gains nothing on the darkness by being... as incoherent as the darkness itself." Nevertheless, the temptation should be resisted.

The story is set in the ruins—"the motionless remains"—of a city that we are invited (though not required) to call Germany after the war. We begin with a reunion between two Jewish survivors, Rubi Krauss and Mordi Neuberg. According to one of the several disembodied voices of the narrative (none of which may be safely identified as the novelist's), Mordi has been hopelessly defeated and diminished by his suffering and the loss of his family and
his people. For him the decision to survive is itself problematic. The process of recovery, he thinks, involves reaching the “level of the pampered who allow themselves refusal or preference.” Out of pity for himself, he has momentarily pushed aside the terrible questions pressing on him and made the existential decision: “‘I choose, therefore I am Mordi.’” His friend Rubi is eager to look for relatives, especially a lawyer named Salomon. But Mordi, knowing that everyone (and, he assumes, everything) is dead, tries to discourage him from the attempt. Meanwhile, they take shelter in an abandoned warehouse in the courtyard of the Convent of the Merciful Sisters. Shelter is necessary because events of biblical enormity are taking place: “Outside the flood begins.”

“Before the flood,” we learn, Mordi had gone “west,” that is, had left the Jewish world to pursue Western European culture, and had written a doctoral thesis on troubadour poetry. His professor had helped him to find refuge in a monastery, and left him with the prophetic warning, which also justifies the temporal scheme of the novel, that “‘just as there are earthquakes, so there are, among men, timequakes.’” This time is out of joint, and nothing can ever set it right, least of all the efforts of poets and artists. “Who,” asks a voice, “can talk about paintings now? Who has a head for paintings?” The book’s official representative of time and memory, of the lingering possibility of coherently linking the present with the pre-Holocaust past, is one Schechter, “the uncrowned King,” a watchmaker who owns no watch. But it is Mordi, the representative of art, who speaks against meaning and against hope. This former poet even warns Rubi against saddling himself with so negative a spirit, one who might turn him into “a total wanderer in a world of chaos, a world where even the song of a bird will seem sin’s accomplice to you. . . .”

Yet at the outset of the book Mordi himself is willing to consider the possibility of a new beginning. Thus, in the one passage in the novel in which Gouri allows himself to participate in so plebeian an impulse of Israeli Holocaust
writing as the desire to redeem disaster in Europe through rebirth in Palestine, Mordi asks:

What's certain? Maybe we'll go from here to another land, we'll go and try it out. Meanwhile we can look for an address. It's not easy, I know. Many houses are shut and covered with soot, and others are too blown open. But in the meantime we have to move and think and change. We'll go and adjust ourselves accordingly. Perhaps we'll succeed, and then we'll be so different and far away we can make a new start in a new place. We'll get other clothes. Get other names.

This is the first and the last time in the novel that Mordi expresses anything that resembles a desire to join again the world that had so recently spat him out.

The crucial piece of action in the novel occurs near the beginning of the book, even though its pivotal character is revealed only much later. A horrific fire breaks out in an apartment house "of many stories, magnificent, crowded." The catastrophic magnitude and fury of the blaze make us aware that this is a story not merely of the geographical entity called Germany but of a Germany that had become, what the narrator here calls it, "Sodom and Gomorrah." By those two words, Gouri wishes to bring before our mind's eye, with literal accuracy, the two neighboring cities of the Bible, which were destroyed by fire from Heaven because all the people in them had become equally guilty. Contemplating this scene of "Primordial Chaos," Rubi suddenly grabs a wet blanket and a ladder and, risking his life, saves a "blond-haired little girl" from the top floor of the burning building. Rubi's motives for the heroic act are not clear. He had wanted to do something so that he could get out of the position where people were always taking care of him. He wanted to assert that he was alive, and intended to go on living.

Yet his heroic action causes his friend Mordi deep pain. This apparently beautiful and generous act, according to Mordi, "'finally leaves behind a darkness sevenfold.' "The rescue is really a betrayal, in which you "'atone, in one moment, for the long crime against the many.' " Mordi saw
this seemingly heroic act as Rubi’s taking it upon himself to forgive criminals for crimes he had no right to forgive, since he was far from being the only, or the most, injured party. By rescuing the girl, Rubi had betrayed “‘all those in whose behalf nobody climbed up to the seventh floor.’ ” This is the case not only because the little girl turns out to be the daughter of Dr. Hoffman, “a successful skin doctor” (i.e., perpetrator of scientific mass murder) but because Germany is Sodom and Gomorrah, and its guilty population deserves punishment by fire from above. To save Hoffman’s daughter is to leave all the other little girls crying through eternity. For what sin had they committed that they did not merit to be rescued by a Rubi Krauss? The rescued girl’s father turns out to be a mass murderer, as well as the inheritor of Uncle Salomon’s apartment and belongings, because any traffic with this world, which has been created in their image by Germans, is traffic with murder.

Mordi’s vehement objection to Rubi’s heroic action is an aesthetic as well as a moral one, and is made partly in the language of a poet. He calls the rescue the climax of a “‘false play’,” the ruination of a true poem, albeit a poem conceived by a diseased imagination, warped by vengefulness: “Ah, who,” asks the narrator about the fire, “created, in his cockeyed dream, a vision so absurd, so gorgeous? For what purpose? What frenzied poet turned his sick imagination or blind desire for revenge into fact?” Since for Mordi the only satisfactory relation that can exist with the post-Holocaust world is one of vengeance, the ruination by Rubi of the vision of vengeance seems to deprive Mordi of all desire to live. “The claim that I have an obligation to fight in order not to become one of the defeated has only a weak hold on me. I’m too smart and too tired to marshal the energies needed for going on.” He can no longer think about “the wonderful countries of immigration” or about changing his name to suit a new life, for he would only be a burden to Rubi. He has no future.

Mordi wishes his death to be seen as a spiritually inconclusive exhaustion, rather than a passionate protest against an unjust, indifferent god. “Protests,” he says, “are
addressed to someone. Don’t imagine any bold movement against the powers above. . . . All that’s going on here is nothing more than a silent diminution.” We are, he says, living “in days when there is no King and every man does what is right in his own eyes. . . . ”

Rubi, for his part, must decide whether he wishes to tie his fate to Mordi and be loyal to the brotherhood of invalids that has for so long included him, or to break free of these impediments and rejoin the world. He goes to bed with a woman he meets in the streets. After the act, he learns that she is none other than Gerti, who had worked as the maid of Salomon, but is now the secretary to Dr. Hoffman. Every connection with the world leads back to the Gestapo. Gerti is the perfect representative of a society in which “scarcely any are troubled by the problem of crime and punishment, with mousy thoughts of regret, so as to permit their neighbors time to get used to the new situation, allowing that it’s hard to ask for more than that and what’s done is done.”

Between Gerti’s body and what it proffers—recovery through sexual immersion, which is tainted with Nazi criminality—Mordi stands as an obstacle. “Let’s go die together,” thinks Rubi about Gerti. “A shared sorrow is half a sorrow. . . . I’ll go to her. I’ll leap over his torso. . . . ” The self-forgetfulness that he seeks in Gerti’s body must contend with the spirit of Mordi, “the dead guardian of my life,” with the “cadaver stench exuding from his long thoughts.” When he leaves Gerti’s bed, Rubi discovers that Mordi has expressed his loyalty to the murdered in for him the only authentic way—by dying himself, apparently by suicide.

The remainder of the book traces Rubi’s attempts to escape from the fraternity of victims, and his eventual discovery that, as Mordi had insisted, there is no way of escape but by dealing with the criminals. Rubi believes that Mordi died because he “look[ed] too much into things. . . . ” Yet without him Rubi feels deprived of his ground of being, emptied, afflicted by “a weird lightness in myself.” He too looks into things, but is cautious about keeping his
glance an inch above morbidity. In one of the novel’s many passages that in its elliptical compression seems closer to poetry than to fiction, the mixture of hope and desolation in a Holocaust survivor is movingly expressed:

Many things vanished. The weak beatings of the heart remained. The sources. Luckily the sun kept its orbit, magnificently unconcerned. Therefore a few certainties endured, like the winds of heaven: East. West. North. South. Day and night. The seasons of the year. There was, in this, a sort of splendid abundance of mockery. What was left for him to do with the seasons of the year, or the winds of heaven? But the passing of time prompts the feeling of going from here to there.

The question of whether the time measures progress or the going has any meaning must not be asked.

Eventually Rubi is forced to admit that Mordi was right about the futility of seeking Uncle Salomon, who is but one of “many many disappearances.” But Rubi still takes refuge in supernatural explanations. “The number of those no longer heard from or seen became so large that he imagines they were summoned heavenward.” Unfortunately, the eyes offer no support to the imagination; and so he resorts to “the illogical explanation that some giant, merciful sorcerer turned all the missing ones into stone so they wouldn’t be marred by the fisticuffs of those unlike themselves.” Gouri’s toying with these metaphysical conceits is not, as it may seem, an indulgence in blasphemy but a suggestion that religious “explanations” of the Holocaust as a glorious resurrection are themselves blasphemous.

The ultimate confirmation of Mordi’s allegation that merely to remain alive is to betray the victims and embrace the murderers is the “chocolate deal” of the title. In order to ease the food shortage, the American occupation authorities have diverted to the market considerable amounts of surplus military chocolate. This is the opportunity for Rubi to satisfy his desire for riches, if only he can find someone who will help him first to lower the price of the chocolate so that he can buy it cheaply, then to raise the price so that he can sell it at a profit. From the ghost of a
murdered friend named Moshko he receives the advice to exploit the desire for peace and quiet of the innumerable people in this “bloody city” who are prepared to pay a good price for these elusive commodities. To do this, Moshko says, Rubi will need “the opinion of a doctor and the hired pen of a famous man.” Although the word is never used, Gouri here appears to offer, if not quite an allegory, at least a parabolic representation of the moral taint that must attach to those who accept reparations from the German government. Rubi confronts Dr. Hoffman with his crimes—“By the way, how many young girls never reached the canopy on account of you?”—and invites him to escape responsibility for them by issuing a false medical opinion to the effect that the chocolate has a pacifying, tranquilizing quality, presumably the last thing a German public wants. Dr. Hoffman complies and is rewarded amply with the chance to go far away, and take a new name, “southwestern, hot and gay.”

If the “chocolate deal” does indeed refer to German willingness to pay and Jewish readiness to accept “reparations,” then Rubi’s deal with Hoffman would be an extension of his earlier guilt in offering forgiveness on behalf of those who are no longer alive to express their opinion in the case. It is a commonplace that “reparations” did not cover all the surviving victims of German brutality; rather, as Raul Hilberg points out, it comprised “in the main only refugees from Germany and the nonrepatriable displaced persons who had passed through camps on German soil.” Jewish survivors from northern Europe, from the East, from the Balkans, even from Austria, were excluded. But the more serious omission, from a moral point of view, was the failure of the Jews who chose to deal with the Germans to step forward as the heirs in law of the destroyed European community. Instead they asked the perpetrators of the crime “to pay for the incompleteness of their job” by compensating the few who survived, thereby purchasing silence and safety. 

It is typical of the novel’s willed indefiniteness and tentativeness that the consummation of the chocolate deal
should be put off to the future and that the last brief chapter should be written wholly in the future tense. Apparently, just as Mordi had foretold, Rubi will be deeply tainted merely by staying alive, and how much more so by freeing Dr. Hoffman instead of killing him, and by repaying the treacherous Gerti for opening the door of the business world to him with minks and diamonds. But he will also try to reforge the link that his own actions have broken by returning to the old cemetery and setting up a tombstone on Mordi’s grave. In our final imagined glimpse of Rubi’s future, he is at Mordi’s graveside, still wearing the signs of mourning, and summoned by Mr. Shechter, the watchmaker, the uncrowned king, the man who represents the faint possibility of overcoming the disunity between past and present caused by the timequake that was the Holocaust.

Of the Israeli novels about the Holocaust treated in this chapter, none is less recognizable as the work of an Israeli than The Chocolate Deal. No one reading this book is likely to guess that its author is an Israeli, much less that he is an active nationalist and one of the original signatories (in August 1967) of the Manifesto of the Land of Israel Movement, which insists on the historic and religious right of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel. Rubi is said to have asked Mordi to “go far away” with him, and Mordi to have insisted on staying behind, in the vast European graveyard. But there is no indication that this faraway place is more likely to be Jerusalem than London or New York. The concern with the moral implications of reparations is indeed an Israeli preoccupation, but it is here presented so abstractly and also individually that it can hardly be labeled as Israel’s peculiar problem rather than that of German Jewish survivors. Finally, in its resistance to the possibility that there might be some middle course between killing the Dr. Hoffmans and making common cause with them, the novel—until its final conciliatory scene in the cemetery—comes close to saying that any form of life after the Holocaust (including, if only by implication, life in Israel) is a betrayal of the victims of the Holocaust.
Dahn Ben Amotz’s *To Remember, to Forget* (1968) is a first-person narrative of inordinate length told by a young Israeli architect named Uri Lam who was born in Germany and lost his parents and a brother and sister to the Nazis. In 1959, he returns to Germany, allegedly after much soul-searching, to claim reparations. His doubts about whether he has the moral right to accept reparations for the suffering of his parents and thus to give absolution on their behalf—doubts that will recur frequently throughout the period of his “adventures” in Frankfurt—have been temporarily squelched by his desire to buy an old Arab house on Jerusalem’s border and a new car. His underlying aim in returning to Germany and his past is to close the matter of the Holocaust once and for all, to forget all that had happened to his family, to forget the abstract question of retributive justice. Although it is not readily apparent in what way his rather feeble remembrance of the Holocaust interferes with either the activities of his life or his peace of mind, Ben Amotz asks us to believe that Uri suffers considerable distress when he is forced to remember what he would rather forget.

The sharp presentation of mutually exclusive moral alternatives—execute justice upon the criminal, or become his collaborator—that characterized Gouri’s novel appears in this book only as something to be frowned upon as the outlook of morally obtuse Israelis when they learn of Uri’s fate in Frankfurt: namely, that he has married Barbara Stahl, a German girl, daughter of a manufacturer of optical equipment, whose first orders, in 1942, were from the German War Department for binoculars, telescopes, and periscopes. In one of Uri’s endless “imaginings” of the immediate future, he hears his friends in Israel say: “Uri married a German girl and is living in Frankfurt. Impossible. It’s true. He lost his whole family in Germany, went there to collect reparations, and married a German girl. How’s that for an outrage! He marries the daughter of his family’s murderers, is awarded reparations, and uses this to raise a family.” The style in which the narrator imagines this reaction indicates his contempt for it. He is reenforced
in this view by Barbara, who is a paragon of all the modern virtues—sexually experienced, the thinking man’s liberal in her “opinions,” and a reader of Buber, who for Uri is a long face and a long beard he once saw in Israel. She assures him that he is justified in pursuing and accepting reparations because they are not meant as atonement for German crimes but only as a partial compensation to victims to help them survive.

The contrast between the severity of Gouri and the self-indulgence of Ben Amotz is well illustrated by an episode in which Uri (like Rubi in The Chocolate Deal) visits a house formerly belonging to Jews (Uri’s parents, in fact), but now occupied by Germans. Here too Ben Amotz tries to show his sophistication by blurring the sharpness of moral distinction between victim and criminal. Have not Arabs been displaced as well as Jews? Is not Uri himself planning to use his reparation money to buy a house formerly belonging to an Arab who fled during the War of Independence? Besides, the new German occupants of the house of Uri’s parents are themselves refugees who have had to scrimp and save to buy and rebuild this wreck. No Dr. Hoffmans, they.

This desire to blur the distinction between German and Jew, especially between German and Israeli, characterizes the book. It expresses itself through what might be called the rhetoric of “complexity” and the banality of sophomoric questions based on tenuous analogies. Is the anonymous German caller (who turns out to be an Israeli prankster) who objects to Barbara marrying a Jew any worse than the caller Uri imagines in Jerusalem who will object to his marrying a German when he and Barbara move there? At another point, Uri is asked by Martin Schiller, a German whose homosexuality is intended to conciliate our sympathy with him because it separates him from the “normal,” virile Germans, what he would have done in 1933 if he had been eighteen and German? Ben Amotz is as a rule content to rest in the heavy portentousness of these questions, as if it had never occurred to him that between the actuality of what the Germans did and the potentiality
of what other people might have done, there remains a yawning chasm.

In dealing with postwar Germany, the novelist shows a similar inclination to ask “big” questions for which he has not formulated, either imaginatively or morally, any clear answers. “Normal” Germany is castigated as the collective inheritor of the Nazi regime by Martin Schiller, the homosexual son of an army officer who arranged the transport of Jews to death camps. Martin flaunts his homosexuality in order to humiliate his father and outrage the whole society of normal, respectable Germans. “Millions of normal people. Talk to them and you won’t believe there’s another Germany. The merchants, officials, the lower middle class. Good citizens who did as they were told, who neither knew nor wanted to know what was happening behind the fences, right under their noses—they are the normal ones. The scar-faced students, the new rich gaping at Germany’s industrial wonders, the Nazis in government offices who speak of democracy as if they invented it, the aristocracy sated with culture, switching from the production of arms, soap, and poison gases to the production of washing machines, cosmetics, optical equipment, and insecticides.’ ” He argues that all those who were involved in the final solution—and by his calculation that would involve millions—should be castrated, “‘their memory and genes erased forever.’ ” Martin Schiller (whose very name seems to suggest that he, and not the mutant generation preceding him, represents the true Germany) is so oppressed by the sense of guilt that he does not allow himself to dislike particular Jews “‘even if they are uncongenial.’ ” Schiller is a constant irritant to Uri, because he insists relentlessly on justice and forces the hero to remember what he wants to forget, even as his own miserable life exemplifies the fate of those who demand remembrance and justice. The “other Germany,” the Germany willing to reject entirely the Nazi heritage, moral and material, is, according to Martin, the Germany of “‘the un-normal.’ ” These righteous characters are “‘beatniks, pot smokers, priests of opium and hashish, homosexuals,
deviates.' This group of Germans not only questions the need for a strong, united Germany, but the need for "any nation to exist—and not Germany alone, but any nation that toys with anthems, boundaries, and flags."

Although Ben Amotz does not intend us entirely to adopt Martin's views of the new Germany (which are contradicted by Uri's own experiences of Barbara and of her father, for example), it is remarkable that, writing in 1968, he does not see their implications for Uri's own nation—Israel—which does toy with anthems and flags, and has more than a passing interest in "boundaries." Whereas in 1959, the date of the novel's action, the view that Nazism, a distinctly internationalist movement, was only an extremely aggravated case of the disease of nationalism, might have been dismissed as a typical liberal cliche, by 1968 it had been made by young Germans of the "New Left" into the underpinning of "anti-Israelism." Barbara, as well as Martin, is a liberal universalist, and it is hard to escape the feeling that if she had not married Uri and moved to Jerusalem in 1959 she might have been arranging charity balls in Frankfurt for the PLO after the 1967 war. Elie Wiesel, in an open letter to young Germans of the New Left written in 1968, said: "By taking a stand against the Jewish people today, you become guilty of what was done to Jews yesterday. By agreeing to deliver to death the survivors of yesterday's massacres, you become, today, the executioner's accomplice and ally." The lack of any awareness of this relationship between "anti-Establishment" and anti-Israeli Germans is a distinct failing in a book that assumes that Israeli self-understanding depends upon an accurate knowledge of the current relation between Germans and Jews. The book is filled with allusions to the resurgence of Nazism in Germany in the form of veterans' organizations, right-wing fringe parties, and so on, but gives no hint of the fact that the latest form of antisemitism is growing among the unwashed revolutionaries.

In the same open letter, Wiesel wrote that "for a German today there is no possible salvation outside his relationship with Jews. Your path will never lead to man unless it leads
But in Ben Amotz's novel, the character who tries to apply this conviction is revealed to be a masochist. Her name is Erna, and she belongs to a Christian organization that does practical work in Israel to atone for German crimes. When Uri, after the first quarrel with his wife (one of the many marriage-manual exempla of the book), seeks revenge by taking Erna to bed, he discovers her to be a woman who can gain pleasure from sex only if she is beaten in the process. The incident suggests (though not to Uri) that young Germans who show an overdeveloped sense of responsibility for their ancestors' guilt are at bottom literally sick with masochism.

Barbara, with her rational outlook, commonsensical attitude toward reparations, and willingness to treat Jews as individuals instead of covering them with the blanket of liberal condescension, is offered as the ideal German of the postwar generation. It is she who forces Uri the Israeli to come to terms not so much with her German identity as with his Jewish one. Uri thinks of himself as an Israeli rather than a Jew, and his views on religion, are characteristic of that half-educated intelligentsia that Israel, in its progress toward "normalization," now shares with other democratic countries. He has been in a synagogue only twice in his life, and parades his illiteracy in Judaism as a sign, rather like his taste in clothing and women, of sophistication and high culture. On the two occasions in the novel when he consciously seeks to identify with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, he describes his emotions in explicitly Christian language. In his honeymoon visit to Dachau—yes!—with Barbara, he "yearned to feel the crown of thorns, to reach my hand into the fog and touch their frozen fingers. I searched for a sign, the faintest sign of stigmata." When he goes to a masquerade ball as a Chassidic Jew, he fancies himself traversing the stations of his "Via Dolorosa." "Why am I dragging myself around like a crucified Christ? You'd think I was really Jewish."

What disturbs Barbara, however, is not Uri's lack of Jewish religion (for she is properly agnostic herself) but his willingness to be identified, in the eyes of others, as an
Israeli rather than a Jew. Many of Barbara’s friends find it hard to believe “that Jews and Israelis are one people. They’re so different, in behavior, in personality, in outward appearance. Take Lam, for example, who’d guess he’s a Jew?” Whereas Barbara cringes at these compliments and repudiates the distinction, Uri takes pleasure in the fact (which is one of the elements of the novel’s unreality) that his own self-definition is recognized by the Gentiles as well. “I’m no Jew,” he upbraids her, “I’m an Israeli—and the two are not synonymous.””

The belief of many Israelis, especially the avowedly secular ones, that the form of life they have created in Israel has almost no connection with past Jewish life in the Diaspora is brought under scrutiny in the last segment of To Remember, to Forget. Israeli sociologists have often explored Israeli attitudes toward “Jewishness” by asking young Israelis whether, if they were to live abroad (not necessarily in Germany, of course) they would wish to be born Jews. Professor Simon Herman, who has thoroughly investigated the relationship between Jewish and Israeli identity, reports that when he posed this question to a substantial number of Israeli students, only a minority (thirty-seven percent) of the secular students answered affirmatively, thirty-four percent said it would make no difference to them, and fully twenty-nine percent said they would prefer not to be born Jews if they lived outside of Israel. Uri Lam belongs to this twenty-nine percent, until Barbara goads him into an act of self-discovery.

Stung by her criticism of him, Uri decides to attend the social event of the season in Frankfurt, a masked ball, as a Chassidic Jew. “I, Uri Lam, would be a Jew for one night. I will finally know what it means to be a Jew.” Predictably, the reaction to him is hostile, indeed antisemitic. The hostility forces him to play the adopted role more fully than he had anticipated, so that he must forsake his secular Israeli identity even to the point of refraining from the smoked pork. Irritation with his antics grows until he is attacked by two ushers who rip off his beard and his yellow patch and are about to eject him bodily from the ball when
he is rescued by Martin Schiller, dressed in the black uniform of an S.S. officer. Distressed by the amusement the other masqueraders seem to get from this odd turn of events, Schiller quickly reverts to the true relationship of Nazi to Jew and himself beats Uri from the hall.

This is the culminating scene of the novel, and it turns out to be something of a blank cartridge, making a big noise but not hitting its target. The conflicting intentions of the book reveal themselves in the confused symbolism of the costumes. Schiller wears the costume of his ancestral opposite, the S.S. officer, Uri the costume not of his ancestral opposite but of his fraternal, if distant, relation: the Chassid. Uri's relation to a Chassid is not the same as Martin's relation to an S.S. hoodlum, but Ben Amotz manages the scene in such a way that the distinction is lost on everyone, apparently including the author. "'For a minute,'" says Uri to Schiller, "'I thought you were a real Nazi.'" "'And I thought you were a real Jew' he said." Having gone to the ball in order to "know what it means to be a Jew," Uri soon decides that in fact he "came to remind the amnesia victims of their past." The desire to discover his own identity, to find what continuity, if any, there is between the Jew and the Israeli, gives way to the desire, already carried out countless times in the book, to "test" the Germans, to provide for them a moral gymnasium in which they can be challenged "'to remember that it can all happen again—today, tomorrow, here or anywhere.'" The desire to teach the Germans a lesson, even if it is the wrong lesson, even if they are incapable of learning a lesson, overcomes the compulsion to learn the truth about himself.

*To Remember, to Forget* lacks both the technical resources and the intellectual stamina to resolve any of the questions it raises. Its incessant use of the device of flashback (as well as what might be called "flashforward" to imagined eventualities) is as much a cliché as are many of its characters and situations: the "Ugly Israeli" abroad, the German-Jewish refugee returning to his "native land" so as to help prevent another such catastrophe, the endless banalities of the developing romance between Uri and
Barbara. Ben Amotz’s refusal to commit himself is evident through the last page of the novel, which returns us to Israel, where the child of German Barbara and Israeli-Jewish Uri is born on the day Eichmann is arrested: “Signifying what? I don’t know. The end of one chapter and the beginning of another? . . . Perhaps.” Strictly speaking, this indecisive posturing is only that of the protagonist, since we never hear directly from the author himself. But there are too many instances in the novel when we cannot decide whether the inadequacy of the language to the experience the author wishes to convey is a reflection on the protagonist-narrator or on Dahn Ben Amotz. In the absence of some implied standard of judgment distinct from Uri’s, it requires an excessively charitable reader to dissociate the author wholly from his creation. Ben Amotz seems to have carried his reader into the wilderness that is the relation between Germans and Jews, Jews and Israelis, and then to have abandoned him there.

Yoram Kaniuk’s *Adam Resurrected* (1971) is imaginatively the richest, and linguistically the most inventive and energetic, of the examples of Israeli Holocaust fiction we have examined. Both spiritually and geographically, it is set more firmly in Israel than any of the others (including Amichai’s) and is the only one of the novels that makes the relation between Israel and the Holocaust its overriding concern, permeating every relationship between characters, every aspect of the action. This is the more remarkable in that the action comprises many levels of experience, various modes of being, from the animal to the human, from the natural to the supernatural. In its insistent combination of moral urgency with a comic spirit, and of fantasy with realism, *Adam Resurrected* is reminiscent of Swift and Kafka. Highly ironical yet intensely serious, aggressively cynical toward, and yet curiously respectful of, belief of any kind, the novel pours scorn and mockery on conventional notions of sanity and health in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event like the Holocaust, but finally acknowledges, with Schiller, that “not everyone who laughs at his chains is free of them.” This is
especially the case with Kaniuk’s treatment of religion. He is skeptical of it yet recognizes it as an organic element of human experience that can be discarded only at the cost of greatly diminished life. The novel’s openness to metaphysical speculation and religious emotion vastly enriches Kaniuk’s exploration of a subject that cannot easily be contained within the banal and pedestrian categories of monism and naturalism.

Kaniuk has created a fable by means of which he can test the hypothesis that Israel exists not only to rescue the survivors of the Holocaust but to heal them, in soul as in body. Most of the book’s action takes place in the desert town of Arad, Israel, at the Institution for Rehabilitation and Therapy, which ministers primarily to European refugees from the Holocaust who have been unable to recover from the horrors of their experience. This mental hospital was founded in 1960 by an American millionaire from Cleveland named Mrs. Seizling under the influence of a survivor named Schwester, who, when they met in Tel Aviv, convinced her that the main task of the new state was to bring the Messiah. According to this woman, a passionate mystic, God has spoken only with psychotics, a commodity with which no land is so richly endowed as Israel. Her theory of the Holocaust is that the Jews were punished for betraying their God by being turned into “smoke and ashes.” Israel, which gave refuge to the fools and heroes among the Jewish people—“the clever Jews immigrated to America or died in Europe”—has become a land of mystified and humiliated survivors who fill the night with their shrieks. Although from one point of view it may seem a misfortune that the Holocaust survivors “have turned this country into the largest insane asylum on earth,” it is also an opportunity, for only through these lunatics will the nation achieve reunion with God. The Institute will have the dual function, therefore, of healing those whose bodies have been rescued, but whose souls “‘are still in the furnaces,’” and of initiating conversations with God.

The chief candidate for messiahship is the consummate
lunatic and resident genius among the Institute’s patients, Adam Stein. Adam had been a circus clown of great renown and wealth in prewar Germany whose dubious good fortune it had been to be recognized by the commandant of the death camp to which he was transported as the agent, years earlier, of his own salvation. For S.S. Commandant Klein of Auchhausen had, as a young man, been on the verge of suicide when he was saved from himself by Adam’s clowning. Now that he occupied the God-like position of death-camp commandant, Klein elected to show his gratitude by offering Adam a “contract” whereby he could save his life by becoming (literally) Klein’s dog and the camp clown. In the latter capacity, he would entertain (and thus deceive) the Jewish victims, including his own wife and daughters, as they were being led to the gas chambers. (Klein very much wanted his victims to die in peace, for “there was something unaesthetic, unclean, about the shrieks of the dying who want to go on living.”) Thus was Adam saved by his peculiar gift, but also victimized by it, for henceforth he could only protect himself from the shame and guilt of his crime by blotting out the memory of Gretchen and Lotta, who had gone to their death trustingly and peacefully, thanks to the reassurance conveyed by Germany’s greatest clown, their husband and father.

Although his extrasensory powers and gifts of prestidigitation make Adam Schwester’s primary candidate for the Messiah, his own experiences and resultant convictions make him the worst. Having once been a dog, he can no longer be a Jew. Deranged he may be, but the Jewish derangement is not for him. By his experiences, he is “estranged from the Messianic vision, from the Jewish madness, from the incomprehensibility woven during more than a thousand years into a compendium of pining and expectation that finally brought about the creation in the East of a nation of Blue Numbers.” Not only the messianic impulse but the impulse toward national rebirth is alien to Adam’s mind when the war ends. “Palestine,” he thinks, “is nothing but a joke. Refugees, escapees, bits and pieces of humanity, chaff tossed in the wind, they cannot establish a
homeland for themselves and are not worthy, perhaps, of having one.” Klein has fulfilled his promise of financial compensation and escape for his dog-clown, and Adam has also received a half-million dollars for his circus, which had functioned in his absence all through the war. He returns to Berlin, invests in Germany’s economic miracle (which is treated with the withering scorn characteristic of Israeli Holocaust writing on this subject), and becomes a millionaire. His composure, deathlike yet luxurious, is shattered only by the news that his daughter Ruth, whom he had thought dead, is still alive in Israel. For the first time, he thinks about his relation to Germany, both in his formative years and now. Was he not, like the camps, a product of German culture? What was the camp itself but the apotheosis of that culture? “Grimm fairy tales and Luther’s essays and the inner thoughts of every proper German were fulfilled in Auchhausen.” True, he was treated regally in postwar Berlin after returning from the furnaces Berliners had built for him. But, as the great clown who had freely chosen to live again among his persecutors, what was he other than the Germans’ “insurance policy against Hell, in case there was anything more terrible than the things they had created with their own hands?”

Adam returns to Israel in 1958, only to find that Ruth has died in childbirth shortly before his arrival. Her husband, bitter against Adam for what he had done in the camp, takes the clown to the cemetery and dares him to make his daughter laugh now. In the attempt, Adam reverts to his dog-character of the war years and is institutionalized. The director of the Institute for Rehabilitation and Therapy in Arad is Dr. Nathan Gross, whose folly is the “ardent liberalism” that insists on believing in the possibility of curing and rescuing victims of the Holocaust without recognizing that the Holocaust was not just a historic but an apocalyptic event, which has created a new world in which everything must be learned through suffering or with the help of those who suffered. Dr. Gross thinks that forgetting the atrocity is the beginning of recovery for his patients, but the patients think otherwise and persistently
The Resonance of Dust

return to the Holocaust inferno. This Jerusalem-born disciple of Freud is sympathetically presented, however, because although he has spent his entire life searching for sanity, his experience with the survivors has unsettled his faith in the superiority of sanity.

If the citizens of Israel want health and sanity in their society, if they want a decisive break with that miserable past which culminated in the Holocaust, they should never have promulgated the Law of Return. Building a homeland out of committed idealists is one thing; building it out of shattered survivors is another. “‘You accepted us,’” Adam chides, “‘with open arms, like a fool. That was a fatal error, the Law of Return will beget the end, we shall cause the soil to rot, pollute the atmosphere. We shall remember. We shall be like frontlets between your eyes.’” Yet in the central action of the novel, we see Adam as the agent not of pollution but of health, for it is he who presides over the recovery of an Israeli boy whose schizophrenia is Adam’s own: he has become a dog, and lives on all fours just as Adam had done in the camp and often still does. Dr. Gross, less rigid in his naturalism than his fellow doctors, who have completely given up hope for returning the dog-child to his human self, allows Adam to take charge of the child. The true physician reluctantly admits that those who have never been sick cannot understand, much less bestow, health; only the sick can. “‘We,’” says Dr. Gross to his angry Israeli medical colleagues, “‘are ants on the surface of the Earth trying to understand the pains of Mars men.’” Men like Adam have come not from another continent but from another planet. Bereft of his own daughter, and reminded by the boy’s howling of the wails of children in the death camps whose mothers had already disappeared and who were awaiting their own death, Adam finds a reason to live in helping the child to recover. By presiding over the evolution of a dog into a child, a process usually requiring millions of years, Adam has in effect become a sort of God, though hardly the one for whom Schwester had hoped. His miracle takes the form not of a messianic revelation but of a healing process in which two sick people cure each other.
If the way in which Adam Stein cures, and is cured by, the dog-child who is reborn as David, king of Israel, represents the zenith of fulfillment in the novel, then Adam's failure to realize the messianic expectations of Schwester is the nadir of disappointment and desolation. The question of exactly how the God of Israel was related to the Holocaust is the pervasive quandary of the novel, announced in the opening epigraph from Josephus that asks, of an earlier Jewish disaster, why God was absent, "so totally absent, during the Great Destruction." Schwester's reply to this question is that God's logic and man's are not the same, and that even the Holocaust reenforces the continuity of the cosmic dramatic struggle between God and His people, who chose each other and remain mutually responsible. Ranged against this childless woman, however, are the voices of inmates whose children have been killed or hideously disfigured in the Holocaust and who are in Mrs. Seizling's institute precisely because they cannot live with the knowledge that the God of Israel can sanctify His chosen people only by burning and mutilating them, and making Satan the instrument of His purpose. Thus Arthur Fine has become a compulsive arsonist who burns not only buildings but people (including his own child) because he wishes to imitate the actions of the divine father who sanctifies His children by burning them. "I wanted to sanctify her," he says of a woman he fell in love with in Israel, "but she didn't understand and fled, not knowing how much I loved her. If she had known, she would have sung in the fire." Another inmate named Wolfovitz, whose Thersites voice reverberates through the novel, writes a letter to God (for to whom but the Master of the Universe should he address his complaints?) in which the Nazis are called "your messengers . . . your boys." Adam, in whose brain congregate all the terrible stories and derangements of the other inmates, fluctuates between despair over the absence and feebleness of the Jewish God, who is a bully in His neighborhood but "scared stiff" among the other nations, and resentment of the horrible implications of His omnipresence and omnipotence. The difference between the
Germans and the Jews, says Adam, is the difference between “the nation that thought God chose them and consequently chose God who abandoned them, and a nation that thought God would not choose them and consequently attempted to escape from God but God chose them as a scourge against the believers.”

Eventually, despite his contempt for the Schwester woman and her messianic schemes, Adam allows himself to be caught up by them and by the expectant eagerness of Wolfowitz and Arthur Fine, which he would like in some way to satisfy. Adam therefore organizes an escape from the Institute into the desert that surrounds it. In the course of the expedition, Adam becomes convinced that he is, after all, the prophet and messenger long sought by Schwester, and that he is truly leading them toward God. The conviction is all the more irresistible because he wants to believe, always has believed, just the opposite: namely, that no God will speak to him and that he then will have to reveal the terrible truth of His absence to them. In fact, a God does speak to Adam, but he chooses to reveal nothing of Him to the “nation” of inmates that has come to seek Him, for the voice he hears is none other than that of Commandant Klein. The Germans’ oft-repeated claim that if there were another world, they would rule it as totally as they did this one, is confirmed. “ ‘I’m waiting,’ ” Klein tells his former dog and clown Adam, “ ‘and I’ll always be waiting for you at the end of the road.’ ” Invited to kill his Commandant-God, Adam declines, because without this mocking and hateful God, there would be no one to talk to: “ ‘In these synthetic, beheaded days, that is the only dialogue that makes sense.’ ” In a kind of reenactment of his role as deceiver and purveyor of false security in the camp, Adam tells the “nation” of his followers that there was nothing in the desert, consequently nothing to look forward to. “ ‘You’ve built a house for nothing. Waited for nothing. He won’t come.’ ”

Adam conceals his vision of God because he does not believe the others could go on living if they shared it with him. He also wants the Institute to resign its religious
mission—no salvation for the Jews in that direction!—and content itself with its healing function, however ineptly performed it may be. Adam’s encounter with God in the form of an S.S. commandant convinces him that “Jewish history is over, or maybe it’s just beginning.” When he first met the dog-child, he knew “neither what to give, nor what to say, nor how to rescue.” For he himself was then “seeking a savior.” Having now carried that quest to its terrible but, given the Holocaust, logical conclusion, Adam is at last able to rescue the child and thereby himself. This is the best bargain the Jews can now strike with history: not joy but peace, not greatness but sanity, not God but man. This is a vast diminution. “Life is so sad without God!” exclaims Adam. “Still, man is left. I am here, and I have a child. . . .” Once Adam has recovered, he becomes blank and dull in a way, and his lover, the chief nurse of the Institute, loses all interest in Adam Stein, whose old self had to die before he could be reborn. “Sanity is sad. Nothing happens. I live today in a lovely, good valley, The heights are gone forever. There are no more frightful deserts, and I no longer leap into the fire, I’m afraid I’ll get burned.” Besides, the God who offers sanctification only through burning has been unmasked for what He truly is.

The bizarre quality of many of the incidents and characters in Adam Resurrected serves to underscore Kaniuk’s understanding both of the Holocaust and of Israel, the two events of modern Jewish history that compete in incredibility. The metamorphosis of human beings, erect and tall, into four-legged animals is an old literary metaphor that was given a new force once the Germans arranged to exterminate the Jews as if they were bedbugs, with poison gas. Even the specific metaphor here employed by Kaniuk was a literal reality in one camp in Rumania, in which arriving Jews were told: “You have come in on two feet, and if you do not end your lives here, you will be allowed to leave on four feet only.” (In this camp the Jews were fed on a diet which resulted in paralysis, so that when the trial of war criminals opened in Bucharest after the war, many of the Jewish witnesses “were indeed able to
walk on all fours only.”) The Arad Institute, at once a house for the treatment of those disfigured by the Holocaust and a gateway into the messianic era, is symbolic of Israel itself. Thus, when Mrs. Seizling endowed it, she stipulated that its architecture be aggressively ugly so that it would be the appropriate symbol of a nation “hastening to set up house for a transient generation in a place where you must strike root upside down, a location to which old people were coming in order to be born anew in the womb of their ancient mother whose loins were clogged with holy dust.” Even the skeptical Adam must confess his grudging admiration for those who have discovered that their sanctuary was also their homeland, and contained not only their future but also their remote past. “They have guts, their blue numbers can be rubbed off. At night they may weep, but in the daytime they stomp across any limitation, across the wasteland, taming everything, omitting any fun, any beauty, any charm.”

Adam’s way is different. He cannot keep his waking and sleeping life, his work and his suffering, his past and his present, in separate compartments. Arrested by his own conscience as much as by those who confine him in the Institute, he can work his way back to health only through his past suffering, shame, and guilt. In the process, he becomes Kaniuk’s symbol for Israel’s right moral relation to its Diaspora inheritance. Israel can serve as a healer to the survivors, but only if it recognizes that in the depths of their experience, the very experience that has made them ill, they may themselves have found a capacity to heal others. Israel cannot recover the Messiah from the wreckage of the Holocaust, because He was never there. The novel endorses the sentiment of those sages of the third and fourth centuries alleged by the Talmud to have said of the long-awaited Messiah: “May he come, but I do not want to see him.” When Adam does see him, and declares to this Commandant-God that Jewish history is either over with or just beginning, he appears to express his creator’s conviction that Israelis will be either the last Jews on earth or the beginning of a new nation.
ern civilization and many theories about the nature and future of Jewish existence. It offered grim confirmation of only one ideology: Zionism. Zionism had from its beginnings maintained that in the post-Enlightenment era Judaism in the Diaspora was doomed. The Enlightenment attack on all religion had brought down the old barriers: to assimilation and to barbarism. Once the Enlightenment had destroyed the Christian structures of the old Europe, Jews could assimilate into the larger society without going through the trauma of conversion. But when secular antisemitism arose, it could not be confined within the old limits of religious Jew-hatred, which had condoned the humiliation of Jews but proscribed their murder. The Zionists would have been wholly justified in saying, to non-Zionist Jews, after the Holocaust: “We told you so.”

The finality of the destruction wrought by the Holocaust, both in literal actuality and in the minds of the Jewish survivors, cannot be too much stressed. One of the most striking depictions of it may be found in a collective journal written by a group of young survivors of Buchenwald, who formed an agricultural commune on German soil just after the war with the aim of training themselves for a new life in Palestine. They could have lived fairly comfortably in the D.P. camps on charity, but chose instead to found “Kibbutz Buchenwald” because of their conviction that for Jews the European experience was conclusively at an end. They were warned by authorities that “all Jews who did not wish to go back to their homelands would be listed as stateless. . . .” But they soon learned of the fate of those who did return to their “homelands.” One of their group had returned to Poland, only to encounter a murderous Jew-hatred. “The majority of the Polish people, Moshe declared, have only one idea: to eliminate the Jews.” But the other members of Kibbutz Buchenwald no longer needed the prod of Jew-hatred to turn them toward Palestine. During the suffering in the German camps, “all that kept us interested in life was the hope that we could tear ourselves out of Europe at the earliest possible moment, and go to Palestine to live and work in the interests of our people.”

In view of all this, it is remarkable that the body of Israeli Holocaust fiction that we have been examining should see
in the Holocaust a summons to critical self-examination rather than an occasion for self-congratulation. If, as has often been alleged by its enemies, Zionism has a propensity for polemic and propaganda, it is certainly in abeyance in these novels, which if anything show an overly refined sensitivity to anything resembling Zionist self-satisfaction. Yet who offered help to the survivors of the death camps more than the Zionists? More important, what offered hope to these survivors but the promise of Zion, the last remaining possibility for the continuation of the historic Jewish civilization that had just been destroyed in Europe?

If, in treating the Holocaust, Israeli novelists have preferred the path of national self-criticism to that of national self-satisfaction, this is less a tribute to their modesty than to their caution. They all know that the Jewish people has passed through a crisis unprecedented in its history; they are by no means certain that the crisis is over, or that the second half of the twentieth century will deal more gently with the Jews than the first half did; they feel too close to the terrible event to be sure that anything of permanent value has survived the storm or been built in its wake. Gershom Scholem speaks for them all when he says: "It is not surprising that there are as yet no signs of a reaction, of one kind or another, to the profound shock of the Holocaust. Such a reaction, when it comes, could be either deadly or productive. We hope it will be productive; that is why we are living here, in this Land." 24

The epigraph for this chapter, from "The Sermon," by Haim Hazaz, and the quotations in the pages that follow are copyright 1956 by Partisan Review. Reprinted by permission.

1. The survivor honored was Gabriel Dagan; the woman was Ruth Elias. See Phillip Gillon, "An Unusual Hero," Jerusalem Post, 27 June 1975.
2. Ibid.
3. See the report of the speech by the then prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, in Jerusalem Post, 8 April 1975, p. 1.
4. The French sociologist, Georges Friedmann (in The End of the
Jewish People?, 1965), following the lead of Jean-Paul Sartre, has argued that Jewish self-consciousness in the Diaspora is merely a function of antisemitism. Of this theory, it is perhaps sufficient to quote Hannah Arendt’s remark that “even a cursory knowledge of Jewish history, whose central concern since the Babylonian exile has always been the survival of the people against the overwhelming odds of dispersion, should . . . dispel this latest myth” (Antisemitism, Part One of The Origins of Totalitarianism [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1951], p. xi). The theory that antisemitism sustains Jewish existence also overlooks the little anomaly posed by the fact that antisemitism led to the destruction of European Jewry.

5. Hillel Halkin, that most astute observer of relations between Israel and the Diaspora, makes this point clearly: “It is commonly asserted, even in sympathetic accounts of Zionism, that the movement to establish a Jewish state succeeded in the end only because of the catastrophic intervention of the Holocaust. If anything, the truth is the opposite. The Jewish communities annihilated by the Nazis were the most ‘Zionised’ of any in the world long before the rise of Hitler to power, and they could have done more for the Zionist cause as live immigrants to Palestine than they ever were able to do as dead martyrs used to prick the conscience of the world” (Letters to an American Jewish Friend: A Zionist’s Polemic [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977], p. 39).

6. A similar kind of symbolic multiplication, including twinning and a whole gallery of women named Ruth, is used by Yoram Kaniuk in Adam Resurrected (1971).


9. Ibid., pp. 310, 326.


14. This is reported to have been the reply of Hermann Cohen, the German-Jewish philosopher, when asked why he, a committed Jew, was not a Zionist (Jacob Katz, “Zionism and Jewish Identity,” Commentary 63 [May 1977]: 52).


17. Hannah Arendt points out that “not only the Nazis, but fifty years of antisemitic history, stand as evidence against the identification of antisemitism with nationalism. The first antisemitic parties . . . were also among the first that banded together, internationally” (*Antisemitism*, p. 4).


19. Ibid., p. 207.


21. Holocaust diaries and memoirs often refer to the Nazis’ peculiar love of beating Jews into unconsciousness and near death, and then telling the stupefied and dazed victims when they awoke: “Well, you see, we rule in the next world too.”


Half of his people had been tortured and murdered, and the other half were giving parties.—Isaac Bashevis Singer, Enemies