Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym

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Authors who publish their works under a pseudonym usually do so to conceal some essential fact about their identity. For the Holocaust survivor who calls himself Ka-Tzetnik 135633 (Concentration-Camp Inmate 135633), however, pseudonymous publication has served just the opposite function: it forces readers to confront what he presents as the one and only significant aspect of who he is. Ka- Tzetnik adopted this strategy with the publication of his first book about his wartime experiences, a volume titled *Salamandra,* which appeared in Hebrew in 1946, and he has maintained it down to the present day. Even after he became a national celebrity in Israel—a result due both to his writings and to his spectacular appearance at the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, in which he fell unconscious on the witness stand—Ka-Tzetnik refused to allow his photograph to appear on the jackets of any of his books, would not speak in public or grant interviews, and did not attend ceremonies for the presentation of the Ka-Tzetnik book prize, an award endowed in his honor by one of his admirers.[1] Only a transformative experience in the 1980s, when he was almost seventy, led him to modify his attempt to live a symbolic life as a pseudonym.

When *Salamandra* was published in 1946, the process of gathering first-hand testimony about the ghettoes and death camps was just beginning. Ka-Tzetnik's book, written in Hebrew and published in a Palestine preoccupied with the postwar struggle for a Jewish state, attracted little attention elsewhere; it was not published in English until 1977.[2] His second Holocaust volume, *House of Dolls,* based on his sister's gruesome fate as a prisoner in a concentration-camp brothel, appeared in 1956 and had considerably greater success. It was promptly translated into numerous other languages, and the English version had gone through fifty printings by 1977.[3] *House of Dolls* was followed by *Atrocity* (also known as *Piepel)*, based on the experiences of the author's younger brother, and *Phoenix over the Galilee,* in which the main character from *Salamandra* sought his place in the new state of Israel.[4] In Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, Ka-Tzetnik became a best-selling author, especially among younger readers who appreciated his direct and uncensored portrayal of a historical period that their elders were unwilling to discuss honestly.[5] Outside Israel, however, Ka-Tzetnik's work has failed to achieve a place in the literary canon of Holocaust survivor literature. The emotional nature of his writing, his limited success in sketching characters with psychological depth, and his frankness about details of the physical and moral humiliations inflicted on the Jews during the war make it easy to classify his writing with that of

[1] Tom Segev, The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust, tr. Haim Watzman (New York, 1991), pp. 4–5; hereafter cited in text as SM.

[2] Ka-Tzetnik 135633, Sunrise over Hell, tr. Nina De-Nur (London, 1977). The original Hebrew title is Salamandra (1946), hereafter cited in text as S.

[3] Ka-Tzetnik 135633, House of Dolls, tr. Moshe M. Kohn (London, 1977).

[4] Ka-Tzetnik 135633, Phoenix over the Galilee (New York, 1969). Originally published in 1966; hereafter cited in text as P.

[5] Omer Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust," Jewish Social Studies, 3 (1997), 42–72, esp. 42–50; hereafter cited in text as KS.

popular novelists who did not personally experience the Holocaust, such as Leon Uris. Today, despite enormously increased interest in the Holocaust, the English- language versions of his books on the Holocaust are all out of print, a degree of neglect that is certainly unjustified.[6]

In everyday life, the author who calls himself Ka-Tzetnik does indeed answer to a given name. He was born in Poland in 1917 as Yehiel Feiner. Like many survivors who made their lives in Israel after the war, he marked his new life by assuming a new Hebrew name, Yehiel De-Nur. ("De-Nur" means "From the Fire," a direct reference to his Holocaust experience *[SM* 4].) But a rigorous separation between his everyday identity and that of Ka-Tzetnik 135633 has been central to his attempt to communicate the essence of the Holocaust experience. The use of the number tattooed on his arm at Auschwitz as an authorial name communicates two fundamental facts about his camp experience: that Auschwitz deprived him of the personal identity that would justify a claim to a proper name, and that the purpose of his writings is not to speak of his own experiences, but to record those of the other victims who did not survive to speak for themselves.

Like many survivor-authors, Ka-Tzetnik has emphasized the devastating impact that being reduced to a mere number had on his sense of identity. In *Salamandra*,, he described the experience this way: "The scribe stabbed as he spoke: 'Get this, whoreson, Hymie Cohen isn't your name any longer. You're dead. Name's exactly what this number says on your arm. It's what they call you by when the furnace wants you. Get it?"' *(S* 161). The tattooed number effaces the victim's name and consigns him in advance to death; it is the mark by which the perpetrators impose their will on him and force him to become their accomplice in obliterating his own sense of self. The anonymous narrator of *Salamandra* continues, "On removal from the scene of registration, total equality had been established—all were in one image, and dispossessed of the last distinguishing mark brought along from the other world—the individual name" *(S* 161). The name—the basis of individuality—is gone, and the Ka-Tzetnik—camp slang for prisoner—is reduced to part of an anonymous mass. Devastating as it was, however, this experience conferred one privilege: it made Ka-Tzetnik part of the collectivity of prisoners. If he could no longer claim the right to speak of his individual experiences, he had gained the right to speak for the group as a whole. By insisting on retaining this (non) identity even in the post-Holocaust world,

[6] Critical literature in English on Ka-Tzetnik is limited; he is not even mentioned in the standard work of Alan Mintz, Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature (New York, 1984) or in most encyclopedias of the Holocaust. The chapter on him in Alan J. Yu ter, The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature: From Genocide to Rebirth (Port Washington, N.Y., 1983) is very unsatisfactory: Yuter seems unaware of the existence of Ka-Tzetnik's first book, Salamandra, even though it provides the essential background for understanding all his other works. Omer Bartov's article (see note 5) is the most important discussion in English; Howard Needier discusses Ka-Tzetnik's use of Biblical imagery in "Red Fire upon Black Fire: Hebrew in the Holocaust Novels of K. Tsetnik," Writing and the Holocaust, ed. Berel Lang (New York, 1988), pp. 234–44; hereafter cited in text as RF.

Ka-Tzetnik brings the reality of "planet Auschwitz" to that other planet, Earth, whose inhabitants have such difficulty conceiving what Holocaust victims went through.

Although Ka-Tzetnik's description of the replacement of name by number in Auschwitz and its implications is similar to that of many other survivor-authors, most notably Primo Levi, his strategy for dealing with the experience is quite unusual among Holocaust memoirists. Ka- Tzetnik was one of the first survivors to cast his story as a coherent narrative, and he had to invent his own literary strategy, rather than following already established models. At the time when he wrote *Salamandra,* it was not yet clear that the first-person narrative written by a named author would emerge as the normative form for the Holocaust story. Many early Holocaust-era testimonies were published with their authors identified only by first names or initials. Not all survivors wanted to be identified with what they saw as the humiliation they had suffered, and some even feared reprisals if their identities became known. Other literary models of communicating the essence of the Holocaust experience were also possible at this point: as the French literary critic Roger Chemain has pointed out, most of the literature about the Soviet prison camps, including that written by survivors such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, has been published in the form of novels written in the third person, rather than as autobiographical memoirs.[7] During the 1950s, fictional accounts of the Holocaust such as John Hersey's *The Wall* and Andre Schwartz-Bart's *The Last of the Just* were more widely read than any of the survivor memoirs that have now come to be considered central to Holocaust literature. *Salamandra*, with its pseudonymous author, could not be categorized as either a novel or a memoir. It represented an attempt to claim the privileges of both genres and to avoid their disadvantages at a time when the stakes in the debate about the representation of the Holocaust were not yet clear. (Among other things, in Palestine in 1946, Ka-Tzetnik did not have to contend with a negationist movement that tried to deny the very reality of the Holocaust.)

Most of the authors of the survivor memoirs that have now emerged as the canonical accounts of the Holocaust experience, even those such as Elie Wiesel who have insisted on the continuing death-in-life that constitutes their post-Holocaust existence, have been emphatic about attaching their proper names to their stories. The use of a proper name functions to authenticate the experiences that an Elie Wiesel or a Primo Levi describes, experiences so extreme that they might easily engender skepticism: it tells us that there is a human being who bears that name and also bears on his arm the tattoo that testifies to his bodily experience in Auschwitz. Wiesel has taken umbrage at the mere suggestion that the recollections of anyone who was actually in the camps might be challenged: "The witness has nothing but his memory. If that is impugned, what does he have left?"[8] The recent controversy over *Fragments*, a narrative presented

[7] Roger Chemain, "Dire l'indicible a la premiere personne: experience concentrationnaire et recit autobiographique/'Awfo&zograjfr/wc et fiction romanesque: Autour des Confessions deJean- Jacques Rousseau, ed. Jacques Domenench (Nice, 1998), pp. 248–50.

[8] Elie Wiesel, Memoirs: All Rivers Run to the Sea (New York, 1995), p. 336.

as the memoir of a child survivor of the death camps but apparently written by a man who was born and brought up in Switzerland and who is not of Jewish ancestry, has highlighted the importance now attached to an author's physical presence in the Holocaust world as the necessary condition for writing about the event. The author of *Fragments* continues to fight what now appears to be a losing battle to justify the claim that the name "Binjamin Wilkomirski," which appears on the title page of his book, is not a pseudonym but a personal name to which he has a legitimate right. He has refused to settle for the satisfaction that some of his critics would perhaps concede to him: that he has written a powerfully imagined account of what a child's experience in the camps might have been like, rather than actual recollections of a childhood whose reality had been hidden from him after the war. In his mind, at least, only those who were there can really write about the Holocaust, and pseudonymous publication is not a legitimate option.[9]

Even in those Holocaust memoirs most pervaded by pessimism about the post-Auschwitz world, the author's use of a proper name is also a proof of endurance and a sign that the Nazis' intentions were, at least in part, thwarted. It demonstrates that the author survived, and managed to bear witness to crimes the Nazis had intended to compound by destroying all evidence. In the case of the woman author Gerda Weissman Klein, whose *All But My* Lz^was published in the United States in 1956, the double last name underlined not only the author's survival but her marriage and her embarkation on a new life, a true victory over the annihilation to which the Nazis had destined her. Ka-Tzetnik's pseudonym functions differently. It emphasizes the author's right to speak about Auschwitz—does he not bear the tattoo "135633" on his arm?—but it claims no victory over the death camp. The continued physical existence of the human body with that number on its skin is an accident: what matters is the murder of the other prisoners for whom Ka-Tzetnik claims to speak.

Although Ka-Tzetnik's use of a pseudonym is unusual among Holocaust memoirists, it follows a long tradition of symbolic authorial names among eastern European Jewish writers, going back to Mendele Mokher Sforim (Mendele the Bookseller), the "grandfather of Yiddish literature" (1836–1917), and continuing with authors such as Sholom Aleichem, Der Nister, and Ahad Ha-Am, whose pen name "One of the People," like Ka-Tzetnik's, turns the author into the representative of a collectivity. Admittedly, Ahad Ha-Am wrote primarily in Hebrew, whereas Howard Needier has suggested that at least Ka-Tzetnik's first book, *Salamandra,* was probably written in Yiddish, even though it was published in Hebrew—a supposition strengthened by the recent publica-

[9] On the Wilkomirski affair, see the comprehensive investigation in Stefan Maechler, The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth (New York, 2001), and Jeremy D. Popkin, "First-Person Narrative and the Memory of the Holocaust," Ideas, 8 (2002), forthcoming. For an attempt to give Wilkomirski's memoir some truth status in spite of the evidence that the author was never involved in the Holocaust, see Michael Bernard-Donals, "'Blot Out the Name of Amalek': Memory and Forgetting in the Fragments Controversy," Journal of the Midwest Modem Language Association, 33/34 (2000–01), 122–36.

tion of *Kaddish*, a volume of shorter pieces that first appeared in a Oddish- language journal (RF 238).[10] Ka-Tzetnik's work can thus be seen as the horrifying conclusion of the Yiddish tradition of literary realism, in which pseudonymous authors figured so importantly. (The uncertainty about Ka-Tzetnik's language of composition is another aspect of the air of mystery that his use of a pseudonym has conferred on his work.) Ka- Tzetnik may have provided a model for the frankly pornographic "Stalag" novels discussed by Omer Bartov. Set in the Nazi camps, these usually anonymous stories were popular in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s. But Ka-Tzetnik cannot have borrowed the idea of publishing under a pseudonym from this literature, since he had been using his pseudonym since 1946, before these works had begun to appear (ELS 49).

Ka-Tzetnik has consistently and deliberately rejected the authorial strategy employed by most of his fellow Holocaust survivors in favor of one in which the very name on the title page of his books repeatedly reenacts the fundamental fact about his experience in Auschwitz. As he has put it in a short sketch entitled "Curriculum Vitae," "K. Tzetnik was born in Auschwitz in 1943... When a Red Army officer asked him: 'What's your name?' K. Tzetnik answered: 'My name was burned with all the rest in the crematorium at Auschwitz'" *(K*152–53). The personhood that was lost in Auschwitz can never be recovered. "Ka-Tzetnik 135633" is not a pseudonym, but the real identity of the author who wrote the words that were published as *Salamandra* and all the books that followed. The continuous reenactment of the loss of identity that occurred in Auschwitz is only part of the significance of Ka-Tzetnik's gesture, however. The other half is his insistence that the story he tells is that of all the prisoners, and particularly of those who did not survive. "For two long years they trod through me, their eyes penetrating mine," he has written.[11] The doomed prisoners' reality became his, and it is what happened to them, not what he personally suffered, that motivates his writing. In the sketch "Curriculum Vitae," he recreates the scene in which he completed the manuscript of *Salamandra* in 1946. When the author was told that "You have forgotten to write the author's name," he claims to have responded, "They! They wrote these pages. They who went to the crematorium! The K. Tzetniks! They are the authors of this book!" (*K*153). In this way, Ka-Tzetnik attempts to answer the objection to survivor literature articulated in the title of one of the earliest published volumes of survivor testimony, *I Did Not Interview the Dead.* Given that more than five million Jews died at the hands of the Nazis, and that only about 100,000 survived the camps, survivor literature is necessarily a minority report. Ka-Tzetnik's authorial gesture attempts to get around this obstacle by abolishing the line separating those who survived and those who did not, by insisting that the complete emptying out of his identity symbolized by the adoption of a number in place of a name also marks the

[10] K. Tzetnik [sic], Kaddish (New York, 1998); hereafter cited in text as K.

[11] Ka-Tzetnik 135633, Shivitti: A Vision, tr. Eliyah Nike De-Nur and Lisa Herman (San Francisco, 1989), p. xi. Originally published in Hebrew in 1987; hereafter cited in text as SV

fusion of the identities of all those who bore numbers. They "trod through him," and thus became part of him, and he can legitimately speak for them.

By adopting the anonymity of his concentration-camp number, Ka- Tzetnik has been able to create a form of testimonial writing that effaces the difference between fiction and memoir. In particular, this has made it possible for him to explore that moral no-man's-land that Primo Levi (whose Holocaust memoir was published more than a decade after Ka- Tzetnik's first book, and who therefore cannot have influenced the Israeli author) has labeled "the gray zone."[12] For Levi, the notion of the "gray zone" is a way of arguing that there were moral distinctions even among the Nazis' victims, and that some Jews can rightfully be censured for their conduct toward their fellows, even if the overall responsibility for the Holocaust remains unmistakably with the Germans who initiated it. Describing what those Jews who occupied the darker regions of the "gray zone" did poses a dilemma for survivor-authors, however. They have often been restrained both because even the majority of those whose behavior they condemn died horrible deaths, and because of the difficulty of writing about their own actions without sounding either self- abasing or self-righteous. *Playing for Time*, Fania Fenelon's well-known memoir of her survival as a member of the relatively privileged group of Auschwitz prisoners who formed the camp's women's orchestra, -illustrates the latter danger: Fenelon castigates the behavior of a number of her fellow inmates in such specific terms that the individuals concerned could certainly be identified by others who knew them. At the same time, she portrays herself as a moral person, consistently concerned for others. In effect, her lack of charity toward many of her companions undermines the credibility of her own self-portrait.[13]

Since his pseudonym allows him to claim to be writing truthfully without engaging himself to write only about his own experiences, Ka- Tzetnik has greater latitude to talk about the full range of Jewish behavior in the ghettoes and death camps. He exploits these possibilities most fully in some of the short sketches collected in *Kaddish,* stories in which there is no identified protagonist or narrator. In "Block Curfew," for example, he tells of ten prisoners trapped in their wooden Auschwitz bunk during an endless block curfew, forbidden even to go to the latrines. They know that the penalty for a prisoner who wets the straw in the bunk is death. As the hours of torture stretch on, one of the ten reaches the limit of his endurance. The others sense his coming breakdown, and prepare to take advantage of it: "After him, they too will be able to let loose a drop. They'll blame it on the first... Nine are out to save their lives at the cost of the tenth. Before their eyes, a wick of life wavers lit, bound to the contortions of its wane, not wanting to go out" *(K* 79). This story has the force of first-hand observation, but

[12] One example of Levi's description of the gray zone occurs in "Story of a Coin." He writes, "It is typical of regimes in which all power rains down from above and no criticism can rise from below, to weaken and confound people's capacity for judgment, to create a vast zone of gray consciences that stand between the great men of evil and the pure victims" (Primo Levi, Moments of Reprieve, tr. Ruth Feldman [New York, 1987], p. 171).

[13] Fania Fenelon, Playing for Time, tr. Judith Landry (New York, 1977).

exactly where was the narrator? Clearly, he was not the victim, for he would not have survived to write about it. Was he one of the other nine men in the bunk? If so, he is telling us that we are reading a story told by someone who consciously took advantage of a fellow-prisoner's weakness to save himself. His action was perhaps excusable under the conditions of the concentration camp—it was not his fault that the other prisoner could not restrain himself, and, once he had loosed his urine, his bunkmates' actions could not make his situation any worse—but it certainly raises moral questions. Did the narrator witness the event from another bunk in the barracks, or did he hear the story from someone who witnessed it? The force of the episode comes from our conviction that the narrator experienced it directly; if we knew that the story was an invention, its significance would be different. Ka-Tzetnik's strategy of leaving the relationship between author, narrator, and protagonist undefined allows him to draw the reader into the horror of a Holocaust experience while bracketing the question of his own personal location in the story.

Not all of Ka-Tzetnik's Holocaust narratives are told in this impersonal fashion, however. *Salamandra* and a number of the sketches in *Kaddish* have an identified protagonist, Harry Preleshnik, the outlines of whose life correspond to what Ka-Tzetnik has been willing to reveal about his own background. The stories are set in the region of Upper Silesia, where Ka-Tzetnik lived before the war. Like his protagonist, Ka-Tzetnik as a young man interested himself in music, poetry, and literature. *Salamandra* includes a number of historically identifiable characters. The head of the Gestapo in the fictional city of Metropoli, where the story takes place, is given the name Alfred Dreyer, the name of the actual Gestapo commander in the city of Katowicz, a city in the area, and Monyek Matroz, the dictatorial head of the Metropoli Jewish Council, is undoubtedly modeled after Moshe Merin, the Jewish official who used German backing to make himself virtual ruler over the ghettoes in Ka- Tzetnik's native region *(SM* 6).[14] *Salamandra* has the structure of a relatively "normal" realistic autobiographical novel: its characters live out their terrible destinies in a framework that corresponds closely to the historical record, and its authenticity is bolstered by the fact that it was published immediately after the war, before there was much documentation that an author who was not there could have drawn on. Although much of the story is no doubt based on Ka-Tzetnik's personal experience, the narrator of *Salamandra* sometimes avails himself of the privileges of a novelist. For example, he records thoughts and experiences of other characters in the novel that the main protagonist could not have known of, such as Harry's wife Sanya's participation in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

In *Salamandra*, we thus have an anonymous author who uses a pseudonym to represent himself as lacking any personal identity, but we have a protagonist who is a unique character, not a Polish Jewish Everyman, and who retains his individuality throughout most of the story. In the final scene, it is true, Harry Preleshnik finds himself buried under a mound of fellow-prisoners' corpses: "Rising from the mound

[14] Philip Friedman, "Two 'Saviors' Who Failed," Commentary, (1948), 479–91.

of corpses to his knees, [he] appeared to be one, grown from their midst" (*S* 215). In a scene in Ka-Tzetnik's later book *Phoenix over the Galilee*, however, we see Harry Preleshnik—but not Ka-Tzetnik!—regaining a sense of identity by putting his story down on paper: "[H]is hand shot out in reflex for the pen, as, at that moment, the first words screamed themselves out of him onto the page. He saw the letters of the words. They were flaming before his eyes. He connected them: HARRY PRELESHNIK... He wrote without respite. Without cease. He had shed his here-and-now. Passed into the planet Auschwitz, which moves in orbits beyond the boundaries of time" (P66). Ka-Tzetnik was thus able to see the act of writing as a way of reclaiming a personal identity; he allowed his alter ego, Harry Preleshnik, to connect himself to his prewar existence. He himself, however, refused this gesture and insisted on maintaining his symbolic status as a nonperson and nonauthor.

Although Ka-Tzetnik has clung to his literary anonymity, he has himself questioned its meaning and its cost in at least two of his later works, so that we have the spectacle of a pseudonymous author sharing with readers his unease about his use of his pseudonym. Ka-Tzetnik wrestled with this subject at length in *Phoenix over the Galilee*, published in Israel shortly before the "Six-Day War" of 1967, and again in *Shivitti,* his account of the psychiatric treatment he received in the Netherlands in the 1970s. *Phoenix over the Galilee* follows Ka-Tzetnik's fictional alter ago, Harry Preleshnik, as he escapes from post-war Europe and slowly and painfully makes a new life for himself in Israel. The book is unmistakably autobiographical: Preleshnik, as we have seen, finds a renewed purpose for post-Auschwitz life by writing the story of the victims of the Holocaust, which he publishes under the title of *Salamandra*, the title Ka- Tzetnik had used for his first book. Like Ka-Tzetnik, Preleshnik rejects his prewar identity and publishes his book under a pseudonym, "Phoenix," although the reference to the mythical bird which is reborn from its own ashes conveys a sense of optimism missing in the name "Ka-Tzetnik." As in Ka-Tzetnik's actual life, the book published by the protagonist of *Phoenix over the Galilee* overwhelms one young woman reader so much that she tracks down the author and eventually becomes his wife.

Despite the many parallels between Ka-Tzetnik and Preleshnik, we cannot be certain that the latter's conflicts over his concealed identity are a direct reflection of the former's thoughts. Nevertheless, Preleshnik's wrestlings with the issue are suggestive. When he visits his publisher's office, Preleshnik "couldn't bear the thought that the employees would identify him as the book's author. Frequently he had questioned his need for anonymity, but unable to account for it, he put it out of his mind. The thing was more than he could handle" (P 88–89). He dreams of a refuge where "he could lock himself away from all eyes. Only then would he be alone with those who were within him—as he had been within them during their final moments" *(P* 89). Preleshnik's pseudonym is thus his way of avoiding reintegration into society and remaining true to his Auschwitz experience: without it, he could not remain united with those who had died, and for whom he claimed to speak. Later, however, Preleshnik tries to help a survivor friend find a publisher for his own testimony and discovers that *Salamandra*

has been too successful in speaking for the dead: an editor rejects his friend's memoir and explains to the two of them that "after the recent publication of *Salamandra*, currently on the market, there was nothing to be added to the subject" (P90). Preleshnik tries to challenge this assertion, insisting on the importance of his friend's individual testimony: "What is in that manuscript in front of you now could have been written by no one but this man" (P90). But the editor remains adamant that the anonymous and collective witness offered by *Salamandra* renders any other accounts unnecessary. Constrained by the persona he has constructed for himself, Preleshnik is unable to reply. The pain of this rejection is too much for Preleshnik's friend, who dies of a heart attack; his manuscript disappears, so that "not a trace would remain of the memorial Abrasha had wanted for his dead family, neither a name nor a memory left behind" (PI 15). The story raises the troubling possibility that, in absorbing all other victims' testimonies into his own, Ka-Tzetnik/Preleshnik has symbolically killed his fellow survivors. But he also fears that if he lets his true identity be known, he will be overwhelmed by a sympathy he fears will destroy him: "He craved the closeness of others and recoiled from it for fear they would find out who he was and where he had come from. He wanted so much to be like everyone else. But how could he enter their homes if they didn't know who he was. And once they did, his life's disaster would be exposed to their pitying stares. No sleeve could hide the Auschwitz number on his arm. Like a mark of Cain, the number would stand out on his forehead" (P 107–8). Preleshnik is thus condemned to tell his story in such a way that no one can connect it with its author.

In *Phoenix over the Galilee*, the pseudonymous author is redeemed by a determined woman who pierces his disguise and offers him her love. Preleshnik resists, but finally yields when they meet in a crowd celebrating the United Nations vote to create an independent Jewish state in November 1947. Their marriage produces two children, named for the brother and sister Preleshnik lost in the Holocaust, but his partial return to normal life is purchased at the price of his wife Galilea's descent into her own version of hell as she is overwhelmed by the burden of sharing Preleshnik's horrible memories. Only when the two of them come to identify with the suffering of Israel's Arab population—to see that Jews can be perpetrators of injustice as well as its victims—are they both able to achieve a certain equilibrium. *Phoenix over the Galilee* earned Ka- Tzetnik the unusual privilege, for a Holocaust author, of translation into Arabic. But the book clearly expressed his unease at his status as Israel's national witness to the Holocaust and his sense of the price he continued to pay for his unique authorial strategy.

These themes are also prominent in *Shivitti,* the most recent of Ka- Tzetnik's reflections on the Holocaust. (*Kaddish*, the volume of shorter pieces published in 1998, appears to consist of material written earlier in his career.) *Shivitti* describes the decision Ka-Tzetnik made in the 1970s to submit himself to a Dutch psychiatrist's program of treatment with LSD for patients suffering from persistent traumatic memories. In Ka- Tzetnik's case, the treatments induced hallucinatory visions based on his experi-

ences in Auschwitz. As he tried to transcribe these visions, the author filled dozens of folio pages with tiny letters without even realizing the newness of what I'm doing: I am writing in the first person! Until now, all of my books have used the third person, even though I've had to go through contortions doing so. All I've ever written is in essence a personal journal, a testimonial on paper of I, I, I: I who witnessed ... I who experienced ... I who lived through ... I, I, I, till halfway through a piece, I suddenly had to transform / to *he.* I felt the split, the ordeal, the alienation of it, and worst of all—may God forgive me—I felt like the Writer of Literature. But still I knew unless I hid behind the third person, I wouldn't have been able to write at all. And lo and behold, here I am in the thick of the manuscript and totally unaware of how naturally I am allowing—from the first line onward—the connection with *I.* ... Without a shadow of a doubt I can at last acknowledge my two identities, coexisting in my body. (ST70)

In writing this extraordinary passage, Ka-Tzetnik in effect renounced the authorial strategy that had governed all his previous works, even though its grip on him remained powerful enough so that *Shivitti* still bore only the pseudonym "Ka-Tzetnik" on its title page and readers were not actually told his proper name. Under the influence of LSD, he was able to state directly his desire to reclaim an individual identity and to speak of his experiences as truly his, as something belonging to him. Belatedly, he expressed his desire to abandon his special status, suspended somewhere between novelist and memoirist, and to join the ranks of Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, and Gerda Weissman Klein. By asking forgiveness for having functioned as "the Writer of Literature," he accepted the claim that Holocaust testimony should be presented in the form of direct, eyewitness accounts, uninfluenced by aesthetic considerations. Writing in this mode would finally let him bring together his everyday identity and his authorial persona. In *Shivitti*, Ka-Tzetnik describes his first halting effort to act the part of a person with an identity that could bring together these two halves of his life. It consisted of taking off his shirt on a Dutch public beach, the first time he had ever let strangers see his Auschwitz tattoo: "Perhaps I could there because no one knew me. It wasn't Israel, where every schoolchild knows the meaning of a plain blue number of someone's arm, knows where that person has been." In the event, he quickly ended his experiment when he realized there were Germans on the beach looking at him *(SV* 24–25).

The paradox of Ka-Tzetnik's proclaimed ability to bring the two levels of his existence together and acknowledge the reality of his experience in Auschwitz is that it was made possible only because of his plunge into a realm of complete unreality. In his LSD-induced visions, the smoke from the chimneys of Auschwitz takes on the shape of a mushroom cloud, which Ka-Tzetnik recognizes as "Ashmadai the new King of Kings, lord of the universe." Only when he is able to share with readers his hallucinations, including one in which his own face appears in an SS cap, does Ka-Tzetnik also feel able to connect himself to the experiences he actually went through there *(SV*40–41). It is, so to speak, only after exposing himself publicly as someone capable of taking leave of reality altogether that he is also able to present himself as a witness to the reality of what happened in the Holocaust. In *Shivitti*, Auschwitz, described in such

grim detail in *Salamandra* and *Kaddish*, becomes a symbolic site where imagery of nuclear holocaust, Nazi Holocaust, and Jewish mysticism merge to produce a universal message about the human capacity for evil *(SV* 9–11). Even as readers are taken on this bewildering journey, however, they are simultaneously asked to believe more firmly than ever in the veracity of the author's previous accounts of wartime Poland, for Ka-Tzetnik renounces the role of the "Writer of Literature" and proclaims himself a simple witness.

Its meditations on the universality of the human potentiality for evil and its call for universal reconciliation have given *Shivitti* a motley but devoted following: a search of the World Wide Web turns up favorable references to it not only on sites about the Holocaust but also on some pages put up by Zen Buddhists, and on the site of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, which helped subsidize the book's publication in English. In the wake of its appearance, Ka-Tzetnik did, for the first time, agree to be interviewed on television and in the Israeli press *(SM* 11). Commentators such as Omer Bartov have seen *Shivitti* as a sign that Ka-Tzetnik has finally completed a personal dialectical transformation that has allowed him to bring together the two separate halves of his life, as Holocaust survivor and as Israeli author. This may be an excessively optimistic reading, however. As I have noted, *Shivitti* has been published, like all of Ka-Tzetnik's previous works, under the pseudonym that he has used since 1946. Bartov himself reports that in 1993, some years after *Shivitti* s publication, Ka-Tzetnik surreptitously removed one of the few surviving copies of the book of poetry he had published in Poland in 1931 from the National Library in Jerusalem and burned it (KS 59, 67). Through this reenactment of what the Nazis did to books by Jewish authors, he reaffirmed his insistence that the Holocaust had destroyed his prewar identity, and that he wished to be known only through the writings that bear the nonname "Ka-Tzetnik 135633."

Despite the unease with the personal consequences of his adoption of that pseudonym expressed in *Phoenix over the Galilee* and *Shivitti*, Ka- Tzetnik 135633 has thus remained loyal to the conviction he expressed in his first statements about the Holocaust: that only the deliberate abandonment of any claim to personal identity can convey the truth of what Holocaust victims experienced. His insistence on imprinting on the title pages of his books the Auschwitz tattoo that he would not reveal in his personal life has been a form of performance that brings readers into direct contact with "planet Auschwitz" and bridges the gap between memoir and fiction. Unlike Mark Twain and other pseudonymous authors who have used their constructed personas to give themselves greater freedom and to keep readers at a distance from their "true" selves, Ka-Tzetnik has insisted that the nonidentity imposed on him in Auschwitz is the reality of his existence. He has done so even in works that simultaneously reveal the existence of an actual person behind the pseudonym—a person with a family, a person engaged in the problems of the post-Holocaust world, even a person desperate to close the rupture in himself caused by the Holocaust and the strategy he adopted to communicate that experience. Paradoxically, Ka-Tzetnik has demonstrated both

the power of the pseudonym as a sign of truth and its power to impose a kind of martyrdom on its employer.

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