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Williams, Alexander

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Witnessing the Ghost, Letting the Ghost Witness: Exploring the Impediments of Witness Narratives in Holocaust Camp Testimonies through Spectrality and the Metaphor of the *Muselmann*

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FORUM

Witnessing the Ghost, Letting the Ghost Witness

Exploring the Impediments of Witness Narratives in Holocaust Camp Testimonies through Spectrality and the Metaphor of the *Muselmann*

Alexander Williams

Abstract Within debates surrounding "Levi's Paradox"—the idea that through their survival, survivors are not necessarily the "complete witnesses" of the Holocaust—the *Muselmann* is frequently posited as able to reconcile this conundrum. Within testimonial literature, these emaciated prisoners were perceived as ghost-like entities who were neither alive nor dead but somehow between life and death. The observed absence left in witness narratives thereby appears to be testimony from inside the experience of these *Muselmänner*. What is ubiquitously overlooked in such analyses is that the *Muselmann* primarily functions as a metaphor—rendering the absent dead legible in language. Ignoring this risks instrumentalizing the *Muselmann,* which threatens to allow the metaphor to become shorthand for something more generic—obfuscating the reality that *Muselmänner* signify real Holocaust victims.

However, all metaphors contain a potential for semantic flexibility. Cannot the *Muselmann's* ability to pollute rigid dichotomies therefore be approached productively and more ethically when refocalizing him as a ghostly entity in testimonial literature? By examining passages from Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* and Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*, this article asks: if the *Muselmann* is viewed as a ghostly or spectral metaphor—a haunting force within the Holocaust's literary corpus—how might this spectral witness be able to draw attention to erasure and historical blind spots? Constituting an ethical and an interpretive undertaking, this refocalization simultaneously allows one to speak with the

Muselmann and enables these anonymous victims to manifest themselves anew as haunting forces through literary testimony.

Keywords Holocaust, *Muselmann*, metaphor, ghost, testimony

One question which has perpetually haunted Holocaust discourse is how to testify and narrativize the harrowing experiences undergone by those in concentration and extermination camps. Survivors have frequently remarked that familiar words somehow fail to grasp the radical unfamiliarity of events that occurred in places such as Auschwitz or Treblinka. Charlotte Delbo, for instance, writes in the opening lines of her testimony that "today, I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain that it is truthful."[1] While such discrepancies between language and experience can partly be attributed to the fact that survivors' narrative strategies are unable to aptly reflect the extreme nature of their experience, this forestalling of narrative is predominantly predicated on the process of witnessing itself. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi corroborates this by explaining that Holocaust testimonies effectively appear as "a discourse 'on behalf of third parties,' the story of things seen from close by [but] not experienced personally."[2] This distinction between the innumerable "drowned" and the few "saved" concisely points to the paradoxical nature of narratively representing a camp experience: by virtue of their survival, survivors are not the complete witnesses of the genocidal process. Without suggesting that survivors are *faux*-victims, it illuminates an inherent asymmetry, as witness narratives of this kind always-already remain once removed from the visceral process of extermination. Narratives thereby necessarily have to speak by proxy simply because no one, Levi concludes, "has ever returned to describe his own death."[3] Yet cannot this absence in narrative, this unwitnessable lacuna left by the dead, be approached by somebody who is viewed as being simultaneously alive and dead?

Often portrayed as a nameless, mute, and emaciated inmate, the *Muselmann* occupies an ambiguous and paradoxical position within literary camp testimony. The term itself denoted any prisoner whose situation, due to extreme malnourishment, was perceived by others as being hopeless and who consequently found himself teetering on the verge of death. Because of this, the *Muselmann* was often described as a walking corpse, a "bundle of psychical functions in its last convulsions"[4] who struck outside observers as a remarkably intangible figure to whom either/or dichotomies seemed inapplicable. Through his body, rigid oppositions somehow appeared to become undone as the *Muselmann* gave the impression of inhabiting a corporeal purgatory—becoming a ghost-like, liminal entity who was neither alive nor dead but rather situated *between* life and death. Within debates regarding questions of

attestability and narrative lacunae, the *Muselmann* has accrued a sizeable modicum of attention, especially after Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz*. With an ostensible ability to disturb fixed dichotomies, the *Muselmann* is frequently posited by scholars as a conduit who can ameliorate the paradoxes of witnessing—a "model *par excellence* for victim experience."[5] Since the *Muselmann* almost literally seems to incarnate the moving threshold where life passes into death,[6] the observed absence in witness narratives can be read as "testimony from *inside* the experience of the *Muselmann*."[7] According to Agamben and others, the *Muselmann* thus acts as a "complete witness"[8] as life and death seem to continually pass through each other within his body—circumventing all the narrative impediments outlined above.

Although the *Muselmann's* enigmatic qualities can certainly aid in exploring problematics of witness narratives, is the aforementioned interpretative framework not overly restrictive? As Esther Norma Marion suggests, it threatens to position *Muselmänner* as "ideal" theoretical subjects—abstract figures devoid of any individual history who merely serve to corroborate preimposed structures.[9] Furthermore, it elevates the *Muselmann* into a paradigmatic figure of the ultimate witness, thereby inadvertently presupposing a hierarchy of witnessing. Ultimately, it disregards the fact that within testimonial literature the *Muselmann* primarily functions as a metaphor—a placeholder who renders the myriad anonymous, absent dead legible in language. Even if a text concerning the *Muselmann* is one which calls for interpretation, such an interpretation therefore cannot take the form of the metaphor being utilized in a purely descriptive manner which merely "speaks about" the *Muselmann*. This approach not only threatens to overlook or negate the connection between subject and metaphor, but additionally risks the metaphor becoming shorthand for something more generic: obfuscating the reality that *Muselmänner* signify real victims of the Holocaust. Rather, as D.G. Myers asserts, testimonial Holocaust literature "demand[s] an ethical response that not only precedes interpretation but serves as its basis."[10] Moreover, what of these metaphorical characteristics? It appears incongruous that scholars have hitherto paid scant attention to why the *Muselmann* manifests in testimonial literature as an enigmatic figure who resists straightforward articulation. In this context, Angi Buettner observes a certain reticence as the *Muselmann* somehow resists phrasing through accepted idioms, describing this process as "haunting."[11] This impromptu remark regarding the specifically haunting character of the *Muselmann* warrants further attention: if *Muselmänner* are interpreted as figures which can haunt, do they not evoke similarities to other undead characters in literature such as ghouls, phantoms or ghosts?

Recall Primo Levi's notable portrayal of the *Muselmann* in *If This Is a Man*, where he writes that "their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Muselmänner* [. . .] an anonymous mass, continually renewed, [. . .] non-men who march and labor in silence." "One hesitates," Levi continues, "to call them living: one

hesitates to call their death death" and concludes that on their faces and in their eyes, "not a trace of a thought is to be seen."[12] The hesitation with which Levi confronts the ontological status of these "non-men" signals their perceived uncertain position between life and death, and presence and absence. Traditionally, the figure of the ghost exhibits a similar liminal predisposition which, comparable to the *Muselmann*, unhinges and puts into question the very rigidity of such dichotomies. Furthermore, ghosts are powerful figures of return. As disturbing and unwelcome reminders of past transgressions or portents of a future death, they incite fear through their capacity to haunt the imagination of others.[13] Continuously coming back "renewed" to incite existential trepidation within the minds of others with their nonpresence, *Muselmänner* similarly returned—seeming to haunt the camps unceasingly as nonmen and undead entities. Finally, the concept of the ghost is already able to harness the latent potential of the liminal characteristics which it shares with the *Muselmann* metaphor. This is important because all metaphors contain a certain potential for semantic flexibility which, as Esther Peeren notes, enables the possibility to "work *with* the metaphor, reshaping it to activate other, more empowering associations."[14] Accordingly, if the *Muselmann* has the potential to illuminate the narrative testimonial absence through his ambivalent position between life and death and his ghost-like abilities to unsettle rigid dichotomies, then cannot these abilities be approached both productively and ethically responsibly when refocalizing the *Muselmann* as a ghostly entity in testimonial literature?

This article therefore considers how, if the *Muselmann* metaphor is viewed as a ghostly or spectral metaphor—a haunting force within the literary corpus of the Holocaust—this spectral witness might be able to draw attention to erasures and historical blind spots. Literary testimony is thereby the ideal medium to approach the *Muselmann's* paradoxical functioning. As a genre, it enables one to approach that which ordinarily refuses to be assimilated into full cognition, as it precludes the need for any conclusion or attestation of systemic knowledge.[15] Therefore, while the *Muselmann's* liminality circumvents conventional dichotomous forms, the literary allows these characteristics to be read on the self-same principles of incoherence. To this end, the first part of this article explores how the *Muselmann* manifests as a metaphor in testimonial literature, using for example Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*. By looking at the perception of death in conjunction with the *Muselmann's* relationship to fellow inmates, it shall be explored how *Muselmänner* can function as metaphorically liminal entities who haunted the minds of others. Secondly, a vignette from Charlotte Delbo's testimony *Auschwitz and After* will be analyzed. Inspired by Jacques Derrida and Esther Peeren's work on the spectral, this analysis examines how Delbo portrays the liminal characteristics of the *Muselmann* within her narrative and argues that it is possible to perceive the

vignette as a "haunted" text which accommodates the use of this unutilized form of interpretation within Holocaust narratives.[16] Constituting an ethical as well as an interpretive undertaking, this refocalization allows one to speak *with* the *Muselmann* while simultaneously enabling these anonymous victims to manifest themselves anew as haunting forces through the literary testimony. Questioning which forms such a haunting might take potentially opens up new areas of knowledge as the address of the *Muselmann*—akin to the manner in which Cathy Caruth speaks of trauma—"lead[s] to an encounter with another through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound."[17]

WALKING HUNGER: THE *MUSELMANN*

In the multilingual environment of Auschwitz-Birkenau, every inmate was aware what the term *Muselmann* entailed, regardless of their native tongue. Sharing similar connotations with other euphemisms considered taboo within the camp such as *Brausebad* [shower] or *Sonderbehandlung* [special treatment],[18] it denoted those who were viewed by other prisoners as physically devastated and morally destroyed. Derived from an epithet denoting "the Muslim," the etymological origins of the phrase are unknown.[19] Although the expression was in common use in Auschwitz, Wolfgang Sofsky writes that in Majdanek these "living dead" were termed "donkeys"; in Dachau "cretins";[20] and in the women's camp Ravensbrück, Primo Levi notes, *Schmuckstücke* or "trinkets."[21] Hunger and malnutrition were, as mentioned, constant sources of anguish for virtually all inmates and the preeminent causes for becoming a *Muselmann*. "The Lager *is* hunger," Levi expounds: "we ourselves are hunger, living hunger."[22] In spite of meager rations being served three times per day, the detrimentally low quantity rapidly deteriorated a prisoner's constitution. Starvation was therefore a ubiquitous threat and could quickly set one on course to becoming a *Muselmann*; a process of drastic emaciation which was colloquially described by Auschwitz prisoners using the Polish verb *muzułmanieć*.[23] The penultimate outcome of this process is observable in the following passage from *If This Is a Man*. After having been paired in a labor detail with a *Muselmann* called "Null Achtzehn," Levi writes that:

> He is not called anything except that, Zero Eighteen, the last three figures of his entry number; as if everyone was aware that only a man is worthy of a name, and that Null Achtzehn is no longer a man. I think that even he has forgotten his name, certainly he acts as if this was so. When he speaks, when he looks around, he gives the impression of being empty inside, nothing more than an involucre. [. . .] All

> avoid working with him. He is indifferent to the point of not even troubling to avoid tiredness and blows or to search for food [. . .] and it is foreseeable that when they send him to his death he will go with the same total indifference.[24]

The perpetual famishment which prisoners such as Null Achtzehn experienced would, as the passage suggests, rapidly atrophy the body, and this physical debility would simultaneously be accompanied by an acute decline in mental activity. Becoming a *Muselmann*, as Becker and Bock argue, was therefore not so much a "condition that one could 'contract' but an ongoing process."[25] This processual dimension is significant because, despite Levi describing Null Achtzehn with fatalistic overtones as an "involucre" who will foreseeably meet his demise with "total indifference," it does not follow that a *Muselmann's* death was somehow preordained. In fact, recent scholarship refutes such fatalistic interpretations, emphasizing that not all *Muselmänner* necessarily lost the will to live and highlighting that some, albeit very few of these prisoners actually survived.[26] Null Achtzehn's predicament, far from being dictated by fate, was thereby the result of a structural process predicated on systemic starvation. This helps to explain why in literary narratives a *Muselmann's* death is often retrospectively taken as a matter of course—why it was never a matter of *if* but "*when* they will send [Null Achtzehn] to his death." It indicates that survival, particularly for a *Muselmann*, was exceptional from the outset, as death was a concentration camp's *a priori* premise and its unwavering rule.

By mentioning, however, that "nobody wanted to work with [Null Achtzehn]," the passage additionally touches upon the various forms of social stigma to which *Muselmänner* were subjected. Viewed by their fellow prisoners as totally superfluous figures who were unable to work, *Muselmänner* such as Null Achtzehn were singled out as scapegoats and became the target of crude jokes, humiliation, and cruelty.[27] "If some Null Achtzehn vacillates," Levi notes, "he will find no one to extend a helping hand; on the contrary somebody will knock him aside, because it is in no one's interest that there will be one more 'muselmann.'"[28] Besides the direct physical abuse prisoners like Null Achzehn endured, the passage also draws attention to the often unnoticed fact that these dissociative processes simultaneously manifested themselves on a discursive level—taking the form, as I will now argue, of a contradictory metaphorical focalization.

THE METAPHOR OF FEAR

Focalization, as Mieke Bal explains, is the "the relationship between the 'vision,' the agent that sees, and that which is seen."[29] This definition is worth repeating

because it is precisely "that which is seen," that is, *Muselmänner* in the eyes of others, who manifest themselves so paradoxically in literary testimony. As observed, Null Achtzehn was excluded from having a proper name because "everyone was aware that only a man is worthy of a name and [. . .] Null Achtzehn is no longer a man." Fellow inmates seemingly banished him from their realm of the living and saw him as occupying a different—metaphorical —topos: the netherworld of the *Muselmänner*. As Null Achtzehn is cast away from common humanity, he is viewed, defined, and therefore focalized by others as signifying something in excess of an "indifferent involucre." To illustrate this, Levi writes in the context of camp selections that nobody wanted to be viewed as a potential *Muselmann*: "our comrades reassure us: 'You are alright, it will certainly not be your turn this time . . . *du bist kein Muselmann*.'"[30] Whilst alive, *Muselmänner* were thus always-already treated as if embodying their inevitable, impending death, and maintained as an absolute other.[31] Moreover, the focalization of Null Achtzehn as a representative of the dead occurs when he is, strictly speaking, still alive. Despite the fact that Null Achtzehn "is no longer a man," he still *is*. Viewed by others as suspended between life and death, he is thereby focalized as an undead, liminal being—an ephemeral and ghost-like figure whose death has somehow not caught up yet. Nevertheless, does the assertion that *Muselmänner* were "dead before their actual death" not mystify or sensationalize the phenomenon? After all, humans cannot "be reduced to miraculous, living objects."[32]

While the latter observation holds superficially, the concept of focalization aptly demonstrates that this fact was, historically speaking, irrelevant to most of Null Achtzehn's fellow inmates. Prisoners undeniably knew that the term *Muselmann* connoted little more than an abstract, near-death condition, but this did not prevent them from viewing the living Null Achtzehn as a metaphorical introjection of death in life—a liminal entity from whom others actively distanced themselves. Stated differently, even though *Muselmänner* were certainly not literal "living objects," their focalization by fellow inmates attests to the paradoxical status quo within the camp, whereby a *Muselmann* was still viewed and treated as such, regardless. However, what does this transposition from the descriptive into the metaphorical suggest for the *Muselmann*? Since the agent utilizing the metaphor asserts the right to define and frame the other—inadvertently or not—the contradictory form of focalization illuminates how these figures of otherness were approached. At base, the passage indicates that this relationship was highly one-sided, as prisoners framed as *Muselmänner* had no voice regarding the way in which their metaphorization occurred. Nevertheless, the vehemence with which prisoners euphemistically attempted to reassure each other that it would "*certainly* not be their turn" suggests that they were not left unafflicted by the *Muselmann's* presence—pointing out that

the relationship between the metaphorized subject and the one who metaphorized was decidedly more complex than hitherto envisioned.

To this end, recall Paul Ricoeur's proposition that in all metaphorical attributions "the subsidiary subject is modified just as much as the principal subject to which it is being applied [as] it disrupts the very order of connotation."[33] Although the *Muselmann's* existence was viewed as paralleling the myriad paths to perdition within the camp, Levi's observations indicate that it was not the *Muselmann's* death which terrified fellow inmates. Rather, it was their own death, which they saw whilst staring into the abyssal gaze of the *Muselmann*. Yet as a result of seeing their own demise reflected through the *Muselmann's* corporeality, the *Muselmann* thereby began to represent something besides just an emaciated prisoner or an abstraction of death. The *Muselmann* came to signify a haunting, omnipresent existential dread in the camp, since no one could predict when they might share the same fate. Being focalized, however, as a ghost-like presence had remarkable consequences. For instance, the rigid divisionary line between "real," individual *Muselmänner*—singular, emaciated prisoners and their generalized metaphorical counterparts—became progressively blurred. Through the figure of the *Muselmann*, the strict boundaries between life and death suddenly seemed to be in conflict, disjunctive, and polluting each other in the process. Without forgetting the distinction between an individual *Muselmann* and his metaphorical shadow, we can therefore discern that the division separating the particular inmate from the abstracted, metaphorically haunting counterpart cannot be maintained as an either/or. In literary testimony, this dichotomy manifests itself as more opaque and in closer proximity than previously assumed. For that reason, an anomalous elision of the body *with* the metaphor appears present—the former producing the latter and, in the eyes of others, the latter producing the former. Metaphorically speaking, whilst death is predominantly analogous to corpses, the *Muselmann* cannot be wholly reduced to a corpse by virtue of being alive—nor can he be curtailed as signifying complete absence, as he is corporally present. Stated differently, the *Muselmann* simply does not let himself be reduced to his discursive attributions without fully coinciding with them either.[34] As such, *Muselmänner* paradoxically embodied and subsequently collapsed the tension between dichotomies such as life and death, presence and absence, and past/present/future—becoming a death future-anterior which haunted the minds of all.

What conclusions can be drawn from this? First, the abovementioned indicates a radical heterogeneity that underpins the *Muselmann's* character as a metaphor. "Yielding meaning through their failure to fully translate between vehicle and tenor,"[35] as Oster argues, subsequently endowed *Muselmänner* with an open-ended predisposition—allowing them to occupy a liminal state of in-betweenness. The critical point that Oster overlooks, however, is that this heterogeneity also contains

an emancipatory or redemptive potential, whereby liminality enables an open-ended reading which helps to avoid exerting textual authority over the *Muselmann* as a literary figure. As Esther Peeren notes in *The Spectral Metaphor*, all metaphors possess a certain potential for semantic flexibility because metaphors only have a provisional, phantasmatic reality—"the substitut*ing* thing never actually is, or becomes, the substitut*ed* thing."[36] The *Muselmann's* heterogeneity therefore indicates that the logic underpinning the metaphor is one of comparison and interaction between that which is enunciated—a *Muselmann* as ephemeral and ghost-like—and the enormous, transient part of the camp's population which serves as the premise of the *Muselmann* metaphor.[37] Insisting on this interdependency enables us to approach the *Muselmann* without objectivizing, instrumentalizing, or arresting him in a preimposed conclusion or framework. Moreover, this approach distinguishes how, rather than containing a preconceived identity, metaphorical usages may shift, deviate, and reshape. Turning now to the question of methodology, if narratives of the Holocaust "demand to be theorized in terms of a heterogeneous, disjunctive space,"[38] then cannot the *Muselmann* justifiably be approached as a ghost in testimonial literature?

SPECTRALITY AND THE DISSIMILAR METAPHOR

Ghosts, specters and other phantasmatic apparitions frequently evoke a sense of elusiveness through their untimely and liminal forms. Perpetually manifesting themselves differently, these ungraspable figures never appear to be identical to their former, living selves and though they seem to herald from the past, their arrival is simultaneously anticipated some time from the future into the present.[39] While this excessive ambivalence might support dismissing these figures in literary testimony, Jacques Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx* that a ghost's heterogeneity is precisely what constitutes it as a productive figure. As the specter's "undiscernability" forbids and blurs rigid distinctions, it thereby enables new readings to come to fruition.[40] The specter enables us to come to terms with the latent ambiguities and residual paradoxes residing within testimony and allows these to be read based on principles of incoherence—as the "illogical excesses of memory" they signify.[41] As a methodology, however, spectrality does not concern itself with an actual return of the dead. When speaking of ghostly figures within the literary realm, what is under discussion is therefore never a lifeless body but rather that which, having no body, comes back and takes on an abstract body.[42] As a manifestation of traces concerning repetition—but always repetition with a difference—specters can be imagined as paradoxical incorporations which consist, to the extent that they consist, of undiscernability.[43]

While this definition appears lacking, it is Derrida's contention that spectral figures cannot be defined in straightforward, dichotomous terms. Their heterogeneous nature blurs and undoes these very oppositions from the outset because the historical inheritance which these recurrent apparitions signify are unable to conform to such strict, artificial separations. For instance, although the events of the Holocaust are fundamentally inscribed as a trace in time, they materialize as being temporally dislodged and dislocated as the inheritance of these events somehow return from the past or arrive from the future. This untimely characteristic can be illustrated through Lawrence L. Langer's observation that Holocaust witnesses are often plagued by the temporally incoherent nature of their experiences, seeming "concerned less with the past than with a sense of that *past in the present*."[44] Not only is the presumed temporal unity of an inheritance therefore decidedly uncertain, it also suggests that the divisionary line between oppositions such as present reality and its antitheses of past, nonpresence, or future is exceedingly unstable and hence that these concepts pollute each other. In this manner, Derrida discerns that there is a "doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself,"[45] meaning that such events negate any illusions of chronological self-containment which one projects upon the present.

The present's "noncontemporaneity" thus opens up a field of traces, projections, and anticipations whereby past and future may perpetually manifest themselves within the present, endowing each moment with the potential to haunt.[46] Effectuating the summoning of the realm of ghosts, it admits the possibility of the past to return in some capacity in the future—a haunting—while at the same time disrupting the categories of past, present, and future. One cannot, however, predict what a haunting will bring nor the shape in which it will manifest itself because a *revenant*, that which comes back, begins by coming back.[47] As a result, this process demands that one perpetually considers the singularity of the time and the history of an apparition, so as to be able to reckon with the specter's unpredictable and heterogeneous nonpresence.[48] A parallel may be noted here with the metaphor of the *Muselmann* who is similarly nonpresent and, by yielding meaning through dissimilarity, has an open-ended and heterogeneous character. This parallel simultaneously announces the shift toward the topos where both *Muselmann* and specter are evoked and may be approached: the literary.

The latter is a thoroughly spectral medium as words always cause something to come back: "they convoke the *revenant*."[49] By way of writing—for example, through a literary testimony—a habitation is created in which a ghost may commence its haunting, as language engenders a ghost by giving it a certain "textual body."[50] The incorporation mentioned above is therefore a recurrence within an artefactual, prosthetic literary body provided by the text. Nevertheless, even if literature provides the place

from where a haunting may commence, it still holds that by utilizing a metaphor, the author asserts the right to define and frame the other. Would a spectral analysis of the *Muselmann* thereby not propagate the same erroneous logic of merely speaking about *Muselmänner*? Based on the semantic flexibility inherent to all metaphors, one can answer in the negative. Because the metaphor of the specter—similar to that of the *Muselmann*—is based upon dissimilarity, undiscernability, and ambiguity, the metaphor's flexibility is not only enhanced but also becomes more pronounced through the polysemic concept of the ghost. In this way, Peeren argues, the meaning of both the metaphorically enunciated, as well as its premise, may be extended in a process which is guided "but not determined by the metaphor's user."[51] Hence, if the *Muselmann* is perceived as a spectral metaphor—endowed with a specifically haunting character—it creates the possibility for these *Muselmänner* to reshape the inherent meaning of their own metaphorical status within literary testimonies. To explore this concept, we turn now to a vignette written by Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo.

THE HAUNTING OF THE SPECTRAL MUSELMANN

Consisting of three volumes, Charlotte Delbo's testimony *Auschwitz and After* (*Auschwitz et après*) occupies a unique place within the literary corpus of the Holocaust. In addition to its importance as a historical document, the narratives exhibit a profoundly literary character throughout. Besides narrating her experiences through a mixture of prose, poetry and contingent dialogues,[52] the interrelations between and within these narratives are not predominantly linear.[53] For this reason, the testimony is most "untimely," as Delbo's narrator, speaking with Lawrence L. Langer, invalidates normative conceptions of continuity and chronology.[54] The text continuously elides past, present, and future, subverting a straightforward chronology, and thus the text accommodates a spectral reading, allowing discontinuity and liminality to take center stage. As such, the following analysis considers in three stages the role of the spectral in a short vignette entitled "One Day," from the first volume of Delbo's trilogy. In the first section, it shall be inquired how a *Muselmann* can be interpreted as a specter by virtue of the reaction she elicits in others. The second part questions how this spectral figure is able to haunt the text, asks what such a haunting consists of and examines the potential effects of this haunting. Finally, the third part sets out to deduce further implications from this haunting and responds to the question of how the *Muselmann*, as a spectral metaphor, can aid in shedding new light on the problems of witness narratives in camp testimony.

I. Conjuring and Disavowal

Narrating how a thirsty female *Muselmann* breaks rank during roll call to gather snow in a nearby ditch, the passage's spectral element swiftly becomes visible through the contrast between the skeletal and the remnants of the vital:

> Her whole body was taut, her jaws tight, her neck with its dislocated cartilage straining, as were her muscles – what was left of them on her bones. Yet she strained in vain. [. . .] Her limp body was pathetic. [. . .] Her ribs protruded like staves. [. . .] Each movement was so slow and awkward, revealing her weakened condition, *that one wondered how she was still able to move*.[55]

This sterile enumeration of the *Muselmann's* various bodily components—jaws, neck, and cartilage—reduces her to an undead amalgamation comprised of several biological parts: analogous to a corpse, yet not quite. This liminal description indicates that by being unable to conform to normative dichotomies, the *Muselmann* becomes situated as a figure between death and life, and between presence and absence. She confronts the narrator as a moribund, walking corpse who defies all expectations by somehow surviving. She thereby provokes a dual sense of disquiet and wonder within the narrator, prompting her to ask how the *Muselmann* was still able to move—as if that which akin to a ghost, though alive, *should* be dead. Besides the conflation of life and death, which exemplifies the process of metaphorical focalization, the narrator's questioning announces the presence of the spectral element within the passage in two ways.

First, the narrator's anxiety and wonder parallel the commonplace reaction to the presence of a specter—fear of and fascination with that which can transform the most familiar into the most disquieting.[56] Recalling Derrida's claim that whenever a specter presents itself, it is often met with a desire to exorcise or disavow it,[57] a similar wish to dismiss and remove the *Muselmann's* presence is seen within the narrative, which attests to the *Muselmann's* spectral nature. Note, for instance, that the narrator not only speaks *of* another inmate—allocating herself the right to frame the inmate as a *Muselmann*—but that the *Muselmann* is in a strict sense still alive. In her analysis of the vignette, Oster remarks that the narrator's desire to rid herself of this undead presence indicates that Delbo's own "survival was contingent upon her renunciation" of these emaciated inmates.[58] "With this female *Muselmann*," Oster continues, "Delbo reminds us of this woman's indirect role in Delbo's own *actual survival*" as the former's death brought "Delbo's own survival a step closer to reality."[59] It may be questioned, however, if the complex relationship between the narrator and the *Muselmann* can be simplified in this fashion. Notwithstanding that survival played a significant role in the camp's social dynamic, Oster's interpretation risks consigning the *Muselmann* to a

position of weakness or near-superfluity. Posed as a losing party in a battle of survival, it overlooks the possibility that the narrator's reaction can, on the contrary, be viewed as indicative of the ambiguous relationship which the dead bore toward the living.

For example, observe that the narrator's renunciation is spoken implicitly in the name of life. On account of this, speaking with Derrida, the narrator therefore "claim[s] to know what that is. Who knows better than someone who is alive?"[60] Within the spectral framework, Oster's conclusion thus forgoes the subtle implication of this renunciation because the narrator's questioning is essentially a performative, exorcistical act. Akin to a coroner, it actively pronounces death upon the other. It attempts to reassure that that which one would like to see dead—due to the *Muselmann*'s petrifying nature—is indeed dead and thereby implicitly tries to inflict death.[61] For that reason, the vehemence of the disavowal should be viewed as being symptomatic of not wanting to know "what everyone alive knows: that the dead can often be more powerful than the living."[62] Pointing beyond notions of survival, the narrator's rejection attests not only to a spectral presence but, furthermore, to the power of the dead.

Be that as it may, if the dead are powerful, should they not manifest a form of agency or exert a certain force or influence? By contrast, the *Muselmann* in the passage is portrayed as a mute, lethargic figure—disinterested in and dissociated from others. Nevertheless, she manages to solicit a powerful response from the narrator despite not doing anything noteworthy, almost accidentally by simply being present. The passage thereby not only indicates a spectral presence but, moreover, suggests that the haunting capacity of the *Muselmann* arguably emanates from her very disinterestedness and disassociation—making her impossible to overlook. Contrary to any active form of haunting, the *Muselmann's* agency appears very different: not a force consciously harnessed, but an "in-activity" whereby she passively solicits something from others, almost despite herself. It is this specific form of haunting which demonstrates the power that a *Muselmann* acquires when focalized as a spectral force working through the literary.

II. Haunting

Directly succeeding the abovementioned excerpt, the following passage supports in explaining the underpinning, together with the divergent and untimely ramifications of the *Muselmann*'s "in-active" form of haunting. After stumbling into the snow-filled ditch:

> She turns her head, [and] looks upwards. "Why are all these women looking at me like this? They look at me yet do not see me. They cannot possibly see me, or they

> wouldn't stand there gaping. [. . .] Why don't you help me, you standing so close? Help me. Pull me up. Lean in my direction. Stretch out your hands. Oh, they don't make a move." And her hand writhed toward us in a desperate call for help. The hand falls back. [. . .] The whole body collapses.[63]

Here, another voice abruptly interjects into the narrator's observations. Overriding the narrative, this voice materializes as a vocalization of the *Muselmann* from the previous passage. Simultaneously, an unpredicted shift follows from the external point of view, in which the narrator is an observing bystander, to the internal perspective of the *Muselmann* as provided by the narrator. Significantly, through the act of assigning a speaking position to the *Muselmann*, this mute presence suddenly procures a voice through which she is able to enunciate an injunction, a demand for help. Nevertheless, how is this injunction received and what does its acknowledgement, or lack thereof, suggest about the *Muselmann's* in-active haunting?

Note that by vocalizing the *Muselmann* the narrator initially presents a contrast between the inmates who look at her "yet do not see"—a group to which the narrator incidentally belongs—and the *Muselmann* who calls for help. A confusing visual asymmetry results from this portrayal, because although the *Muselmann* is evidently able to view her fellow inmates, the obverse does not appear to hold. This asymmetry has far-reaching consequences precisely because the disregard of the *Muselmann* shifts attention away from the traditional Holocaust perpetrators such as the SS. Instead, the narrative presents a juxtaposition between the *Muselmann* and the numerous inmates who collectively fail to respond to the former's injunctions. By vocalizing the *Muselmann's* demands, effectively conjuring her as a spectral figure who has a body and a voice, the narrative thereby evokes her as a figure capable of demanding attention and an ethical response as she illuminates inmates' historical enmity toward the *Muselmänner*. This focuses attention on certain practices of marginalization perpetrated by ordinary camp inmates themselves—uncomfortable facts often glossed over in commonplace camp portrayals which complicate the traditional victim/perpetrator dichotomy.[64] Moreover, when the *Muselmann's* demand remains unheeded, the vocalized narration not only terminates instantaneously but the narrator even substitutes personal pronouns ("her hand") for the definitive article ("the hand," "the whole body"). This objectification amplifies what was already discernible through the *Muselmann's* unanswered demand: an asymmetric desire for recognition which directly addresses the historical complicity of ordinary inmates in the demise of these skeletal figures. In this way, the narrative approaches and reconfigures the historical through literary testimony and attests to how ghostly figures such as the *Muselmann*, following Peeren, can shed light on processes of "erasure and cultural and historical blind spots."[65]

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that an inheritance—that which the specter ultimately represents—is never docilely given a date in the chain of the present, but instead "recalls us to anachrony."[66] Because the specter's untimely nature desynchronizes time and collapses the boundaries of past, present and future, this changes how the *Muselmann's* injunction for justice resonates in the present. Hence, as the focal point shifts from the historical to the anachronistic, the haunting capacity of the specter affects contemporary readers of the passage differently.

When the *Muselmann's* inner perspective—the narrator's vocalization of the ghost—asks "why don't *you* help me," an ambiguity surfaces: does this question address historic fellow inmates, contemporary readers, or both? It is exactly this uncertainty which signals the noncontemporaneity of the *Muselmann's* injunction, because, due to the specter's anachronistic nature, this plea is temporally out of joint. As the *Muselmann* is granted a voice by the narrator, her haunting manifests itself not only in the past but also simultaneously in the present, albeit with diverging results. The address made therefore emerges as that which has come back from the past into the present by virtue of consigning it to "you —an immediate, specific reader in the present day. For that reason, the reader appears to almost inhabit the role of a bystander or, specifically, a camp inmate. The distinction between historic onlooker and contemporary reader—the spatio-temporal chasm separating them—is elided as soon as it comes into being. In effect, the distance between reader and camp inmate is temporarily negated as both are suffused into one. The ambiguity of address in Delbo's passage therefore is not related to the question of who is talking to whom, or even which "you" is strictly implied. Rather, since these distinctions are blurred from the outset, the text emphasizes the direct ethical implication of this cross-temporal injunction. The narrative thereby not only signals the noncontemporaneity of the present to itself but, moreover, issues a demand for historical justice through the figure of the *Muselmann* within the present. Analogous to a ghostly visitation, whereby the *Muselmann* specter returns from the past to haunt the present with her summons, these summons themselves—pertaining to real Holocaust victims—seem far more important than scrupulously differentiating between strict voices within the text. Hence, as the reader is unavoidably confronted by an indictment *of* the specter *by* the specter, this demand requires us to take the singularity of the victim and, specifically, the specter's historical and temporal singularity into consideration—something which the *Muselmann's* fellow inmates historically failed to do.

Thus, the *Muselmann's* haunting, besides resonating differently in both past and present, contains an important ethical dimension in both instances. The vocalization of the demand for recognition drew attention to inmate complicity—which historically existed in the background but ordinarily remains undiscussed. Conversely, by addressing an ambiguous "you," the ethical injunction resonates in the present as a

direct summons from the past. We are tasked with responding to this *Muselmann* specter who takes hold of the reader *qua* inmate by asking why they refuse to help her regardless of their textual proximity—thereby eliciting an ethical response. This act of "taking hold" from the past into the present attests to the efficaciousness of the specter's haunting, as the *Muselmann* provokes the disquieting question underpinning all Holocaust literature: "What is being asked of me?"[67] In spite of this, the *Muselmann* factually remains a mute presence. Are the vocalized injunctions therefore not a verisimilitudinous conjecture? After all, it is the narrator who enunciates the *Muselmann's* words. Furthermore, are such enunciations not at odds with the first passage where the narrator implicitly desired to exorcise the *Muselmann*? It seems contradictory to initially disavow the specter, only to vocalize her words shortly thereafter. Pushing this logic to its limits, recall that the *Muselmann* indicated that her fellow inmates "look at me yet do not see me." In other words, she states that this group of bystanders—including the narrator—do not acknowledge her. Yet, through what can only be described as a paradoxical nonacknowledgment, the vignette's narrator certainly does look, see, and acknowledge the *Muselmann* as she conveys her thoughts.

What these contradictions indicate is that the *Muselmann* not only bears a complicated relationship to outside observers but that his or her haunting is also, to some degree, dependent upon such outside observers.[68] As previously noted, *Muselmänner* should not be envisioned as active agents in the strictest sense, but rather as figures who solicit responses almost despite themselves. While the *Muselmann* in the passage thus never appears to force anything onto the narrator, she nevertheless constantly experiences the urge to acknowledge and respond to the *Muselmann* without necessarily wanting to acknowledge her—a nonacknowledgment. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi briefly alludes to this exact process, writing that the *Muselmann* "hounds you with his demands for help or with his simple presence, *itself an entreaty*."[69] The conclusion which can therefore be drawn is that the in-active ability to conjure or solicit an ethical response in others despite themselves *is* the very agency of the *Muselmann*. It is the very nonpresence of the *Muselmann* which constitutes a haunting as it always implies a summons, an ethical injunction to respond to the very proximity of the *Muselmann*. Admittingly, this agency is tentative and uncertain in nature because any demand can conceivably be ignored.[70] As an inmate in the past the narrator could, for instance, have actually disavowed the demands of the specter. For the narrator of the testimony in the present, however, the injunction continues to resonate regardless. This explains how literary testimony may retrospectively stage the *Muselmann* as challenging this disavowal—bearing witness through the figure of the *Muselmann* to the narrator's own past disavowal and to the fact that this has haunted her decades into the future. This untimely element

of the *Muselmann's* agency conversely emanates in the final section of the vignette and concludes how the agency of the *Muselmann*, as a haunting literary figure, aids in coming to terms with the initial problem of witness narratives in camp testimonies.

III. Agency and Demand

As the second passage concludes with the *Muselmann* collapsing into the ditch, the narrator observes thereafter that:

> I no longer look at her. I no longer wish to look. If only I could change my place in order not to see her. Not to see the dark holes of these eye sockets, these staring holes. What does she want to do? Reach the electrified barbed-wire fence? Why does she stare at us? Isn't she pointing at me? Imploring me? I turn away to look elsewhere. Elsewhere.[71]

The third passage from the vignette initially evokes two elements discerned in previous passages. The first few lines, for instance, exhibit a similar wish to exorcise the specter paralleling that of the first excerpt. While this desire was only implicit in the first instance—by asking how the *Muselmann* was able to move—the narrator now unambiguously confirms her resolve to rid herself of the *Muselmann's* spectral presence by stating that she "no longer wish[es] to look" and by declaring her wish to physically "change [her] place." Moreover, through the verbs "staring," "pointing," and "imploring," the latter part of this passage mirrors the *Muselmann's* injunction to be acknowledged as observed in the second excerpt and, comparably, elicits a non-acknowledgment from the narrator by virtue of her observations. These similarities notwithstanding, what makes this third passage stand out is the narrator's continual engagement with the *Muselmann* despite her physical presence, together with the absence of her vocalized demands. As the doomed inmate grows limp, the narrator averts her gaze because she "no longer wish[es] to look." Although one would expect the passage to conclude at this point, the narrator continues to inquire why the *Muselmann* keeps on staring, pointing and imploring—a contradictory observation because the narrator, having averted her gaze, should not be able to view this at all. This ambivalence is exacerbated as the narrator concludes the passage by repeating that she is "turn[ing] away to look elsewhere"—prompting the question as to when, if at all, she has turned away from the *Muselmann*.

The ambiguity in this passage concretizes how the *Muselmann* appears as a haunting force almost despite herself. Quite literally, the *Muselmann* is lying drained in a ditch and is therefore unable to move. Nevertheless, she remains able to continue her demand for acknowledgement from the narrator despite having lost all vitality.

To explain how this is possible, it is productive to recall the process which Derrida delineates through the German phrase "*es spukt*," or, "it haunts." Though difficult to translate into English, it denotes the quasi-anonymity of an operation without act and the absence of any concrete subject or object.[72] The power of the *es spukt* thereby differs significantly from any "acting out" in the ordinary sense. As Derrida elaborates, it is "the absolute proximity of a stranger whose power is singular *and* anonymous, an unnamable and neutral power, that is, undecidable, neither active nor passive, an an-identity that, *without doing anything*, invisibly occupies places belonging finally neither to us nor to it."[73] In effect, the *es spukt* endows spectral figures with an agency which, although separate from acting out, still has a profound impact.[74] Returning to the passage, as the *Muselmann* metaphorically oscillates between being an individual and abstract figure, she continues to color perception even when her physical manifestation is kept from view. Whether or not the narrator has succeeded in turning away is thus of minor importance. Rather, the ambiguity highlights that as the line between the empirical and the virtual becomes progressively blurred, the haunting capabilities of the *Muselmann* continue to operate. Seemingly without doing anything, she remains able to haunt because the narrator herself continues to acknowledge that the *Muselmann* stares, points, and implores her—even, as will be shown below, long after the narrator's actual liberation from the concentration camp. Her nonpresence is therefore an injunction in and of itself—a source of anguish, fear and fascination and the reason why the narrator wants to "change [her] place in order not to see her."

This attestation of a haunting despite the absence of a textually present specter opens up additional lines of inquiry. For example, as specters always desynchronize in myriad ways there is no reason to exclude the possibility that their embedment within a narrative—directly present or not—cannot conversely influence the narrative itself. By polluting the prosthetic body of the work that it inhabits, the specter's haunting can arguably make its proximity felt without being textually immediate—leaving its mark without fully manifesting itself. The vignette's final passage is a prime example of this as both the temporal and the spatial are simultaneously desynchronized, thereby demonstrating the interrelation between haunting and narrative. As the narrator turns away to look elsewhere, she mentions that:

> Elsewhere—ahead of us—is the gate of block 25 [the death block]. Standing, wrapped in a blanket, a child, a little boy. A tiny, shaven head, a face with jutting jaws and a salient superciliary arch. Barefoot, he jumps up and down ceaselessly with a frenzy like that of some barbaric dance. He also waves his arms to keep warm. The blanket slips open. It's a woman. A female skeleton. She is naked. Her ribs and pelvic bones are clearly visible. She pulls the blanket up to her shoulders

> while continuing to dance. The dance of an automaton. A dancing female skeleton. Her feet are small, gaunt, bare in the snow. There are living skeletons that dance. Presently I am writing this story in a café—it is turning into a story. A break in the clouds. Is it afternoon? We have lost all notion of time. [. . .] Hours have passed since I succeeded in not looking at the woman in the ditch.[75]

As the narrator shifts her gaze to look "elsewhere," the narrative presents a final, unanticipated interjection. Taking the form of another *Muselmann*, the presence of this emaciated figure becomes all the more unsettling as this "skeleton" is ostensibly a child, a small boy. This unforeseen evocation is remarkable for two reasons. First, the child initially appears to be arbitrarily evoked as he does not seem to serve a direct, textual purpose—the *Muselmann* child is in no way foreshadowed in the vignette nor is there any recurring mention of him thereafter. Secondly, might the child's presence not be a telling misidentification on the narrator's behalf? After the blanket slips open, the child is revealed to be an adult woman—attesting not only a conflation of gender but, moreover, a conflation of age. These "mistakes" are significant as ambiguity and ambivalence are foregrounded, affecting the narrative in several respects.

Recall that at this point in the vignette, the narrator has averted her gaze in an attempt to ignore the *Muselmann*. As previously concluded, however, a specter can haunt and demand a response even when it is not directly perceived. For that reason, it follows that as the narrator turns away, the haunting continues regardless, albeit in a different manner. Whereas the initial effect of the *Muselmann's* haunting constituted an unintended nonacknowledgement, in this instance the overall narration becomes contaminated—disabling any further narrative portrayal on the narrator's behalf. Deflecting her gaze away from the *Muselmann* does not grant her the comfort she desperately seeks, but on the contrary results in her perceiving more *Muselmänner*. Whether in the guise of a "child" or in whichever direction the narrator looks, the image of the *Muselmann* and the ethical demand she represents is constantly present and cannot be banished—an operation without act. In the absence of a concrete actor or subject, the *Muselmann* specter still infects everything even when her physical instantiation is narratively absent. To explain this change in narrative, it is tempting to view the passage allegorically—as a *danse macabre*.[76] After all, the silent and lethargic *Muselmann* is suddenly described as a "dancing skeleton" through verbs emphasizing vivacity and movement. Furthermore, it appears logically sound to situate this passage as a *memento mori* in light of the *Muselmann's* ethical imperatives. Accounting for the passage in such a fashion, however, would not only preclude the absence of any clear pronouncements regarding morality but, additionally, forgo the observation that ambivalence itself occupies the most prominent position. Not only is this skeleton alive and only seen by virtue of the narrator turning away from another "living

skeleton," she even appears unable to discern the *Muselmann's* gender.[77] Again, the Derridean notion of the *es spukt* can be productively applied because the haunting which has commenced now manifests itself spatially, in the way in which the narrator comes to view and narrate her surroundings. Despite lying some distance away in a ditch, the *Muselmann* specter has taken complete hold of the narrator and appears to have inscribed death into the narrator's gaze—she is unable to see or narrate anything but that which relates to the specter and its ethical injunctions.

As the vignette draws to a close, the *Muselmann's* haunting has manifested itself in multiple ways. By virtue of her ability to blur dichotomies, the *Muselmann* came to haunt the mind of Delbo's narrator with her ambivalent "in-active" powers to which the latter could not *not* respond. While her response was to look away, the haunting continued regardless, as it manifested itself not only through an unwitting response—a nonacknowledgment—but additionally through a desynchronization of time and, ultimately, narrative space itself. Besides inciting fear, fascination, acknowledgment, and disavowal, by virtue of the narrator's mind being haunted she starts observing a mob of specters which she, following Derrida's observation of the spatial, "can no longer even assign a point of view. They invade all of space. [. . .] inhabit even there where one is not, haunt all places at the same time, [are] atopic (mad and non-localizable)."[78] The demand for justice is thus not just contained to a sole topos but rather manifests itself throughout space-time. As the last few lines indicate, the ethical injunction seems to follow the narrator out of the camp after liberation until the very moment of writing: "Presently I am writing this story in a café." Although the last sentence therefore appears to give a precise indication of the time that has elapsed "since she succeeded in not looking at the women in the ditch," this cannot be taken at face value since the actual event, was much longer ago—a sign of time being out of joint and the *Muselmann* haunting her across time and space, rendering the present apart.

CONCLUSION

How does the spectral *Muselmann,* in closing, shed new light upon the problem of witness narratives? Through Primo Levi's and Charlotte Delbo's testimonial narratives, we have discerned that the agency of the *Muselmann* is more complicated, uncertain, and tenuous in nature than previous scholarship has opined. The haunting agency of *Muselmänner* is neither active nor passive but *in-active*—soliciting a reaction through presence alone and, by virtue of receiving such a response, acquiring agency almost despite themselves. Such agency, however, is not one which directly effectuates concrete results. Rather, it illuminates how fellow inmates in the past, and

survivors or readers in the present, come to terms with these figures of otherness. What is thereby continually foregrounded through the figure of the *Muselmann* is the question concerning an ethical imperative, the question of "What is being asked of me?" Stated differently, we are summoned to respond to these figures of radical alterity in a responsible fashion: tasked to acknowledge a demand for justice which resonates across time and space, survivors, victims and readers.

The ethical challenge facing Delbo *qua* survivor therefore not only differs from Agamben's epistemic quandaries but is, perhaps, also more important. When the *Muselmann* metaphor is refocalized as a spectral metaphor, the need to search for an "ultimate insight"—by essentially giving up one's subjectivity—is effectively annulled. What takes precedence are the ethical dimensions pertaining to the question of how to approach the other. Evoked as something unfinished or unhinged in time, the inheritance which the specter represents therefore perpetually seems to recur in the living present—reminding the living of the imperative for justice owed to the victims of totalitarian violence in the past. Naturally, this question cannot be raised in isolation—either without the narrator or the *Muselmann*—as the latter continuously raises these issues through Delbo's narrator. Hence, what is additionally observable from the testimony is how the metaphorical usage of the *Muselmann* may be extended in a process which is guided, but not necessarily *determined* by the metaphor's user. For that reason, *Auschwitz and After* not only emphasizes how literary testimony estranges and defamiliarizes axiomatic truths of history,[79] but its narrative, by continually emphasizing the noncontemporaneity of the historical inheritance presented, creates the possibility of a textual haunting which unfurls new modes of ethical interpretation of that very history. This, in turn, has pressing implications beyond the study of the Holocaust.

Considering that spectral figures shed light on processes of erasure and cultural and historical blind spots, their demands for justice may resonate similarly in different contexts. After all, as Derrida writes, "there are so many ghosts in this tragedy, in the charnel houses of all the camps,"[80] which thereby suggests a study of ghosts far beyond the realms of Nazi concentration camps. For example, what of the "undead" figures who haunted the various gulag labor camps in the USSR—the so-called "goners," or *dokhodiagi*?[81] From Oświęcim to Kolyma, there are those who, although no longer physically with us, are still waiting to tell their story. As such, how can the *Muselmann* aid in witnessing this absence? Effectively, by listening to him. By inquiring how textual openings are utilized, by making use of his liminality, and by letting the *Muselmann* manifest himself freely within a narrative to observe the results this can yield. Cathy Caruth's comments on how to approach a traumatic experience can be applied analogously to surmise how to "listen" to the *Muselmann*: namely by looking at "the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another,

the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound."[82] By inquiring how these spectral presences manifest themselves in time, space and through the reception given by others, they can be evoked to serve as important witnesses, long after their corporeal demise—haunting us with a demand for justice but also acquiring an agency through that very process *ex post facto*. In this way, one can do justice to these hundreds of thousands of anonymous Holocaust victims while, at the same time, giving them the attention they deserve. Not by simply witnessing their ghosts, but by letting their ghosts witness.

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NOTES

1. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, 1.
2. Levi, *Drowned and the Saved*, 89.
3. Levi, *Drowned and the Saved*, 89.
4. Améry, *Mind's Limits*, 9.
5. Skitolsky, "Body of the Walking Dead," 82.
6. Agamben, *Remnants*, 47.
7. Consonni, "Body of the Muselmann," 250.
8. Agamben, *Remnants*, 51.
9. Marion, "Nazi Genocide," 1019.
10. Myers, "Ethics of Interpretation," 269.
11. Buettner, "Skeletal Figures," 360.
12. Levi, *If This Is a Man*, 90.
13. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 2.
14. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 8.
15. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 5.
16. While analogies and sparse allusions to ghosts have been made in passing, there is a complete dearth of spectral readings of the *Muselmann* in academic literature.
17. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 8.
18. Oster, "Holocaust Metaphors," 304.
19. This association may originate from the fact that *Muselmänner* were often seen crouching

down in a position akin to Muslims during prayer or from their supposed fatalism regarding their impending death. An alternative explanation, kindly proffered to me by Tiasa Bal, alludes to the abstention from food as observed by Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadan. Alexander G. Weheliye urges reflection on the name, as failing to do so would "[leave] intact the bonding of an abject process/status to a racio-religious label." See Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 54.

20. Sofsky, *Order of Terror*, 329.

21. Levi, *Drowned and the Saved*, 107. While female denominatives exist, the male term is customarily utilized regardless of gender in testimonial and academic literature. Although a thorough address of this issue is outside the scope of this research, the gender issue remains contentious. See Oster, "The Female *Muselmann*," for an exploratory analysis of the topic.

22. Levi, *If This Is a Man*, 90.

23. Ryn and Kłodziński, "Teetering on the Brink."

24. Levi, *If This Is a Man*, 48.

25. Becker and Bock, "*Müselmanner* and Prisoner Societies," 167.

26. Becker and Bock, "*Müselmanner* and Prisoner Societies," 169. There is a propensity in recent publications to privilege accounts of "former" Muselmänner who survived and testified. Notwithstanding the value thereof, only an infinitesimally small number of Muselmänner persisted relative to those who did not. The exception should thus not be taken to prove the rule.

27. Sofsky, *Order of Terror*, 203.

28. Levi, *If This Is a Man*, 94.

29. Bal, *Narratology*, 149.

30. Levi, *If This Is a Man*, 131.

31. Oster, "Holocaust Metaphors," 320.

32. Oster, "Female *Muselmann*," 209.

33. Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 97.

34. Oster, "Holocaust Metaphors," 319.

35. Oster, "Holocaust Metaphors," 308.

36. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 6.

37. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 7.

38. Levi and Rothberg, "Remains of Theory," 36.

39. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 10.

40. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 165.

41. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 12.

42. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 156. While "ghost" and "specter" are often used interchangeably, a distinction must be upheld between ghosts—a generalized meta-concept—and the specific conceptualization of the specter. As Tim Fisken delineates, "the specter is of course a ghost, something dead. [...] However, a specter is not just dead [...] The specter has a more am-

biguous relationship both to the body and to the idea of departure (and return). The specter is what remains or returns after death [and thus] combines an ambiguous relation to appearance with an ambiguous temporality, the appearance of something which is not present." Fisken, *The Spectral Proletariat*, 17.

43. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 165.

44. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 40, italics added. Felman and Laub also note this untimely dimension of the Holocaust *qua* event, considering it "not as an event encapsulated in the past, but as a history which is essentially *not over* [. . .] whose traumatic consequences are still *actively* evolving." *Testimony*, xiv.

45. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 48.

46. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 29.

47. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.

48. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 126.

49. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 175.

50. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 158.

51. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 7.

52. Kingcaid, "Struggle for Signification," 68.

53. Trezise, "Community in *Auschwitz and After*," 860.

54. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 5.

55. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, 24, italics added.

56. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 2.

57. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 59.

58. Oster, "Holocaust Metaphors," 332.

59. Oster, "Holocaust Metaphors," 332.

60. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 59.

61. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 59.

62. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 59.

63. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, 25.

64. On the question of guilt and the historic complicity of camp inmates, see Primo Levi's chapter in *The Drowned and the Saved* entitled "Shame."

65. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 13.

66. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 6.

67. Myers, "Ethics of Interpretation," 269.

68. Only the narrator is, in the final instance, capable of evoking the *Muselmann* as a specter.

69. Levi, *Drowned and the Saved*, 78, italics added.

70. Although this would arguably constitute a response in and of itself.

71. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, 26.

72. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 166.

73. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 217.

74. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 20.

75. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, 26–27.

76. A medieval European allegory personifying the concept of death which, through imagery of dancing skeletons, was a reminder of mortality.

77. This misrecognition is surprising as Delbo was incarcerated in an all-female, adult section of Auschwitz-Birkenau [BIb], where the presence of children would be unlikely.

78. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 168.

79. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 5.

80. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 131.

81. For more on the *dokhodiagi,* see Etkind, *Warped Mourning*, 26.

82. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 8.

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CONTRIBUTOR

Alexander Williams is a PhD candidate at the Institute for the Study of Culture (ICOG), University of Groningen. By focusing on survivor testimonies concerning the former *Aktion Reinhardt* extermination camps—Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka—his research explores why extermination camp inmates viewed themselves as spectral entities; as human ghosts who thought themselves as belonging neither to the living nor the dead. By analyzing the spatiotemporal narrative elements within these testimonies through methodologies inspired by philosophy, history, and astrophysics he attempts to answer why this was so. Prior to receiving his Research Master's degree in Literary Studies from the University of Amsterdam in 2020, Alexander worked as a teacher and guidance counselor at a vocational college. He is also affiliated with the Dutch Sobibor Foundation and co-manages the *European Journal for Life Writing.*