

Yoram Kaniuk's *Adam Resurrected*: The madness of the Shoah

Dvir Abramovich

The University of Melbourne

Yoram Kaniuk, who Nicole Kraus maintains was "Israel's greatest and least celebrated writer,"¹ was born on May 2, 1930, in Tel Aviv, Palestine, and died in 2013 in Israel. A theatre and film critic, he began writing prose in the 1960s and became one of Israel's most prolific novelists. In more than forty years of prodigious output, his body of work has been translated into more than 20 languages. His complex and sensitive literary craftsmanship has been recognised with several prizes, including the Brenner Prize (1987), the Prix des Droits de l'Homme (France, 1997), the President's Prize (1998), the Bialik Prize (1999), the Prix Méditerranée Étranger (2000), the Kugel Prize for Lifetime Achievement (2008), and the Sapir Prize (2011). Though not a Holocaust survivor himself, Kaniuk lived close to victims most of his life in Israel and met others when travelling abroad.

After fighting in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, during which he was wounded, Kaniuk was sent to Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City to recuperate. He then stayed in America for more than a decade, where he encountered a group of Holocaust survivors who inspired him to contemplate a book about their sufferings. To some degree, his own wartime experiences and his conversations with Holocaust survivors in America provided the raw materials for his later writings. But *Adam ben kelev* (*Adam Resurrected*, 1968), which forms the heart of this chapter, is not a personal witness to or a historical reconstruction of real events. Rather, it is a profound reimagining by a literary mind that turns memories, delusions, and fabulous East European and Yiddish tales into what may be called a poetic epic of Jewish madness.

Kaniuk's most well-known post-Holocaust novel *Adam Resurrected*² (1968) is a journey into the surreal heart of darkness of a survivor. It is less about the historical events of

¹ Nicole Kraus, "Born Again," *The New Yorker*, June 12, 2013: n.p

² The version used for this chapter is a reprint from 2008 (Yoram Kaniuk, *Adam Resurrected* [London: Atlantic Books, 2008].)

the Shoah and more about the psychological effects and the life of those victims of Nazi oppression once they reached Israel. In 1982, Kaniuk again traversed the Holocaust terrain in his powerful novel *Hayehudi haakharon*³ (*The Last Jew*).

Kaniuk's notoriety as a "maverick" was exacerbated by the appearance of *Adam Resurrected*, which quickly became a *cause célèbre* in Israel. Commentators argued that for him to publish a book about Holocaust survivors was inappropriate and even immoral. What right, they asked, had he to speak on behalf of the victims of Hitler's brutal regime and what qualifications could be brought to the task? Did he have the sensitivity and the sense of honour to tackle such a topic? Yet, as Michael Englard avers, *Adam Resurrected* is a "maniacal masterpiece" and "one of the central works of Holocaust literature."⁴

Pertinent to readers everywhere is whether or not a purely literary genius can depict the psychological or emotional condition of Holocaust survivors in a legitimate way, especially when those survivors and their caregivers in a mental facility are fictionally represented as all mad, and perhaps as symbolic of all Israeli society, of Judaism, and of the whole modern Western world. In other words, does art trump history and historical responsibility to survivors of the most enormous crime ever committed?

The original Hebrew title of *Adam Resurrected* is literally *Adam, the son of a dog* and, as we stated earlier, very quickly generated controversy. For Anat Feinberg, who feted the novel as "undoubtedly one of the most original and powerful Hebrew novels about the Holocaust"⁵, the work marked a "...new thematic and stylistic direction in Kaniuk's prose" in which the author "confronts the ever-open scars of Holocaust survivors and their traumatised lives...in an expressionistic style, harsh, gruesome and provocative."⁶ Likewise, in his reading, Edward Alexander enthused that *Adam Resurrected* is "imaginatively the richest, and linguistically the most inventive and energetic"⁷ of Israeli literature he had encountered.

³ Yoram Kaniuk. *Hayehudi haakharon*. (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Sifriyat Hapoalim, 1982).

⁴ Michael Englard, "Adam Resurrected," *The Guardian*, December 13, 2008. N.P

⁵ Anat Feinberg, "Yoram Kaniuk," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., Vol. 11, ed. Fred Skolnik (New York: Thomson Gale, 2007), 764.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Edward Alexander, *The Resonance of Dust: Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1979), 106.

As noted, some readers were disturbed by the seemingly trial comic tones of the novel, which they felt was disrespectful to the dead, the survivors, and the survivors' families. Others praised it as a story brimming with humanism and found its political criticisms of Israel as a failed Jewish state refreshing. Still others found it an intensely moving revelation of how the Holocaust continued to reach deep into the Hebrew psyche to eviscerate its integrity and wisdom and yet was salvaged, transformed, and resurrected through the resources of Jewish wit and compassion. Kaniuk remarked on the role of comedy in confronting the Holocaust, noting that one can either tear one's hair out and scream or "...laugh at the insanity of it all. The Jews have known it for many generations."⁸

Iris Milner contends that Kaniuk's novel reflected a shift and a retreat in Israeli literature away from "a judgemental position" that necessitated "a profound transformation in the self-perception of Israeli society."⁹ Milner adds that *Adam Resurrected* and other literary works appearing in the 1970s and 1980s acknowledged that the survivors were "displaced persons so traumatised that no redemption, and particularly not a national redemption, was relevant to their tormented lives."¹⁰ In a similar fashion, Yigal Schwartz argues that *Adam Resurrected* offered a counterpoint to those post-Shoah writers who strove to imbue their suffering at the hands of the Nazis with meaning by utilising the narrative model of the Passion or the Binding of Isaac. According to Schwartz, *Adam Resurrected* was the first to show that "the path in life represented by the road of torments and redemption was an empty shell, superfluous and phony."¹¹

In addressing a question as to whether he lacked a personal perspective given that he did not experience the Holocaust directly, Kaniuk offered the following, which is worth quoting at length:

I am an Israeli native. I was educated, like everybody else, to reject the diaspora. What changed my perception was my encounter with the Holocaust refugees shortly after the

⁸ Fuchs, *Encounters with Israeli Authors*, 78.

⁹ Iris Milner, "The 'Gray Zone' Revisited: The Concentrationary Universe in Ka. Tzetnik's Literary Testimony," *Jewish Social Studies*, 14, no. 2 (Winter, 2008): 123–24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹ Yigal Schwartz and Jeffrey M. Green, "Person, the Path, and the Melody: A Brief History of Identity in Israeli Literature," *Prooftexts* 20, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 327.

1948 war. You must understand this was very traumatic for me; I participated in the heaviest battles and was wounded. But nothing was as shocking as my encounter with those refugees I had met shortly after they arrived in Israel from their transition camps and, worse, in Europe. From that point on, the Holocaust became an obsession. It was very clear to me that I could have easily been one of them. When Israel accepted reparation money from Germany, I left for the United States in protest. If literature is something through which the absurd becomes legitimate, my writing legitimises my attempt to convey the horror I did not experience physically.¹²

The literary text of the novel can be read as a very complex set of interwoven hallucinations, without there being more than a few passages in which the historical background in Europe or the current Israeli setting for the persons and events that appear in the novel can be credited with some degree of reality or at least realism. Kaniuk approached the book's so-called "maniacal" subject by creating a matrix of dreams, hallucinations, and Jewish jokes. This notion of the Jewish victim as a clown and the genocidal actions of the Nazis as a grotesque carnival also stirred up contention about the novel.

Asked why *Adam Resurrected* received mixed reviews in Israel while garnering consensual acclaim abroad, Kaniuk responded thus: "It seems to me that Israeli critics work exclusively within the context of Hebrew literature. When a book seems to defy the conventional norms or the established categories of literary generations or 'new waves', the critics are at a loss."¹³ Adam Rovner agrees with Kaniuk that the novel enfolds within its midst transgressive threads:

Adam Resurrected violates the entrenched paradigms of Shoah literature in general and Hebrew literature of the Shoah in specific, emphasising that absurdity, epitomised by clowning in the camps, is all that life offers to Adam and all men who are sons of Adam...The novel suggests that we are all trapped on a stage, inmates of a prison-world, compulsively performing a routine devoid of meaning without the direction of a

¹² Esther Fuchs, "Native Israeli Literature and the Spectre of Jewish History" (Fuchs Interview with Yoram Kaniuk) *Hebrew Book Review* 8, no. 1-2 (Fall/Winter, 1982-83): 60-61.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

revealed God...Kaniuk's novel presents a satiric and satyric subversion of the literary paradigm of redemptive suffering...Survivors find no transcendent purpose to their torments in *Adam Resurrected*; there is no theodicy, no "Passion," only the profane "passion play" of Adam, the mocking saviour who leads a flock of psychiatric inmates into the desert. Instead of revelation, Adam only finds a heavenly father who is literally indistinguishable from a Nazi camp commandant.¹⁴

To be sure, there are historians who do not accept the premises of an artistic rendering of the Shoah in any other form than that of respectful seriousness, an extension of the Adorno admonition that there can be no poetry after the Holocaust¹⁵ and that the aesthetic imagination—like normal language itself—died and only a brute, documentary representation or agonised personal witness are legitimate. Others argue that Jewish tradition has always been able to cope with the worst of tragedies by gaining control over the memories of torment, the breaks in the continuity of community, family, and personal life through modes of wit, irony, and comedy. Still others argue that there is no way to write about the utterly irrational and insane horrors of the Holocaust except in terms of delusion and madness.

The novel is mainly set in 1961 Israel, with the principal character Adam Stein being returned to a special psychiatric asylum in the Negev Desert after a brief period of release spent in Tel-Aviv. Most of the action takes place in and around Mrs Seizling's purpose-built asylum for the care and treatment of Holocaust survivors. But there are also flashbacks to earlier times. With occasional memories of other characters in the novel, the focus tends to be on Adam Stein's childhood home during the first decades of the twentieth century, his experiences in university in the 1920s, his life as a circus performer during the heady days of the Weimar Republic, and the first frightening and repressive years of the Nazi regime. After he is arrested, from the early 1940s onward, Adam goes through the great transformation from man to dog in the concentration camp, with scenes of how physical and moral changes in him are brought about during the inferno.

¹⁴ Adam Rovner, "Instituting the Holocaust: Comic Fiction and the Moral Career of the Survivor," *Jewish Culture and History* 5, no. 2 (2000): 11.

¹⁵ Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*, 326.

From 1945 to 1958, Adam, exemplifying the next phase in the metamorphosis of Jewish life and character, attempts to integrate back into Germany and Switzerland. These attempts are only superficially successful and also appear through the lens of the growing distortions of his feelings of guilt and encroaching insanity. When Adam goes to Israel to seek his daughter, he, like other survivors, goes through a new ordeal of assimilating and becoming a native Israeli, a Sabra, in a secular society, with settings in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Then, as the delusions become too painful for him to bear, he is placed in a mental hospital in Jaffa and eventually in the newly opened Seizling Institute and its immediate surroundings in the Negev and its small towns. The time of the narration, when Adam writes to the reader outside of the hallucinatory experiences of the novel, is in the early years of the 1960s.

As stated earlier, at the centre of these experiences and narrative events is Adam Stein, the man with a charismatic effect on all patients at the asylum, who eagerly await his return because they believe that he has the power to give them a special, new life. However, the attending psychiatric doctors and nurses are sceptical of Adam's so-called powers. Almost the entire plot is seen through Adam's eyes and is part of his memory. There are several strands of narration that look back into Adam's past and those of the other patients and staff at this mental hospital. Their memories, current delusions, and participation in various treatment exercises carried out individually and in groups at the asylum often overlap, and they at times seem to share each other's fantasies.

Despite occasional spells of sanity and self-control, Adam Stein is totally mad; therefore, his releases from the asylum are always brief. After an initial stint in a hospital for the emotionally disturbed in Jaffa, outside of Tel Aviv, he is sent to the newly opened hospital in the Negev. Some of the former patients and staff of the first home have moved to this facility, and everyone welcomes him since he is charming and entertaining. He gives courses and helps other inmates who have been chosen because they are survivors of the Holocaust like him. They find different activities to keep their minds off the terrible memories that haunt them. He gets along well with the nurses and doctors, and they find him useful in their treatment of the patients under their care, as Adam enfolded them in his hallucinatory games.

The book begins just before Adam's return to the hospital and ends with his later release and death. The plot centres on his relationships with the patients and staff of the hospital. There

is, however, no continuous narrative; it is possible that everything that happens only happens in Adam's mind, including the conversations among others, the newspaper reports on the events in the hospital, or the night when the patients go into the desert to seek a vision of God. Perhaps, too, nothing at all occurs, not even the hospital's founding. The only element that is historically real and true is the Holocaust.

From the moment Adam Stein awakens, while still in the pension in Jaffa where he has attempted to strangle his landlady, his take on the world is an ambiguous melding of factual reality, hallucinations, memories, dreams, and poetic speculations: "Through his not quite meshed lashes he sees himself spread over the worn, faded wallpaper. Instead of stereotyped flowers, he sees his own image multiplied a thousand times."¹⁶ It is in this kaleidoscopic view of the world around him that Adam and the other patients in the hospitals he inhabits are connected. The world he creates around himself—or rather, the world he draws them all into inside his private phantasms—is, of course, no less a mad realm of the imagination than any of their own delusional states. But because this web of intersecting fantasies has them all cooperating in a single aberration, it provides them with human contact again.

Many of the people in the hospital had been part of the pseudo-scientific experiments Nazi doctors performed on twins. Therefore—like Adam—they, too, could survive only by dissociating from the reality in which they were tortured and then interjecting into their selves their lost sibling with whom they had seen and shared the feelings of intense pain. Having lost their own spouses, children, or parents in analogous ways, other patients also created psychological alternates that they identified with, imagined as being present with them, and conjured up as having spiritual roles to play in their lives. On occasion, a patient or a staff member is annoyed both in the day-to-day life of the asylum and in the dream world in which Adam manipulates them.

Kaniuk deftly shows the reader how, at any one time, the patients may be interacting as suffering human beings trying to come to terms with their traumatic experiences during the Holocaust, reviving memories of the lives they led and the people they loved during normal times before the concentration camps transformed their whole world into a nightmare. He also

¹⁶ Kaniuk, *Adam Resurrected*, 2.

shows them recalling how they came to Israel after World War II and their attempts to start new lives in the recently established Jewish state. The complicating factor in all this is that remembering for them also means resurrecting the families they lost and the tormenters who ruined their lives—in a sense, becoming the wives, children, siblings, prison guards, and insane doctors who experimented on them.

One of the ways in which these people now assembled in the Negev hospital in 1961 survived these traumas was by dissociating themselves from their bodies and normal minds, sometimes becoming their tormenters, sometimes becoming the animal they were treated as and made to live with, sometimes hallucinating a miraculous world where heavenly beings take care of them. These *projections* (analogous to a film projector casting its motion pictures onto a screen) of their own images of their multiple selves onto others and the *introjection* (absorption of mental images as a wide-angle camera focuses a diversity of scenes into a small, concentrated viewing space) of the others into themselves continue in the present time of the novel and include the other patients and staff with whom they interact.

Mrs Edelson—the landlady of the pension where Adam has been staying since release from the mental home in the Negev—awakens Adam, who attempted to kill her the previous evening. He opens his eyes not only to the reality of being in Tel Aviv but also to the dreams and envisioned constructs of childhood, early life, and career as a famous clown in pre-Holocaust Germany. He simultaneously awakens to the unbearable horrors of the concentration camp where he was incarcerated and kept alive as a pet dog. The old-fashioned furniture of the pension reminds him of his former home with his wife and son, but it is difficult for him to focus on any one moment, as each image of memory slides into another, like whiffs of smoke from the crematoria where all he loved has been consumed. Adam knows, too, that he is soon to be taken back to the asylum.

He vaguely knows why he must leave, that is, that he is insane. Then, he is driven out of the city and into the desert. He arrives at "Mrs Seizling's Institute for Rehabilitation and Therapy, Arad, Israel," a place which is at once brilliantly new and self-threateningly inhuman, an asylum to care for patients and a prison or concentration camp to protect them from the outside and the outside world from them. The hospital is described, and most of its inmates and staff members are introduced, as Adam passes down the hallways and is greeted by the people

who have been eagerly awaiting his return. All patients, however, while mad in their own way—including, it appears, nurses and doctors—are nevertheless presented through Adam's eyes and seem to be extensions of his confused consciousness. A special relationship between Adam and Nurse Jenny develops, but what it consists of remains to be explained. For again, as with the chief psychiatrist Dr Gross, the world described seems to have no objective integrity. Rather, it appears to be part dream, part hallucination, and part shared fantasy, as well as a real place. Through the voice of the narrator, names change, and it is never exactly clear whether the person speaking belongs to a single historical moment or one particular character even as the narrator seems to shift perspectives and evaluates this world in a state of uncontrollable metamorphosis.

Though it seems to be a historical section of the novel, this chapter begins with as much grotesquery and fantasy as any other and develops into the same hysterical and hallucinatory experiences as the rest. Mrs Rebecca Seizling—who at first gives the impression of being an eccentric and drab-looking American tourist from Cleveland, Ohio, arrives in Israel and attempts to see all the sites, then tries to meet high officials in the Israeli government to propose an expensive project she offers to fund. She is rebuffed as an impractical and bizarre personality, although the size of her offer prompts one official to probe her background and discover that she is the richest woman in America.

Seizling then meets by chance with the elder Schwester Schwester (*Schwester* being German for sister), the elder twin by three minutes, a survivor of the Holocaust, especially of the terrible experiments performed on siblings by the Nazis. The two women, who hit it off immediately, concoct a plan to build an up-to-the-minute mental hospital for survivors of the Shoah. This plan would provide Mrs Seizling with an honourable and fulfilling purpose in life and the Schwester sister with a way of doing God's work revealed spiritually to her as well as enabling her to create a proper place for her dead sister to live with and in her. The elder Schwester sets forth her ideas that inspire her and which outline the inner structure of Kaniuk's novel:

We were a nation...a nation that betrayed God. And we paid the highest price possible—we became smoke and ashes...Human beings who have been halved, quartered...During the day we may be complaining, yawning, making money, building

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houses, scrambling around as far as we can, but at night we are insomniacs in our spacious houses, our modern apartments, our magnificent cars, at night we dream nightmares and shriek for Satan has tattooed our forearms with blue numbers...All those numbers screaming and crying because they have no idea of the why or the wherefore or the how or the how long or the when or the whereto of it all...¹⁷

All of these Jews, suffering intensely from their memories and their guilt, "have turned this country (Israel) into the largest insane asylum on earth."¹⁸ If she had a million dollars, continues the elder Schwester Schwester, she would gather all these survivors, take them into the Negev, where they would live in a protected and caring asylum, prepare to meet with God—and be cured. Mrs Seizling accepts this vision as her own and eventually convinces the Israeli government to allow her to bring it to fruition with her millions.

The lives, personalities, memories, and hallucinations of the patients, nurses, and doctors seem to have some basis in historical facts but are ghost-like wisps of insanity, perhaps emanating from Adam's mind. Their entire existence is curtailed and fragmented by the crazed policies and practices of the National Socialist regime, the defensive measures generated in the minds of all who went through the ordeal, and the subsequent careers in which survivors tried to live in a world that could not understand and often denied their realities. In his memory of how he was educated in German idealistic philosophy and aesthetics at the university, Adam offers a glimpse into the dangerous manipulation of ideas that led to the evils of the Holocaust and the shameful rationalisations still being made for it. If all this is a grotesque mixture of fact and fancy, reason and irrationality, credulity and insight, it is nevertheless something that approaches the truth. At the heart of the chapter, there is also the special romantic relationship between Adam and the nurse Jenny, their furtive sexual encounters, their deep discussions on the meaning of life, and their psychological influence on one another.

Adam's usefulness in the concentration camp consisted of entertaining in two ways: first, he was made to play music and reassure the crowds of Jews being prepared for entrance into the killing machines of the Holocaust, to calm down their fears, prevent panic, and make

¹⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁸ Ibid., 54.

them walk directly into the supposed "shower rooms." In performing this duty, Adam recognises his wife and child being herded toward their annihilation. Instead of warning them of the impending danger—since there is nothing they or he could do to avoid this horrible death except cause a commotion that would elicit even more acts of cruelty—he smiles, keeps performing, and watches them disappear into the illusion that all is not as bad as they feared. Adam is also given a second role to play, as a clown. He is taken to live within the compound of the commandant as his personal clown, where he listens to the mad chatter of his master, crawls on the floor like the master's pet dog, and grovels and performs like an animal. He loses his freedom, his dignity, and his humanity.

From his first role of leading the victims to their inevitable deaths, Adam absorbs into his consciousness the knowledge that he has collaborated with the perpetrators of this enormous criminal act. Further, in regard to his own family, he realises that by colluding in the deceit to prevent them from screaming and flailing in rage against their murder, he has robbed them of that final assertion of rebellion, their only means of asserting their Judaism in prayer and their humanity by rejecting any cooperation with evil. From his second role as a pet dog and performing creature, Adam seems to willingly give up his integrity as a person. Adam does more than humiliate himself by crawling around on all fours, eating from the same food bowl as the dog, and licking up to the monster of a Nazi. He becomes a dog, thus earning the moniker he is given in the title of the novel, *Adam Ben Kelev*, Adam the son of a dog (in the sense of being one of the race of canines).

As the war begins to wind down after the Battle of Stalingrad, with the German defeat a foregone and inescapable outcome, the master seeks to insinuate himself into Adam's good graces, hoping—as it seems to transpire in fact—to have the dog-man-clown lead him to safety.

The bribes seem to work; to save his own life and ensure some kind of survival in the post-war period, Adam lives on with the promised wealth and property he receives for services rendered. Some or all of the memory that Adam carries within when he departs from Europe and reestablishes himself in the Land of Israel may be a hallucination. In that version, the former concentration commandant Klein converts to Judaism, passes himself off as Dr Weiss, and accepts a post as director of the mental hospital in the Negev where Adam is placed for treatment. To be sure, it is as likely to be a phenomenon whereby the victim identifies with the

victimiser, so that Adam has multiple personalities or social *alternates*: he is himself continuous with the man he was before the Holocaust, that is, a clown, husband and father, what he became during the Holocaust, one of the perpetrators, a dog who has no moral responsibilities for or understanding of the crimes, and a broken and lost Jewish soul. Because the loss of his wife and children is too much to bear, he also becomes them, giving them a life inside his mind that defies all reason and makes him even less the independent man he used to be.

When Adam Stein was taken aside from the Selection and given a chance to live by the commandant as his pet dog, he was humiliated and degraded as a human being. But this circus trick whereby man becomes a dog is part of a greater swindle. It is a hoax in which the very qualities that make a human being human are twisted and lost because the acceptance of the role as a beast is not only consciously taken to ensure survival, it is unconsciously adopted to cope with the painful experiences felt and seen all around, the guilt in the face of such collusion with evil, the intensity of personal losses, and the inability to find any purpose in it all. In the Seizling Institute, Adam is not the only person to still slip in and out of the delusionary identity as a dog. Other members of his own family (brother, wife, child) return from the oblivion of death in such a metamorphosed shape or, which is virtually the same thing in such delusions, the Nazi officer who forced the role upon them, and from there to the patients, nurses, and doctors at the asylum who inhabit and constitute Adam's dream world; and historically, too, for "all the German mothers whose sons came back from the war wounded and blind"¹⁹ and thus the whole world then and now.

The reader cannot be sure when reading a description of a man crawling around the floor and barking like a dog is, in fact, a historical scene verifiable by objective witnesses an optical illusion set up for satirical purposes, a private delusion projected by Adam's mind or one of the other patients, or a shared hallucination generated by the structure of the Institute itself, as though it were a giant kaleidoscope meant to concentrate the collective pains and pious wishes of the inmates:

¹⁹ Ibid., 82.

"Come, monster, draw nigh," whispers Adam to the dog. Whereupon, as if by magic, the embodied sheet begins to approach the candies. Closer and closer it comes, until it snatches the candies with a paw that looks just like a hand (or perhaps a foot, eh, monster?), hoarding them, growling and retreating. "Eat!" The animal answers with a bark. "I was a dog once. Rex was once a dog. We all were dogs once."²⁰

When Germany lost the war to the Allies in 1945, Commandant Klein was true to his word and arranged for Adam Stein, his pet dog, to survive the final days, with its forced marches and the anarchy and hardship of defeat. In return, his Jewish slave helped the Nazi officer pass as a Jew, Dr Weiss. Then, inheriting the estates of Baron Von Hamdung, his former enemy's ancestor, Adam supported his tormentor/protector in his new life as a wealthy man about town, card shark, and investor of the money by bringing him regular payments of coins in condoms.

This was the life Adam led in Berlin and Switzerland until he travelled to Israel in 1958: a bizarre and unreal life, a life built on preposterous relationships and tenuous circumstances. Rather than return to the circus, the newly rich and emotionally unstable survivor became the subject of research into the paranormal conducted by American scientists. The reason for his journey to the Jewish state was that he had learned that his daughter Ruth, who he was sure had died in the camps, was alive in the new land. This report also sets off a train of memories about his family and what happened to them after his famous circus was declared *Jüdenrein*. Everyone had disappeared into the machinery of the Holocaust—until they showed up one day when he was playing his violin to soothe the fears of the long lines of victims being led to the gas chambers and ovens. Until then, Adam repressed his memories and his longings. He had also chosen not to migrate to Israel right after the end of World War II because, for him, already hiding his broken soul within the carcass of cynicism and denial, "Palestine is nothing but a joke. Refugees, escapees, bits and pieces of humanity, chaff tossed in the wind, they cannot establish a homeland for themselves and not worthy, perhaps, of having one."²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 108.

²¹ Ibid., 127.

Feeling that his supposedly miraculous and cynical life in Europe was collapsing around him like a pack of cards, he decided to make contact with his daughter through a letter but was answered by her husband, who recounts her story since her escape as a refugee and invites Adam to come to see his newly born grandson. Ruth's history is that of many other survivors, providing a context to measure Adam's far more unusual experiences and the other patients he will meet at the Seizling Institute. However, though Stein feels an immediate sense of welcome in Israel, he cannot really begin a meaningful life there, and a crisis is triggered when some boys in the open-air market call him "soap," a reference to the supposed use the Nazis made of human fat rendered down from the bodies they destroyed. His good feelings wash away from him, and he feels himself to have become a monster: "Adam Frankenstein Stein...a bar of soap in a nation of soap bars."²² Only at this point does he go from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem to try to confront his daughter, but once there loses his courage. After a while, he places a notice in the newspaper mysteriously inviting Ruth to meet him. Instead of his daughter coming to see him, it is her friend, as Ruth died in 1958.

Another moral crisis, another mental collapse, another descent into confusion and madness—at each stage of which reality fragments, confounds itself with guilt-ridden memories, and fills out with hallucinations. By the time his son-in-law Joseph Graetz leads Adam out of the cemetery where they have gone to see Ruth's tombstone, Adam is back in the concentration camp and has become a dog again.

He is in a session with Dr Gross at the Seizling Institute in the Negev, back in the earlier asylum in Jaffa, in the concentration camp in Germany, in Jerusalem, in Tel Aviv, everywhere and anywhere all at once, himself a man, a clown, a dog, a victim, and a victimiser. The child, nicknamed David, King of Israel, who crawls around the room and barks like a dog, is another middle-aged survivor, is Adam then and now, and is a host of other beings in hallucinations, and whose own distorted minds actively join in this collective dream.

One could argue that Kaniuk seeks to show that individuals respond out of their own historical experiences, concocting strategies in their minds to survive both the Holocaust and the aftermath of irreparable pain and guilt at not being able to save their loved ones, as well as

²² Ibid., 133.

the indifference from others who cannot or do not want to believe what happened during the Shoah. Like Adam, who sat down one day to burn all the papers that proved his memories to be true or that asserted alternative facts to his feelings and imaginings, they are all arsonists who try to burn away in one way or another the unbearable and unacceptable past. But if, as Adam lectures his fellow survivors, the only way to escape all this madness is to laugh—which is the reason that he became a clown—and this is the lesson that he teaches to the others, he then exemplifies the principle in himself and brings all their preexisting and newly learned performances together in the Seizling Institute.

Adam's special relationship with a dog-man is sometimes perceived as an avatar of Reuben Katz, *alias* "Handsome Rube," and otherwise the whole panoply of Adam Stein's inner demons, social alternates, and hallucinatory revenants of his family. In order to try to teach Handsome Rube to express himself in human language, Adam takes out an old typewriter and shows him how it works. He also produces *ad hoc* documents to make the dog-man that he is officially recognised and protected. However, as the canine performers are Adam as well as anyone else he imagines, the Olivetti typewriter serves as a means for the protagonist to communicate with his whole mental cast of players across all the normal boundaries of historical time and geopolitical space.

In this state of mind, Adam Stein remembers more about his past in the concentration camp and the process by which he was converted from a man into a dog, in the same way that the Nazi tormenter Klein becomes a friend, a Jew, and then Weiss, the psychiatrist at the Seizling Institute. Of this process, Adam explains to Dr Weiss, "We are both lost, we have both perished. Our voices are the voices of ghosts—Jew to Jew, God to Son of God, man to father of man. You, my God, shall wait for me at the end of the road. I won't murder you. I can't, and it's a shame, a shame."²³

Perhaps Kaniuk is contending that God may have died in Auschwitz and in all the other hundreds of camps and murderous acts of the Holocaust. However, to search for him, against all reason, to obey the Law when the Law has failed to protect all the victims, living and dead, that is Judaism too. If God is to live, it is when he is recognised in the tortured, suffering, and

²³ *Ibid.*, 303.

cremated Jewish body, in the voices of confused and humiliated people constituting a mythical voice crying in the wilderness, the howling of a dog, the chuckling of a clown, the ravings of a frightened old woman.

Having returned from his Negev wanderings, Adam Stein meets with his fellow patients and the doctors to discuss the nighttime wanderings—recapitulating the Exodus, expressing his wandering mind—all of which have become a circus performance by clowns, trained dogs, and mind readers. Pain, humiliation, envy and pleasure coalesce into the phantasmagoria of madness:

"The number engraved on your arm is God!" screamed Wolfowitz in a fury and at once broke into laughter. At the sound of these words everyone laughed, though the doctors despaired of figuring out their meaning. As always, no matter what was done to prevent it, a gap existed between the careful and partial intelligence of the doctors and the capacity of these others to unite in a secret society rooted in unintelligible truths. Again the group laughed, and the doctors cleared their throats and took notes in blue notebooks that had the seal of the Institute stamped on their covers.²⁴

Thus, the engraved numbers, tattooed signs of being in a concentration camp, the mark of Cain, the circumciser's removal of the prepuce in remembrance of the covenant, all these signs run together.

One of the shortest chapters in the book takes its title from a used guillotine purchased by one of the patients, Abe Wolfowitz, "the Circumciser (who was never a circumciser)." Why he needed such a slicing device is supposedly explained in an involved story of Wolfowitz's life that winds its way back through the history of a medieval curtain from a synagogue in Poland, the Baal Shem Tov and his followers, the penning and influence of mystical books, and then an institute for the study of language, a discussion of modern Jewish art, and the

²⁴ Ibid., 326.

speaker's own preference for paintings of large-breasted women. This rigmarole eventually picks up brief hints about Wolfowitz's daughter Naomi's death and his inability to rescue her: "I have bought a guillotine," he says, "that is able to cut plastic. If Naomi's head had been made of plastic, she would have been saved, and God acquitted."²⁵ This absurdity alludes to a swift and painless death, resurrection, rebirth, and a reversal of history's errors and revolutionary executions. As well, it plays on the ambiguity of the word *plastic*—in its original sense referring to the malleability or plasticity of a material. Then, once the brittle and hard man-made plastic was invented, the term came to mean something artificial and unnatural. Wolfowitz then continues, turning to one of the essential themes of the novel and its theoretical resolution to the unbearable pains of memory, guilt, and hopelessness that the Holocaust inflicted on the Jewish survivors:

I bought it so that I might be reminded of the atrocity which here, in this house, sometimes starts to disappear. Dr Gross calls this the beginning of recovery—in other words, forgetting. It will stand here, and I, whenever I want, can lay down my own head and bring to a close the agony of dying, what I call fate's game of pretense.²⁶

Wolfowitz's greatest fear is that he will forget what happened to his daughter and to millions of other children when their parents could not protect them from the Nazi scourge. If Dr Gross, the head psychiatrist at the Institute, believes that he can begin to cure his patients by making them erase the memory of their losses from their troubled minds, he would himself be committing an "atrocity" or, as commentators on the Holocaust have indicated, continuing

²⁵ Ibid., 339.

²⁶ Ibid., 339.

the Shoah, so that a 614th mitzvah has been suggested as the crux of rabbinic Judaism: never to forget, or Hitler will have been vindicated and won.

The memories, embedded deeply into their survivors' bodies and psyches, are all they have left of their lives and the core of their identities: there would be a reason to believe in God if that were taken away from them. The newly purchased guillotine will therefore be a sign of an alternative to Gross's theoretical cure of madness, as a means of providing a different escape: self-inflicted decapitation that also punishes the father who failed to save his daughter's life. Yet all this is "pretense," an illusion or delusion, but one that is necessary to the historical dignity and moral integrity of the men and women who have survived.

Wolfowitz goes on, concluding his speech and the chapter, by drawing in a previous discussion of a sacred relic of the destroyed synagogues of Eastern and Central Europe, the beautiful woven curtain that stands between the inside of the Ark, where the Torah scrolls are stored, and the outside, where the rabbis, cantors, and congregants observe. This is a veil of mystery and a work of art covered in mystical images and signs, a thing that separates and a medium through which spirit and words may pass. His discourse, however, quickly devolves into the absurdities and madness of the novel's normative textures, with its mixtures of sacred and profane and transcendent and mundane realities. Thus, the paradox of the indignities inflicted on the Jewish body, in life and death, and its ability to survive, if only in agonising memory: "The curtains may be found on the shoulders of angels and under the asses of loose women. The Schwester sister sees an angel of God in the stream of a Bedouin's piss. Thank God for giving me life so that I would be able to die!"²⁷

Hidden almost in the heart of this bizarre chapter—bizarre because it covers many new locations and introduces several characters not seen previously or only tangentially discussed in earlier chapters—is the question of how to find a watermelon in the Seizling Institute. Something so ordinary as a watermelon, food a child wants and no one thought of providing or if on the premises, is locked away in the kitchen where none of the patients, not even Adam Stein, is permitted to go according to a strict interpretation of the foundational rules of the Institute. A child's craving clashes with a legal restriction, becoming, as so often in the madness

²⁷ Ibid., 339.

of this novel, the forbidden fruit, the withholding of which, according to Stein, is another atrocity committed by those who misunderstand the Shoah and its consequences. "It's nauseating," Stein exclaims. "If I could just get him a watermelon! Even one watermelon."²⁸ Cut off in mid-word, Adam runs about, trying to raise support against this misconstruing of Mrs Seizling's intentions and to again complain about injustices, now and in the past.

As he rushes about the Institute, Adam forgets what he was at first seeking, and each person he meets—or whom he conjures out of his imagination, for they are ultimately the same thing—leads him into his own and into their memories. Characters rise out of the lost past, speaking of injuries and frustrations caused by the Holocaust, whose presence in the present of his ramblings and in the place of a shared hallucination mark a map of suffering that continues ad infinitum. Whatever happened under Nazi rule, with all its unspeakable and unimaginable cruelties, continues to occur in the Institute when the nurses and doctors try to make the survivors forget their losses and guilt.

At one point, Stein seems to be penning a letter to his son-in-law Joseph from the pension of his old friend in Tel Aviv, near the Yarkon River, again let free on furlough from the Seizling Institute. His release from the mental home, however, is disastrous. By being deemed to be free of his hallucinations, he has become not a *tabula rasa*, a blank tablet upon which all new memories may be inscribed and a fresh personality formed, able to cope with the realities of modern Israel, but a *tabula mortua*, a dead surface where life, in all its painful complexities and humiliations and irresolvable griefs, has been scraped away, a kind of palimpsest, once impressed by history's sufferings and torments but now unable to receive new impressions, a soulless and deathly mentality.

In Adam Stein's case, he complains that the moment he recovered, he was lost, not himself, since he could no longer be a dog or anyone or anything else that he had been during his emotional illness. When he recalls, for instance, the nurse Jenny with whom he seemed to be having a romantic affair in the early chapters of the novel, rather than a nurse who sought to treat his many fantastic waking dreams, she is now described as "a marvellous lunatic" with whom he could no longer sleep,²⁹ confirming our presentiment from the beginning that

²⁸ Ibid., 349.

²⁹ Ibid., 361.

everyone, everywhere and at all times, is an aspect of Adam's delusional mind. Precisely in recalling those former hallucinations and the human relationships they fostered in order to fill the gap between the previous normalcy of life before the Holocaust and all attempts at accommodating reality since his arrival in Israel, the madness creeps in again. He is not sure, however, whether he is ready to accept them for what they are and embrace them in place of sanity, with all its loneliness and sterile activities.

In writing this letter, Stein reveals himself—his inner core of doubts and delusions—while holding himself together enough to keep up the performance of normalcy and sanity for the outside world so that he is not returned to the asylum in the desert. The novel ends with a simulation of logic that is an actual demonstration of Stein on the edge of insanity: "Joseph my dear, goodbye and good luck. Would that everything which has happened will never happen again, and that whatever will happen may, in fact, not happen, and may all dogs talk to one another."³⁰

Our perspective on all this, more than 70 years after the Shoah, contains the swirl of mixed mimetic levels of reality. First, there are the different manners of imitating what people believe they have lived through as historical events and individual life-forming stages in their careers. Then, there is what their minds have done with those overwhelmingly painful recollections, constituted as fantasies to help them cope with such physical abuse, social humiliations, domestic and professional losses, necessary guilty actions, and wave after wave of psychological disorientation. Third, there are the denials of truth that leave gaping holes filled with substitute people and events, bizarre adaptations of the "other's (the tormentor's, the absent loved one's, the mythical, legendary and fancied saviour's) appearance, self-history, and powerful mastery over the destroyed original self.

In another sense, the more than fifty years since Kaniuk wrote and published his novel is a historical period of Jewish and Israeli history in which the Holocaust could begin to be squarely observed and studied in ways that were too difficult to achieve beforehand. The Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem played an important part in this shift in mentality by doing to the Jewish sensibility what the Nuremberg Trials (1945–49), after the Allied defeat of the Nazis,

³⁰ Ibid., 370.

never fully made possible. Thus, Kaniuk's novel can now be viewed in a wider perspective as part of a Jewish and Israeli debate on the meaning of the Holocaust, both in itself for those who died and survived the events and in its long-term influences on successive generations who did not experience it or know its survivors firsthand.

It should be evident by now that one of the principal themes in Kaniuk's novel is the psychological damage done to many of the individuals who managed to survive the Holocaust. This horrific event was not merely an enormous crime against the Jewish people—a systematic murdering of six million men, women, and children and the destruction of their culture and civilisation in Europe—but also a deep rent in their history, separating centuries of persecution, exile, and isolation, during which tools were found from within the different communities, separated as they were from one another, to maintain religious, social, educational, and financial institutions, and to change their sensibilities to fit in with the surrounding societies, no matter how hostile they were. For no matter how harsh the treatment and extensive the boundaries of exclusion had been, no one had ever before attempted to eradicate the Jews as a biological entity. Jews had been hated and exploited, to be sure, but they had also been protected as a witness to Christian truths, used for economic purposes detrimental to their own welfare, and shifted from one part of the world to another. The Nazi program set out at the Wannsee Conference at the end of 1942 was to make Europe *Jüdenrein* cleansed of all.

To cope with personal, epistemological, and spiritual losses during this period of mass persecution and murder, many strategies of the human mind were set in motion, mechanisms familiar to those who study psychological trauma under conditions of infantile and adolescent crisis; social, political, and natural disasters; and proximity to persons whose previous suffering has not been resolved or controlled. Such strategies include the suppression of memory, the dissociation from pain and humiliation, and the formation of multiple personalities. For Jews—whether Ashkenazi, Sephardic, or secular—traditional methods specific to Jewish tradition proved inadequate, such as integrating private memories into inherited religious myths and legends, adjustment of liturgical prayers, holiday texts, and collective writing of local and cultural Memory Books of Remembrance. During and after the Shoah itself, not only were whole extended families obliterated and communities destroyed, but individuals were separated from loved ones forever, and whole populations of relatives, friends, and colleagues

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disappeared without a trace. Many lost faith in the ability of Jewish authorities, institutions, and formalised memories to provide any comfort or material from which to reconstitute their normal existence.

As Kaniuk shows throughout *Adam Resurrected*, alienation of the self from its own identity became widespread as irrational substitutes came into being with only temporary force to assuage pains, losses, and guilt. Customs, language, and emotional patterns of behaviour broke down into which, if at all, only shared fantasies could flow—often out as well as in—making any accommodation to an indifferent, misunderstanding, or even hostile world all but impossible. Another key theme in Kaniuk's novel is, therefore, how Adam Steiner is able to bring together (in reality or fantasy is never clear) the suffering souls of the survivors gathered into Mrs Seizling's Institute and to bind their fantastic alternative lives—or, rather, hallucinated alternatives to real-life—into a new dynamic fabric: a tapestry that winds and unwinds, like Odysseus's seemingly abandoned Penelope's shroud for her father-in-law Laertes, constantly projecting images, stories, and relationships that substitute real memories and domestic continuity with lost loved ones. Insofar as they understand the process, the nurses and doctors see merit in this phenomenon of shared trance-like behaviour, not because it is a cure, but because it is a form of palliative care, a way of staving off a complete collapse of the mind and heart. The patients can then live out their damaged and disrupted lives with some sense of personal meaning and social cohesion.

As in other novels of the twentieth century, *Adam Resurrected* focuses on an asylum as at once a microcosm of a sick world—as in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* or Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*—but also as a meditation on the limits of the Jewish mentality. These novels take the asylum and hospital as the ultimate expression of a sick world, one in the decadence that preceded World War I or as the epitome of Communist oppression.

Kaniuk's *Adam Resurrected* combines the two representative types. On the one hand, there is the Seizling Institute, with the best of intentions insofar as it becomes a distorted image of Adam Stein's mind and mirrors Israel, Judaism, and the world as having been driven mad by the Holocaust. On the other hand, instead of satirising mental health therapies or theories, the Institute modifies them positively in terms of a mild amelioration of suffering into a community of mutually supportive fantasies. It is not so much that physical and psychical

illnesses are deeply involved with one another or that reason and emotion (subjectivity and imagination) need to be in balance. Rather, it is that the historical reality of the world at best juxtaposes varieties of good and evil, though the triumph of wickedness and violence seems to prevail most of the time. Occasionally, the imagination transforms tragedy into comedy or a series of comforting jokes.

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