

Prelude

This is a book about living with the past—not about memory itself *per se*, but about the process of constructing cultural memory, about the negotiation, implicit or explicit, between what is remembered, transmuted into narrative, handed on from generation to generation, and what is forgotten, unspoken, overlooked. My underlying assumption is that the understanding of the past generated by such a process plays an essential role in shaping attitudes and actions of individuals and societies in the present. This understanding (“memory”) is at times difficult to distinguish from the process of its formation (“memorialization”); the former is often the only evidence that may be found of the latter. That the two concepts blur together in discourse heightens the need for clarity on this point. The process of memorialization is never complete; memory is not set in stone—it is constantly open to re-negotiation, and “reading backwards”—an insertion of more recent understanding and experience into discourse about the past. This is discussed more fully in chapter 1.¹

This book is about identity. Memory and individual identity are closely linked; we are what we remember as much as we are anything else. This is apparent when philosophers of identity theorize scenarios such as the transplant of one person’s memory into another’s body—the term for such a scenario in science fiction is the “body swap,” which is to say that we speak of Rachel inhabiting Leah’s body, rather than Leah acquiring Rachel’s

1. An example of reading backwards is brought forward by Nicola King, in the introduction to her book *Memory, Narrative, Identity*, when she describes a Holocaust survivor recounting his experience, constantly punctuated by the insertion of the claim “he didn’t know that then”—understanding he acquired after the fact was so intimately bound up in his memory of what he did experience that he could not separate the two in his recounting. King writes that “[h]is memory of that moment seems to have been deeply affected by what he didn’t know at the time of the event: what he also has to remember is the painful fact of his own ignorance” (1).

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brain or personality; the *locus* of identity in such a scenario is with the consciousness, rather than the body.² At the same time, an amnesiac is a person who has “lost their memory,” not an entirely new person; memory is not the sole criterion which determines identity. Nor is identity shaped just by personal experience, but also by the complex of stories—history, folk tales, other people’s memories—which surround individuals and help them to locate themselves within their socio-cultural *milieu*. Ricoeur argues that “we never cease to reinterpret the narrative identity that constitutes us, in light of the narratives proposed to us by our culture.”³ In other words, such stories (which I will define in my first chapter as components of “cultural memory”) do not simply inform people about past events, they provide models from which one might learn how to perform the “-ness” of group identity—Canadianness, Jewishness.⁴

This book is about imagination, which refers to both “the power or capacity to form internal images of objects or ideas not actually present to the senses, including remembered objects” and the activity of the mind exercising this capacity.⁵ Sidra Ezrahi has written that “what is ‘remembered’ is of course also imagined, as mimesis takes on the authority and license of memory and memory becomes an article of faith. In its most radical form, memory and imagination describe a circularity that promotes an aesthetics of the whole.”⁶

Memorials, the vehicles constructed to convey cultural memory from one generation to the next, depend upon imagination: they stem from the imagination of their creators, and act on the imagination of those who encounter them. This is true of each of the sub-types of memorial with which I am concerned here. Monuments invite the visitor into a physical space, but within that space one encounters images (and sometimes text) which prompt the construction of a mental picture of the events and lives represented therein.⁷ Narrative invites the reader into a space that is not physical, but nonetheless real, as Ricoeur insists: “To speak of a world of the text is to stress the feature belonging to every literary work of opening before it a horizon of possible experience, a world in which it would be possible to

2. See Schechtman, *Selves*, 16–17.

3. Ricoeur, “Life in Quest,” 32.

4. See also B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

5. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “imagination.”

6. Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 9.

7. See especially my discussion in chapter 4.

live. [...] To appropriate a work through reading is to unfold the world horizon implicit in it.”⁸ This unfolding, like the reconstruction of events represented by a monument, takes place primarily in the reader’s mind; it is a work of the imagination. The barrier between fiction and memory is more permeable than one might expect; both are constructions. This also holds true for the third category of memorial I consider, liturgy.

Liturgy, and especially Jewish liturgy, as I discuss more fully in my concluding chapter, has historically been considered to be a type of text which describes a public performance of worship.⁹ Neither the text nor its performance is imaginary—and, indeed, some might take offence at such a characterization¹⁰—however, the space which they construct for participants is *imaginative*. The many variations on the Passover Seder, for example, are carefully constructed to guide participants through an imaginative reconstruction of the exodus, so that each participant might “regard him or herself as if he or she had come out of Egypt.”¹¹ Likewise, the *Ne’ilah* service on Yom Kippur is dominated by the image of the worshippers standing at the gates of heaven, pleading for admittance; the worshippers, in fact, pray as though they are at those gates, they imagine themselves in that space just as the participants at Passover imagine themselves as slaves in Egypt.¹² The imaginative space of liturgy differs from that of narrative in that it is a shared space; liturgy is primarily a communal endeavor.¹³ However, liturgical space functions in a similar fashion to narrative space, insofar as

8. Ricoeur, “Life in Quest,” 26.

9. See Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, 1–3.

10. For example, Stanley Hauerwas insists that “Attending liturgy is a Christian’s duty because it’s *true*. It’s what makes life make any sense at all” (emphasis added) in “Christianity,” 530.

11. *m. Pesah* 10:5 (adjusted for gender neutrality). For a more robust discussion of the imaginative function of several variants on the Passover seder, see my article “Seder and Imagined Landscape.”

12. See Hammer, *Entering the High Holy Days*, 167–74.

13. The difficulty with considering liturgy to be entirely communal is that this results in having to consider the recitation of the Amidah, for example, as liturgical when it takes place in the presence of a *minyan*, but not when it is recited privately. While context is certainly important, such a finely drawn distinction verges on nonsensical—a Catholic priest who says the Daily Office by himself is still engaged in a liturgical performance, and for the same reason that some solitary acts of Jewish worship ought to be considered liturgical: it connects him to the history and life of the community, even if the community itself is not physically present. This is yet another example of the imaginative dimension of liturgy.

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it provides the community with an identity-generating narrative that may be interpreted and re-interpreted as circumstances and the needs of the community change.

The issues surrounding memorialization in the past century are, as even this brief prelude indicates, complex and diverse, and the form of this book is dictated by the complexity of its material. My structure is loosely inspired by Emmanuel Levinas's suggestion that Europe (by which I understand a civilization which also extends to former European colonies such as Canada, Australia, and the United States) "is the Bible and the Greeks," a culture formed in the interstices between two distinct modes of being in the world.¹⁴ What follows is an attempt at disentangling the two strands, laying them side-by-side, and seeing how they pull on one another.

The Bible and the Greeks are, in this work, represented by the two ancient approaches to loss and catastrophe, which I probe in my first two chapters: Amalek and Antigone, memory and mourning. It is important to note at the outset that, in this scheme, Amalek emphatically does not represent vengeance, but rather the ambivalence of Deuteronomy 25:17–19, a people caught between the urge to blot out the traumatic past, and a pressing need to remember the history which has shaped them. My reading of this passage does not engage with the idea of the ban, חרם, which is a vector of analysis commonly applied by (Christian) biblical scholars.¹⁵ In her study, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, Susan Niditch divides passages dealing with חרם into two types: those that treat the ban as a sacrificial system, in which "[i]mposition of the ban, so that dead enemies become an offering to God, is one way of making sense of the inevitable carnage of war,"¹⁶ and those that treat the ban as a mechanism of God's justice, "rooting out [. . .] impure, sinful forces damaging the solid and pure relationship between Israel and God."¹⁷ Niditch links this latter interpretation to the idea of the just war, which has been an important concept in twentieth-century

14. Levinas, *Time of the Nations*, 133.

15. See, for example, Childs, *Exodus*, 313; Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 352, 966; Meyers, *Exodus*, 135; R. D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 302; G. Ernest Wright's commentary on Deut. 25.19 in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Volume II, 482. The word חרם does not actually appear in either the Exodus or the Deuteronomy passages dealing with Amalek; such analysis of those passages must begin by assuming a similarity between the treatment of Amalek and nations which are explicitly subjected to the ban.

16. Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 50.

17. *Ibid.*, 56.

justifications of warfare.¹⁸ While the passages from Deuteronomy and Exodus that I analyze do not make an appearance in this volume (and nor does the verb חרם make an appearance in either passage), Niditch does analyze 1 Samuel 15, which details a later interaction between the Israelites, led by King Saul, and the Amalekites, led by King Agag (from whom Haman, the villain of the book of Esther is said to descend) as an instance of the ban as a measure of God's justice.¹⁹ It is worthwhile to quote Niditch's final analysis of this approach to warfare at some length:

It is not easy for humans to kill others. To participate in mass killing in war is destructive of individual psyches and of the larger community's mental health. The ban in either trajectory is a means of making killing in war acceptable. [. . .] [T]he ban-as-God's-justice ideology actually motivates and encourages war, implying that wars of extermination are desirable in order to purify the body politic of one's own group, to eradicate evil beyond one's group, and to actualize divine judgment. In the ban as God's justice a sharp line is drawn between us and them, between clean and unclean, between those worthy of salvation and those deserving elimination. The enemy is thus not a mere human, an offering, necessary to win the assistance of God, but a monster, unclean, and diseased. The ban as God's justice thus allows people to accept the notion of killing other humans by dehumanizing them and the process of dehumanization can take place even within the group during times of stress, distrust, and anomie.²⁰

While Niditch does not make reference to the work of Elaine Scarry at any point in her book, the parallels between what she writes here and Scarry's 1985 book, *The Body in Pain*, are striking. Scarry discusses, at some length, the psychological necessity to disguise and obscure the actual injuring of bodies, which, she argues, is the single inarguable fact of warfare.²¹ The main means by which this disguise is perpetrated is linguistic rearrangement:

the act of injuring, or the tissue that is to be injured, or the weapon that is to accomplish the injury is renamed [. . .] as prisoners subjected to medical experiments in Japanese camps were called "logs," and as the day during World War I on which thirty

18. Ibid., 57.

19. Ibid., 61–62.

20. Ibid., 77.

21. Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 63.

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thousand Russians and thirteen thousand Germans died at Tanenberg came to be called the “Day of Harvesting.”²²

This inversion, in which people become inanimate (“logs,” or crops to be harvested) and weapons take on a life of their own (“arms,” parts of a body, as Scarry describes slightly later in the same paragraph as the passage quoted), acts just as the notion of holy war, the ban as justice, described by Niditch, in “allow[ing] people to accept the notion of killing other humans by dehumanizing them.”

Scarry takes what may be rightly labeled a logically extreme view of the idea of the “just war”; by reducing war to two structural components (injury and competition), she is able to argue that, while there may be some justification for the existence of “a contest based on a reciprocal activity that would produce a nonreciprocal outcome abided by all,” there is no necessity, and thus no justification of, or justice in, such a competition being based on the injuring of human bodies.²³ Niditch does not go nearly so far—which is to be expected, as her book is a descriptive study of war as it is portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, rather than an argument for or against war itself—but is, at times (such as in the passage quoted above) sharply critical of fictions (to use Scarry’s terminology) that make the taking of human lives too easy by obscuring the basic humanness of the lives to be taken. If such fictions are reprehensible *during* times of conflict—and I agree with Scarry and Niditch that they are—then how much more problematic do they become afterwards, when the dehumanization of the enemy is no longer a response to the exigencies of war but rather an integral part of the narrative on which a society builds its identity?

In the following pages, I will examine a sample of memorial sites and texts through which the boundaries between living (individual) memory, cultural memory, and history are constantly being re-negotiated. None of these is neutral. Each one is a construction; each both presents a particular interpretation of the event(s) it represents and is itself subject to interpretation and re-interpretation.

In Part One, I address Amalek and Antigone, two ancient texts which continue to be read, interpreted, and used as touchstones in discourse concerning memorialization. Chapter 1 presents the liturgical space opened up by Parshat Zakhor, one of four short passages appended to the normal order of Torah readings in the month prior to Passover. This examination

22. Ibid., 66.

23. Ibid., 142.

both illuminates the backwards-reading tendency of memorials, as the responses of various communities over different points in history demonstrate the way that each found in the text a model for their own situation,²⁴ but also provides a framework for a more widely-ranging discussion of what memory is and how it functions, on both an individual and communal level.

In chapter 2, I engage in a closer study of the way memorialization contributes to the formation of identity, both individual and cultural. Due to the strong parallels between the social situation of the Athenian Empire in the fifth century BCE and that of the British Empire in the early twentieth century CE, as well as to the great influence classical forms had on the accoutrements of memorialization in the First World War, I begin by briefly returning to ancient Greece, to examine what light the conflict over the burial of Polynices portrayed in Sophocles' *Antigone* may shed on the issue of how, and by whom, the meaning of history is negotiated.

This discussion provides the foundation for my investigation of the way the memory of the First World War was constructed in Canada. Throughout Part Two, I argue that the dead (or wounded, or missing) bodies of soldiers are the locus of such negotiations. I further argue that the dominant Christian theology of the time neither challenged nor was challenged by the events of the war; rather, commemorative activity freely borrowed images of sacrifice and atonement, and the churches incorporated the transformed images back into their regular vocabulary of worship. Focusing on Canada permits me to draw on a particular set of historical circumstances that, taken together, provide a useful interruption to more dominant (British and American) understandings of the war, thus underlining the element of selectivity at work in memorialization. My main vehicle for this discussion is a parallel reading of four novels from L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series (the publication of which spanned the years 1908 to 1921) and the work of the Imperial War Graves Commission (now known as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission).

I conclude Part Two with a close examination of one particular Canadian monument to the First World War, the Walter Allward-designed Canadian National Vimy Memorial. "Reading" the monument alongside Jane Urquhart's fictional account of its creation in *The Stone Carvers* permits me to unpack the way the memory of the First World War has evolved from the time it was being constructed by Allward, Montgomery, and a

24. Cf. Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 7.

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host of other Canadian culture-makers, until the present day, when more nuanced historical readings are available to undermine the triumphant, nation-building myth of Canada's War. One of the great risks of constructing memorials that carry the past forward into the present is that the consciousness of the present can, then, also infect the past. Memorials are too dependent on their readers ever to be truly stable texts.

In Part Three, I begin by conducting a similar, though briefer, examination of the presentation of memorials to the Holocaust. I suggest that, where the First World War memorials were originally designed to serve an existing community of mourners, acting as substitutes for the bodies of dead soldiers, the Holocaust memorials, particularly those that take the form of museums, have been designed to *create* a community of mourners, guiding the visitor towards a sense of sympathy for and responsibility to the victims they commemorate.

Two churches bombed during the Second World War and rebuilt afterwards provide the framework for my consideration of the relationship between the history of the years 1933–1945 (the total span of Nazi rule in Germany) and religious practice since that time. Where the vocabulary of memorialization at work in the First World War was well in tune with the Christian theological language of the time, the memory of the Holocaust poses a direct challenge to Jewish theological understanding. It is the negotiation between theology and history, and the role that memorialization plays in this, that is my primary concern in this part. After a survey of several notable academic theologians, I focus primarily upon the relatively recent work of David Blumenthal and Melissa Raphael, both of whom, in different ways, are concerned particularly with the issue of encounter between God and humanity, and how the understanding of and approach to such an encounter is altered by understanding of the Holocaust. Thus, my focus returns to the issue of Jewish liturgy—not within a calendrical framework, as at the beginning of this book, but as a space of encounter. I conclude with a reading of two contemporary novels by Canadian Jewish women, both of which point towards the possibility of, but do not actually accomplish, a reconciliation between liturgical and quotidian existence, a renewal of connection between God and humanity, accomplished in part by a re-interpretation of existing memorials.