does not dwell on it. He states: "My father went first. He held his head straight up, pale, and I could see how his mouth trembled nervously. He looked at us, he looked us over, one at a time, my mother, my brothers, my sister, and me. At this one moment, now that he was so vulnerable, I loved him more than ever" (p. 118).

The narrative starts out with a description of conditions after the Americans have pushed the Germans back. The narrator is obviously impressed by the four American liberators he gets to know, and tries to imagine their lives in the States. They serve as a substitute for the father he has lost In the war. At the same time he tries to come to terms with his own sexuality. He matter of factly describes how the girl Bea, of whom he has grown fond during the many nights that he and she along with the other villagers spent in the shelter, beds down with one of the American soldiers. At the same the author skilfully evokes the warmth and kindness of the village people, who are forced to take shelter in the pit that they have dug to protect themselves from the constant shelling of their houses. He suggests that in times of danger human beings do comfort one another, and can live together as one family in spite of the petty annoyances that this promiscuity enforces on them.

As in *The Danger*, Vandeloo's narrative style is extremely spare. The language is always precise, never flowery. Both stories have been skilfully translated and make gripping reading.

MOSAIC STONES FOR THE HOLOCAUST: Etty Hillesum: *Letters from Westerbork* and Jona Oberski: *Childhood.*

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"One ought to write a chronicle of Westerbork," commented Etty Hillesum, almost in passing, while eating red cabbage at the edge of the yellow lupin field in the summer of 1942. A nameless man sitting beside her answered: "Yes, but to do that you'd have to be a great poet." Etty recorded this conversation in a letter of December of that same year, and continued:

> He is right, it would take a great poet. Little journalistic pieces won't do. The whole of Europe is gradually being turned into one great prison camp. The whole of Europe will undergo this same bitter experience. To simply record the bare facts of families torn apart, of possessions plundered and liberties forfeited, would soon become monotonous.... I am no poet (23-24).

Despite these reservations, she did record her experiences at the camp during her stay there from November 23, 1942 to September 7, 1943, "noting it all down like a dutiful secretary" (66), writing with the knowledge "of being the ears and eyes of a piece of Jewish history..., contributing... (a) little piece of stone to the great mosaic that will take shape once the war is over" (124).

The facts of the history of the 140,000 Jews living in Holland on May 10, 1940 (the beginning of five years of German occupation) have been well documented (Hilberg, 365-381; Presser). The fate of Dutch Jews parallels that of all European Jews: following a gradual but systematic exclusion from Dutch society, most (about 100,000) were rounded up into Dutch camps like Westerbork, deported weekly on freight trains, and murdered in the killing centres at Auschwitz and Sobibor or other concentration camps. A few (4,000) were able to emigrate or flee, a few survived in hiding (7,000) or because of mixed marriages (8,000), and a few returned from the camps (5,450). These are the facts, the abstractions; in the mind's eye they form a stream of suffering and destruction so vast that the mind itself loses its ability to comprehend.

In the face of this vastness, Holocaust literature "has as its unifying purpose the translation of the abstract into the particular," the transformation of numbers "into the story of the living, suffering and dying of each soul" (Idinopulos, 186). Etty Hillesum's *Letters from Westerbork* and Jona Oberski's *Childhood* are two such works: into the outline sketched by historical facts they draw the detail of individual experience and emotion. They are part of the larger body of European Holocaust literature; in Holland they stand together with, among other works, Anne Frank's diary, Marga Minco's *Bitter Herbs*, Clara Asscher-Pinkhof's *Star Children*, Johanna Reiss' *The Upstairs Room*, Philip Mechanicus' *Waiting for Death: a Diary*, and Hillesum's own *An Interrupted Life*. Hillesum's letters, written from November, 1942 to September, 1943, sketch a human face and heart for ten months of Jewish suffering in Westerbork, while Oberski's small-child memories of passing through Westerbork to Bergen-Belsen and returning to Amsterdam capture the baffled helplessness of individuals confronted with an incomprehensible system for the destruction of a people.

Etty Hillesum was born in Amsterdam on January 15, 1914; she died in Auschwitz on November 30,

1943. Her mother and father, he a classicist and headmaster of the Deventer *Gymnasium*, were killed immediately upon reaching Auschwitz on September 10, 1943; her brother Mischa, a concert pianist, died on March 31, 1944; her brother Jaap, a doctor, also did not survive the war (Hillesum, *Letters*, 153-154). In July 1942 Etty was given a post on the *Joodsche Raad*, the controversial Jewish Council created in February, 1941 by the Germans as one of the tools in achieving their aim of transferring all Jews to extermination camps in Poland (Presser, 45-57; 238-277; Hilberg, 372). Though Etty's job exempted her, at least at the beginning, from internment at Westerbork, she volunteered to go there and spent most of her time prior to her deportation in the camp. Westerbork had been built by the Dutch government in 1939 to house up to 1,500 refugees from Germany; the Germans used the facilities as a temporary holding camp for up to twenty times that number of people.

Etty's letters to friends in Amsterdam document some of the individual situations in camp life which never surface in statistical accounts. Some involve the immediate problems of everyday existence: hot water ("the boiler house: four hot-water taps along the outside wall; a long row of people with bowls, buckets, and coffee-pots" 99); toilet paper ("a royal gift" 104); sanitary napkins and handkerchiefs ("[t]he hygiene problem is really the most desperate of all" 74); cooking ("[m]y [10] roommates are domestic women whose lives revolve around that one small hotplate" 105). Her letters react to the insanity of bureaucratic rules: the all-important, everchanging "lists" ("the 'parents' list' of Westerbork staff;" "the Meijer list [what sort of list is that, for heaven's sake?]" 67); packages to Westerbork ("two kilos from the provinces" but five kilos from Amsterdam, 79); communication out of Westerbork ("[w]e can still send certain specified telegrams to Jews in mixed marriages; they are delivered by courier" 95; "we are only allowed to write on one side of the page now" 119); identification stamps ("red, green, and blue identification marks; you can talk about them for twenty-four hours at a stretch....At the moment...all stamps, all colors, have been suspended; there is to be a regrouping" 87). And still other letters record the frenzy of loading the weekly train transport to Poland on Monday nights ("no words and images are adequate to describe nights like these. But still I must try..." 124) and the numbness accompanying its departure ("The whole camp holds its breath; another three thousand Jews are about to leave..." 55).

Despite her protestations that she was no poet, Etty's documentation is made all the more compelling by an equally clear-eyed description of her emotional experiences in the camp. Most striking are constant references to the concentration of time and experience: "I'm sure I could talk for a year at a stretch about this one week" (16); "the summer of 1942—it seems years ago" (23); "every bunk and every rough wooden table seems to radiate its own atmosphere," one "a squalid slum," another "a solid middle-class district" (35); "a woman who had come from Vught...told me her latest experiences in three minutes" (56); "the woman who has the bunk above my mother dropped a bottle of water. Most of it landed on Mother's bed. In this place something like that is like a natural disaster of scarcely imaginable proportions..." (122); "[h]ow terribly young we were only a year ago on this heath, Maria!" (144). From her letters it is quite clear the she knows about the "liquidation" of the "Jewish remnants" (45), and yet she shares in that destructive but life-giving hope against hope that somehow, somewhere, through some quirk of fate, someone will survive (126). Regularly, yet very hesitantly, she addresses the existential question "why," for example when a girl, momentarily exempted from a transport, asks her "in the voice of a child that begs for forgiveness, 'Surely God will be able to understand my doubts in a world like this, won't He?'" (130), or when Etty marvels that she is dressing babies and calming mothers for the next transport: "What is going on, what mysteries are these, in what sort of fatal mechanism have we become enmeshed? The answer cannot simply be that we are all cowards....We stand before a much deeper question..." (126).

The question "why" is particularly acute in the knowledge of the destruction of children, whom Etty Hillesum describes with special sympathy (121). "A million children massacred: I shall never understand," writes Elie Wiesel; "Jewish children: they haunt my writings" (203). One of these children was Jona Oberski: born in Amsterdam in 1938, Oberski and his family were interned in Westerbork and eventually sent on to Bergen-Belsen; his father died there, his mother shortly after liberation. The style of Oberski's *Childhood* reflects the nature of childhood memories: brief, vivid flashes of half-understood experiences, each accorded a separate chapter and conveyed in the simplest of sentences, illuminate the pattern of destruction known from other sources. The first chapter, for example, is entitled "Mistake;" the child, having slept through the round-up and transport process, wakes up in the unfamiliar surroundings of Westerbork ("It was dark. The walls were wood. There was a funny

smell. It sounded like there were other people there" 1). For the moment, it seems, their round-up was a "mistake," and mother and son are permitted to go home after a week; inexplicably for him, his parents cry when they see each other. The next roundup is not a "mistake," however, and this time the child is awake; he throws a sock at the German soldier who has come to get them, giving vent to the confused anger which adults have learned to sublimate in the interest of self-preservation. This time, too, his father seeks to convince the authorities that the family has "been sent there by mistake," since it had been waiting for permission to emigrate to Palestine. But where adults still desperately seek some sort of system, the eyes of a small child see the absurd meaninglessness: "A truck pulled up and we all had to get in. It was very crowded. All I could see was coats. When we got out we had to go into a big room full of people and tables. Lots and lots of people" (28).

The book begins with memories of warm, happy days within the home and larger community in Amsterdam, such as Jan's birthday or a trip on the ferry. The book ends with his return to Amsterdam and his being taken into the home of friends, with the beginning of his adjustment to "normal" life. But just as the initial happy days are interspersed with memories of unexpected hurts, such as bullying by the son of the shopkeeper who will no longer sell to his mother, or having to wear a yellow star (21), it is clear that the adjustment to life after the camps will be interspersed with greater hurts; in the words of Jacob Presser, "one thing is certain, not a single [camp child] came back unharmed" (541). Oberski's book reflects this physical and psychological damage: while the memories of the child in the concentration camp seem to record emotionless encounters with a reality which is too bizarre to elicit any kind of feeling, the memories of the time immediately after the liberation reveal that feeling has been postponed, not circumvented. The child, for example, reacts much differently to his father's death in the camp, at which he was present, than to his mother's after liberation, at which he was not. Though he saw his father die and even looked through the corpses in the "dead house" for the body, he cried only because he was afraid to die himself, especially because he had kissed his father's hand and thought he might get sick (71). When told that his mother had died, in contrast, he reacted violently: he struck out in anger at his physical surroundings and became deathly ill for over five days. The book ends with a violent image of healing. After his concerned foster mother kisses him on the lips, he begins to be able to rid himself of some of that which he has internalized:

> My legs trembled. My hands grabbed the plate and threw it on the floor. I stamped on it, I burst out crying and I screamed: "You kissed me on the lips. Now I'll die. My mother told me so herself."
>
> My mouth filled with vomit. I almost suffocated. It came splashing out on the floor. It spattered her legs. She said, "Now look what you've done. Just clean it up. You're not a baby any more."
>
> She gave me a cloth. I started wiping it up (119).

Oberski, now working at an institute for nuclear physics, dedicates his book to his foster parents who, he writes in November, 1977, "had quite a time with me" (120).

Discussions by readers seeking to understand Holocaust literature continually emphasize that this literature is different from any other, that it cannot "be judged by traditional literary standards," that readers "must listen with other than aesthetically oriented ears" (Cargas "Holocaust," 181). This is so also because Holocaust literature is not metaphorical: it disowns "the figurative use of language" (Rosenfeld 19) and describes a reality which fiction could not imagine. Because of this, literature of the Holocaust cannot yet be read, interpreted, or evaluated with the same precision or confidence as might other literature. Rosenfeld writes:

> we lack a phenomenology of reading Holocaust literature, a series of maps that would guide us on our way as we picked up and variously tried to comprehend the writings of the victims, the survivors, the survivors-who-became-victims, the kinds-of-survivors, those who were never there but know more than the outlines of the place. Until we devise such maps, our understanding of Holocaust literature will be only partial, well below that which belongs to full knowledge (10).

One of the "maps" for reading Holocaust literature, is, paradoxically, its intense hopefulness: as "a chronicle of the human spirit's most turbulent strivings with an immense historical and metaphysical weight," it is "an attempt to retrieve some ongoing life—posit a future tense—for whatever it is of human definition that remains to us" (Rosenfeld 2). This is true also for Oberski"s *Childhood* and Hillesum's *Letters*. A few weeks before her deportation Hillesum still articulated

hopefulness as part of the human definition: "And yet life in its unfathomable depths is so wonderfully good, Maria—I have to come back to that time and again. And if we just care enough, Maria, God is in safe hands with us despite everything, Maria" (144). Especially those of us "who never lived under a sky of blood" (Wiesel, 203), can read such statements only in awe, anger, and humility, marvelling at the poets who, through the tragedy of world history, contributed a "little piece of stone to the great mosaic" of Jewish history and the human spirit.

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Writing in Holland and Flanders

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Writing in Holland and Flanders was the irregularly appearing publication of the "Foundation for the Promotion of the Translation of Dutch Literary Works," also known more simply as the "Foundation for Translations." Established in 1954 by the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Public Health, and Culture, and also supported since 1960 by the Belgian Ministry of Dutch Culture, the Foundation's primary task, according to its constitution, "is to promote the knowledge of Dutch literature outside the Dutch language area." It fulfills this mandate by seeking out international publishers for translated works, promoting publications at book fairs, facilitating international contacts for Dutch authors and providing them with information pertinent to the translation process, working with the translators themselves, and generally representing the interests of Dutch literature abroad through whatever channel seems appropriate.

Writing in Holland and Flanders played a role in a number of these functions. Provided free of charge, with a circulation of about 3,000, it presented authors, most often from the twentieth century, by a brief biographical sketch and translated excerpts from their works. Sometimes an entire issue was devoted to one author (eg. Vol. 35 [Spring 1978] on Remco Campaert), with a slightly more extensive discussion of his or her writing and translations from several works; sometimes an issue focussed on authors by dealing with a particular theme (eg. Vol. 40 [Autumn 1982]; *The Child is Father of the Man. Flemish Writers about their Parents,* or Vol. 36 [Spring 1979]: *Exploring the World of Women. A survey by Diny Schouten)*; most often, however, an issue presented a very large number of different authors with no apparent commonality except for the Dutch language of their writing. Some of the translated excerpts were taken from completed translations for which a manuscript was available for publication; at other times the excerpt was intended to pique the interest of a potential publisher so that the translation could be commissioned. From 1956 to 1982 forty volumes appeared; since 1982 publication has been suspended.