This article analyzes the dimensions of religious discourse in Ruth Kluger's memoir, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (2001). Specifically, I focus on how Kluger's religious language intersects with her conceptualizations of gender and the Holocaust. First, I examine Kluger's childhood memories, including her references to biblical intertexts and her charged recollection of Jewish holidays. I then move on to analyze Kluger's reflections on the issue of free will, often couched in "theological" terms, which appear in the latter part of her memoir dealing with her experience in the camps. I argue that both dimensions of Kluger's religious language are intertwined with her memory of gender as part of her lived experience, as well as her ongoing construction of gender as an analytic category. Both dimensions occasionally overlap in Kluger's narrative, revealing important ramifications for the debate about feminist engagement with the Holocaust. In this regard, I attend particularly to Kluger's occasional construction of gendered essentialisms in her remembered confrontations with evil and authoritarianism.

The study of Jewish women in the Holocaust emerged as an area of research in the 1980s and has steadily grown to become a discrete, interdisciplinary field encompassing feminist theory, literary theory and historiography. Attention is paid not only to the historical particularities of female experience in the Nazi concentration camps, but also to the social construction of gender, as expressed in male and female difference in wartime Europe and as redeployed in Holocaust memoirs and other representational media. Thus far, the study of women and gender in the Holocaust has had a controversial, albeit relatively short span of existence. In a germinal article on the topic, Joan Ringelheim claimed that scholarly literature on the Holocaust had so far had the regrettable tendency to be "gender neutral," eliding women's experience by subsuming it under a "universal" framework that took men's experience as normative of the human experience. Literary memoirs by male survivors such as Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel were thought to epitomize the experience of all Jewish survivors.
Heeding Ringelheim’s clarion call to pay specific attention to “the hidden experiences of women” in the Holocaust, a large number of studies gradually appeared, and a paradigm shift in Holocaust historiography was underway.\textsuperscript{4}

Controversy was nevertheless not far behind. The initial response to a more focused study of women and gender in the Holocaust was one of considerable resistance, if not—as Lenore Weitzman claims—outright hostility.\textsuperscript{5} The oft-cited view of Gabriel Schoenfeld is emblematic of such a negative response. Schoenfeld thought that scholars who singularly attended to women in the Holocaust were doing nothing more than disseminating “propaganda” under the guise of scholarship.\textsuperscript{6} Lawrence Langer, a respected literary scholar of Holocaust writing, likewise rejected gendered approaches to the Holocaust, criticizing them for producing “a mythology of comparative endurance” that valorized women as worthy of more esteem (than men) by virtue of having suffered more (than men).\textsuperscript{7} Critics were concerned that gender distinctions risked obscuring the bigger picture: Anti-Semitism, not sexism, was the determining factor in the Nazi persecution and murder of Jews.\textsuperscript{8} Langer’s cautionary words about avoiding an implicit “competitive” schema in our reading of women’s particular experience of the Holocaust is, I think, valid; but it is not sufficient reason to relinquish a historical investigation of the elements distinctive to women’s experience.\textsuperscript{9}

A primary means of gauging Jewish women’s experience of the Holocaust is to analyze various autobiographical forms—the memoirs, testimonies and diaries of survivors. Autobiography entails a “split” subject: the narrated self and the narrating self.\textsuperscript{10} Memory and history may not align; the generic imperative to produce a representational narrative can force “closure” onto a life that in many ways resists it, especially in the case of trauma survivors.\textsuperscript{11} In this light, the purpose of interrogating women’s memoirs would not be to excavate an “accurate” historical record of the peculiar female experience beneath accreted layers of memory, but to interpret the distinctively female subject presented in memoir—to assess how the subjective construction of gender shapes narration and reflection.\textsuperscript{12} Earlier studies have used memoirs as part of a wide range of documentary evidence in order to articulate a social history of women’s Holocaust experience.\textsuperscript{13} Fewer studies have analyzed women’s memoirs for the constructions of gender found therein.\textsuperscript{14}

One Holocaust memoir stands out as ripe for such analysis—Ruth Kluger’s \textit{Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered}.\textsuperscript{15} Kluger was born to Jewish parents in Vienna in 1931 and raised in what she describes as an acculturated Jewish family. In 1942, at the age of eleven, she was deported with her mother to Theresienstadt, and one year later they were both deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Kluger and her mother were later selected for manual labour at Christianstadt, a sub-camp of Groß-Rosen. They escaped in early 1945, acquired forged German passports and survived the final months of the war amongst the civilian population in Germany. After the war, Kluger lived and studied in Bavaria before immigrating with her mother to the United States in 1947. In her adult life, Kluger carved out a career as a professor of German literature, first at Princeton University and subsequently at the University of California.
On a visit to Germany in the early 1990s, Kluger had a serious accident and was hospitalized for months. During her recuperation, she drafted a memoir in German, which was eventually published to much critical acclaim as *weiter leben—Eine Jugend* (1992). In 2001, Kluger translated her own work into English. Revised for an American audience, it was published under the title *Still Alive*.

The unique literary style of *Still Alive* has been commended, in the words of Lisa Costello, for its “complex dialogic,” in which various and competing aspects of Kluger’s subjectivity interact continually across different narrated timeframes. Gender is one aspect of Kluger’s subjectivity that repeatedly comes to the fore in a “performative” process of remembering the past to “bring it into relation with the present.” Kluger narrates her remembered *experience* of gender (through, for example, childhood gender roles in her family), but she also *reflects* on the significance of gender in relation to the Holocaust, theorizing about its interface with the problem of evil in highly complex ways. In all of this, Kluger resists the pull toward sentimentality and the “redemptive” closure of a childhood survival tale. Moreover, Kluger’s text projects a female implied reader and so “creates a space for women” in a literary situation where the “traditional male experience” of the camps “has come to be attributed to both sexes.” Beyond this, Kluger’s text makes some bold feminist claims, many of which not only use gender as an analytic construct, but sharply distinguish between men and women *as such*, in ways that would be deemed essentialist by contemporary feminist theory.

Kluger’s award-winning memoir has understandably given rise to a substantial body of secondary literature. Predominantly, scholars have examined Kluger’s depiction of her fraught relationship with her mother, whom Kluger presents as narcissistic, neurotic and paranoid, inflicting arbitrary suffering on her only daughter. This motif has garnered some negative reviews of Kluger’s text in the Anglophone press, as Linda Shulte-Sasse has pointed out. Other studies have examined the evolution of Kluger’s feminist perspective as an outgrowth of her disaffection with her mother’s way of life. Still other studies have interpreted Kluger’s systematizing reflections, or her literary artifices, such as the poems she incorporates into her text. Yet one aspect of Kluger’s text has not been given due attention: the continual surfacing in it of religious language, despite her avowed atheism (*Still Alive*, p. 18). While a couple of studies have examined the connection between Kluger’s feminism and her critique of the restricted role of women in the Judaism of her upbringing, scholars have yet to interrogate the broader function of religious discourse in Kluger’s text across its temporal segments. The purpose of this article is to examine the rhetorical function of Kluger’s religious language, specifically focusing on how it intersects with her conceptualizations of gender and the Holocaust.

By “religious language” I mean something very broad: any element of Kluger’s text that relies upon images, texts, discourses or philosophies derived from a culturally central, organized religion. For Kluger, this religion is most often Judaism, but sometimes aspects of Christian discourse are invoked as well. There are several dimensions to Kluger’s use of “religious language,” which will be grouped into two categories for
the purpose of this analysis. The first involves Kluger's childhood memories, which include references to biblical intertexts as well as recollections of Jewish holidays. The second involves her reflections on the issue of free will, often couched in "theological" terms, which appear in the latter part of her memoir dealing with her experience in the camps.

I contend that both dimensions of Kluger's religious language are intertwined with her memory of gender as part of her lived experience and with her ongoing construction of gender as an analytic category. Moreover, these two dimensions—of childhood memories and of reflections on free will—occasionally overlap in the rich texture of Kluger's narrative. In this overlap lie important ramifications for the debate about feminist engagement with the Holocaust. Kluger is not engaging in what has come to be known as "Holocaust theology," but neither is religious language wholly marginal to her text. Filling an in-between space, it cements Kluger's other pertinent reflections on gender differences, which are not only or even primarily between male and female Jewish survivors. The differences that concern her are between male and female perpetrators, and between men and women as such. This essentialism raises highly contentious issues around Kluger's presentation of Jewish male survivors of the Holocaust—issues that, via religious discourse, are often implicated in Kluger's gendered conceptions of evil and authoritarianism.

**Childhood Memories**

**Biblical Intertexts**

Although Kluger admits that her family was not particularly versed in the Hebrew Bible (p. 42), her memoir is interspersed with images and stories from it. Kluger refers to biblical stories—three from the book of Genesis, as well as the story of Ruth—on five occasions. Her biblical intertexts are not merely decorative; they subtly interact with and shape some of her larger philosophical concerns relating to gender, power, self-determination and free will. These connections become stronger as her memoir progresses.

Kluger's first biblical reference, to the story of Noah and his sons (Gen. 9:18–28), occurs at the beginning of her memoir, in the context of her memories of her early childhood in Vienna (pp. 15–18). As a four-year old pretending to be asleep on the sofa in her family's living room, she overhears the women of the family talking late at night about Hans, a teenage cousin of her mother. Having heard that Hans was tortured in a "KZ" and later released, the women discuss how they might get him out of Austria to safety. The child Ruth senses danger but barely knows what to make of it; she can only frame the mysterious undertones of the women in terms of "secrets" not accessible to her young mind.

Later, as an adult, Kluger is spurred to visit Hans by the "transgressive" curiosity awakened in her upon overhearing the "secret" of his torture. Returning to the episode from her childhood, Kluger connects her encounter with Hans to what she overheard as
a four-year-old: “The grown-ups pretended that only grown-ups die. But on the street, for all to hear, the Nazi boys were singing songs about Jewish blood spurting from their knives. That included my blood, didn’t it?” This is the first of Kluger’s several recollected impressions of what it meant to be Jewish in 1930s Vienna; in this case, it meant the possibility of death. Indeed, her memoir opens with the stark sentence: “Their secret was death, not sex. That’s what the grown-ups were talking about.”

In Kluger’s recollection of her meeting with the adult Hans, concepts of sex and death merge: Her curiosity about the facts of Hans’s (near) death experience imposes itself in her mind as an indiscretion equivalent to Noah’s sons unveiling their drunken, unwitting, somnolent father, breaking a taboo that is sexual in nature, incestuous in fact, and so heinous that it warrants their being cursed (Genesis 9:25–27): “I can’t get rid of the prickly sense that I am breaking taboos, searching for indecencies, like Noah’s children uncovering their father’s nakedness, that I am not supposed to know about death and dying.”

Kluger’s use of the biblical narrative in which Noah’s sons expose their father’s “nakedness” is delicately nuanced. On a symbolic level, the story describes the denuding of patriarchal power by the sons (a theme to which Kluger will return in relating her frustrated desire to transgress patriarchal strictures in her own family context). But in Kluger’s text, Noah’s sons are to their father what the inquisitive Ruth is to “death and dying”: She wants to know about them, so as to denude them of their power. For Kluger, “knowledge is power,” and her quest to know the details of Hans’s torture exemplifies the kind of knowledge she seeks—knowledge of the kind of misery “imposed by others with malicious intent,” the kind from which “no one recovers” (p. 18).

However, the tension arising from a perceived taboo inhibits Kluger. By referencing the story of Noah in this context, Kluger recasts it as a quest for knowledge and power, a proscribed knowledge about “the father” that imposes a “misery” upon him out of “malicious intent.” In seeking knowledge of Hans’s misery, Kluger wants access to a certain kind of power, but she is uncomfortably aware that this quest transgresses a boundary. The perceived taboo on knowledge and power is therefore gendered in its contours: “Wars, and hence the memories of wars, are owned by the male of the species. And fascism is a decidedly male property, whether you were for or against it. Besides, women have no past, or aren’t supposed to have one” (p. 18). The proscribed knowledge about the father that Noah’s sons indecently sought out thus also symbolizes the “memories of wars,” which are “owned” by men, not women.

Kluger’s second biblical reference, to the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9), occurs in the context of Kluger’s recollections of her father. On a visit to a bookstore, Ruth’s father invited her to choose a volume from the shelves. “That was unusual,” comments Kluger. “It stands out in my memory.” Her choice, approved by her father, was for “the fattest book among those that were eligible . . . a book of Jewish legends.” The book quickly “became a favorite,” and from this cherished volume, Kluger cites a legend: “When the Tower of Babel was built, God threw colored confetti into the crowd, thus damning them to their various languages and misunderstandings: God’s wrath as a painted carnival of chance” (pp. 31–32).
Kluger gives no immediate reason for her selective remembering of this one biblical legend, nor does she comment upon it explicitly. Instead, she goes on to recall her father’s love of chess, his enthusiastic effort to teach its rules to six-year old Ruth, and his disappointment when she failed to grasp them. She sensed her father’s boredom; perhaps Ruth was “too young” or “not gifted enough,” and consequently she “felt a little stupid and a bit ashamed.” Yet Kluger’s reference to the Tower of Babel, particularly its retelling in the children’s volume, powerfully connects with themes that surface in this section of the memoir, in ways that are implicit and indirect. Kluger recalls the reference to colored confetti—the anthology’s way of representing the story in Genesis to the child’s mind—as a “painted carnival,” and she remembers her games of chess as an adult in similarly metaphorical terms, likening the game to “a dance.” In the children’s book, God is conceived as a character “damning” the crowd to “their various languages and misunderstandings.” Kluger recounts the frustration that she and her father experienced at her inability to understand the language of chess. A barrier exists between them, even as she continues the “ongoing conversation” with her father’s ghost when trying to learn chess as an adult (p. 32).

Indeed, misunderstanding is a reiterated theme in the relationship between Kluger and her father. In her memory, this man was “an authority figure in the life of a small girl” (p. 33). A physician by profession, he was arrested and imprisoned for performing an abortion on a young non-Jewish woman. After his release, Kluger’s mother arranged for his emigration but could not afford to go with him herself (p. 35). At her father’s farewell luncheon, she recalls, she sought his attention and instead received “a thrashing such as I never had before, in front of my wide-eyed friend—the humiliation of it!” To cap it off, she was “banished from the family table.” She writes: “To this day I don’t know why or how I made him so mad, and to this day I would like to know and make up for it.” But the opportunity for reconciliation never arose, for, although her father did leave Austria, the Nazis would catch up with him in France, and she was never to see him again: “It’s my last impression of him, forever connected with terror, violence, injustice and the deep regret of having been misunderstood” (p. 36). Kluger likewise recalls an incident when, reproached by her father for taking his typewriter to play a game, she “trembled all day” thereafter (p. 32). The problem, she felt, lay in her difficulty in “gauging” her father’s “moods.” Just like in the legend of Babel, where interpersonal relationships were compromised by God’s introduction of different languages, Kluger’s childhood relationship with her father is fraught with misunderstanding based on the gap between her “language” and experience and his own.

The third biblical reference in Kluger’s memoir, the most detailed in terms of her reflective comments upon it, occurs in the context of her childhood attempts to forge a robust Jewish identity (pp. 41–42). Before the Nazi annexation of Vienna, she was receptive to a “nascent patriotism”; “tentative” and short-lived, it was gradually “damaged . . . beyond repair.” Seeking an alternative means of constructing her identity in relation to a significant community, she “became Jewish in defense.” To illustrate this process, Kluger tells how she adopted the first name “Ruth,” after the eponymous biblical character:
Shortly before I turned seven years old, during the first week of the German occupation, I changed my first name. I had been called Susi, a middle name, but now I wanted the other name, my first name, the Biblical name. Why do I have it if I can’t use it? I thought, and under the circumstances only a Jewish name would do. (p. 42)

Kluger’s choice of her “Jewish name” symbolically announces her emerging Jewish identity amidst the oppressively anti-Semitic circumstances that surround her, but it takes on additional significance as she moves through life:

So I got my proper name, not even knowing then how right it was for me, that it means “friend” and belonged to the woman who left her country because friendship meant more to her than kinship. For Ruth the Moabite emigrated not because of her faith, but because of another woman, her mother-in-law, Naomi. She was loyal to a person who was not a beloved or a betrothed male, though her “Whither thou goest, I shall go” is often misappropriated to that context. Hers was a freely chosen loyalty, beyond the limits of community and gender, from woman to woman. (Ibid.)

Note that Kluger considers herself to be like her namesake, inasmuch as she finds the biblical Ruth’s story an exemplary mirror of her own life. In her reading, the primacy of friendship over kinship motivated the biblical Ruth to follow her mother-in-law from Moab to Judea (cf. Ruth 1:6–19a). Ruth, Kluger emphasizes, emigrates with another woman and not because of a man, and she values friendship more than faith. In her own life, however, Kluger became an immigrant together with her mother; the ties of kinship, not friendship, dictated her emigration. It is therefore unclear whether Kluger, in likening her life-story to that of her biblical namesake, was referring to herself and her mother. Her later reflections on the saving power of friendship as she experienced it in New York may have some relevance in this regard (pp. 192–199).

Kluger declares that “male theologians” have “misappropriated” Ruth’s declaration of fidelity to Naomi (p. 42; my emphasis—R.S.). The gendered qualification indicates Kluger’s impression that professional readers of the biblical text have co-opted it into a biased agenda that views Ruth as faithful either to the memory of her deceased spouse or to the patriarchal covenant obligations of the ancient Judean people. But Kluger insists on an interpretation of Ruth as one who freely chooses to transcend gender divisions and faith obligations (implying, perhaps—not inappropriately—that the “male theologians” emphasize Ruth’s faith more than the text merits). Kluger’s own experience of acting out her “free choice” on a death-march from Christianstadt provides the grounds from which she counters the predominant “male” interpretation of Ruth (more on this below). She refuses to give these rhetorical male interlocutors the power to “take away” her namesake by foisting their interpretation upon her. Kluger humorously concludes that she would willingly trade the books of Esther and Maccabees to these male theologians for the sake of keeping her reading of Ruth. The former are “fables of tribal victory through sex and violence” (ibid.)—a description...
in keeping with her earlier remark about the memories and narration of wars being the domain of men.

A fourth biblical reference, again to the book of Ruth, occurs in chapter 11 of Kluger’s memoir, in the context of the child Ruth’s encounters with the prohibitive, gender-biased restrictions imposed by her great-uncle, who became the man of the house after her father’s departure:

> Once I got hold of a Bible in order to read the story of Ruth. I had just gotten to the part where my namesake uncovers Boaz’s feet [Ruth 3:6–13] and wanted to ask my great-uncle ... how to interpret that strange scene. Instead he took the book from me. It was a holy book, not for entertainment. ... If I had been a boy, he would have treated me differently. ... Boys had to study for their bar mitzvah ... and it was to their credit if they voluntarily read the Bible. But girls did not need that; they only read books to pass the time. (p. 50)

Even as a child, Kluger perceives the injustice of the differential treatment, based on gender, that was built into her family’s practice of Judaism. As we shall see, Kluger will return to this significant anecdote in a later episode, when she encounters a different kind of male authority figure in Auschwitz.

Kluger’s fifth and final biblical intertext, again in the context of her childhood attempts to forge a new Jewish identity, alludes to the creation narrative (Gen. 1:1–3:24). Told that she has been enrolled in the “Mosaic” religion classes at school, the young Ruth misunderstands the word to refer to her toy mosaic. When it is explained to her that the word refers to “Moses, the great lawmaker of our early enlightenment,” Ruth feels something amiss in its euphemistic nature: “It was as if the word Jewish had been defiled by anti-Semitic venom” (p. 43). Nevertheless, her school religion lessons were “a lot of fun.” The class sometimes acted out Bible stories, and Ruth played the part of God in the narrative of creation: “I stood between the blackboard and the wall in order to be invisible and told the first couple that they had sinned.” When she told her family about it, they laughed good-naturedly (pp. 43–44).

The contrast between this narrative and the preceding one should not be overlooked. Kluger’s family approved of her public engagement with the Bible via performative art, in a school setting, but her private reading of the Bible in the home was not allowed. Ruth could act out the role of “God” and elicit no offense, but her desire for intimate knowledge of the sacred book was not sanctioned. Kluger’s three biblical intertexts from the book of Genesis (the stories of Noah, the Tower of Babel and Adam and Eve) all deal with themes of transgression and punishment. Kluger’s second reference to the book of Ruth narrates her *enactment* of a “transgression” (her quest for biblical knowledge) that is met with punishment—or at least approbation—at the hand of her great-uncle. The references to the creation story and the book of Ruth showcase the young Ruth trying to assert a viable Jewish identity in the face of anti-Semitism. All five biblical intertexts illustrate Kluger’s careful interweaving of the issues of Jewishness, anti-Semitism, gender and her feminist consciousness as she reflects back on her
childhood experiences. As noted, hints at her later experience in the camps surface in three of these intertexts, and I will develop their significance more fully in the second part of this article. Before that, however, I will look briefly at the way religion and gender intersect with Kluger’s reflections on the Holocaust in the context of her childhood experience of the Jewish festivals and rituals.

The Festivals and Rituals

Kluger’s two accounts of celebrating Pesach as a child, narrated together (pp. 44–45), occur within the context of her other attempts at constructing a Jewish identity; however, they are not so much examples of the same effort as reflections on its success. Kluger recounts her first memory of a family Seder in connection with her questions about the meaningfulness of a religiously determined Jewish identity. She comments particularly on the intrinsic gender divisions in the practice of the Seder, even as she admits the beauty of the event. For Kluger, Pesach was “weighted with poetic and historical significance”—for the men of the household, as well as the children, but “scarcely for women.” With some irony, she adds: “not even an inexperienced child, provided she was female, could overlook the gender difference on this day of glory. The women in the family stood around all day in the smelly, overheated kitchen to prepare the dishes without their usual household help, those dishes which the oldest uncle would then ceremoniously use for his interpretation of the end of our exile” (p. 44).

The second Seder is recounted directly, this time with reference to the symbolic relevance of the festival vis-à-vis the dire situation of the Jews in Vienna at the time. At that Seder, Ruth clashed with an elder cousin over who had the right to read the first question in the Haggadah, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” Since Ruth was the youngest, she thought it was her privilege, “but” she writes, “I was only the youngest girl, and the next oldest child was a boy.” This was her cousin Heinz, who quarrelled fiercely with Ruth over the issue. Eventually an adult intervened, and Ruth won the quarrel. She recounts the result:

The holy Haggadah came sailing in my direction across the table, tossed by my angry cousin. I had won, but the pleasure of taking part in a meaningful ritual had been drained out of this victory. And what is the answer to the question that was such an honor to ask and worth fighting for? How indeed was the night different from all other nights? God saved us, is the answer; he took care of his people. The analogy to the twentieth century didn’t hold up in the event, and what little I had been taught of a Jewish faith in a Jewish God crumbled in the course of the years that ensued. I would have become an agnostic anyway, but the Nazis added to my disappointment the feeling of having grasped a rotten plank during a shipwreck. (p. 45)

In this second episode, Kluger deftly draws attention to how the powerful poetic narrative of the Exodus, celebrated in the context of the encroaching Nazi terror, actually revealed its impotence in her life. What begins as a reflection on the gender bias
in a festival ritual ends as a reflection on the fate of all of the Jewish people in the Holocaust, male and female, and a provocative statement about Kluger's consequent loss of faith.27

One passage in Kluger's text that has already received some scholarly attention concerns her difficulties in grieving for her father's murder without a physical burial site.28 When she finds out that her father was sent to Lithuania and killed there in an unknown way, Kluger expresses her sense of stumbling around in a kind of mental darkness (p. 39). She wants to "find or invent an appropriate way of mourning, some ceremony" for her father, even though she dislikes "ceremonies" on principle, suspecting them of mendacity (p. 30). This leads her once more to grapple with the gendered restrictions of Jewish tradition. Only men are obligated and expected to recite the Kaddish—the prayer said in commemoration of deceased parents. According to her mother, Kluger's beloved and jocular grandfather, who had no sons, had once said to his (male) dog in front of his two daughters: "You are the only one around who'll be able to say kaddish for me" (p. 30). Kluger adds that her mother accepted "the humiliation like a good Jewish girl," recounting the story to her daughter without a trace of criticism. But Kluger is not so sanguine:

If it were different, if I could mourn my ghosts in some accepted public way, like saying Kaddish for my father, I'd have a friendlier attitude towards this religion, which reduces its daughters to helpmeets of men and circumscribes their spiritual life within the confines of domestic functions. Recipes for gefilte fish are no recipe for coping with the Holocaust. (Ibid.)

Here Kluger refers to Judaism and its rituals not in light of her childhood attempts to construct a religious identity in response to anti-Semitic persecution, but as a practice that ought to have significance for coping with the horrendous outcome of that persecution: the Holocaust itself, and more intimately, the murder of her own father. But for Kluger, the unalterable fact of her gender bars her from mourning her familial ghosts in the only acceptable, ritually prescribed way according to Jewish tradition. This leads her to invent her own private ritual instead, in the form of her poetry. As she explains, "I want to say Kaddish because I live with the dead. If I can't do that, forget about religion. Poetry is more helpful" (p. 31).

Nevertheless, we get the sense that poetry is not a wholly satisfactory solution. Kluger's reference to the restrictions around the Kaddish leads her to criticize the halakhic dichotomy between what is "public" and therefore "accepted," and, by implication, what is "private" and not accepted. Kluger understands Judaism as confining women to the "private" (and hence "unaccepted") sphere of the home. To the rhetorical interlocutor who advises that women in Judaism may yet set the table for Shabbat, she offers the cynical rejoinder: "I don't want to set the Sabbath table or light candles. I don't live with tablecloths and silverware" (pp. 30–31). It is the public religious expression of Kaddish that Kluger understands as the valid means of mourning her ghosts.
There may be, in part, an allusion here to Kluger’s public role as a respected literary scholar and professor, as well as to her American feminist consciousness, which advocates for the presence of women in the secular, public sphere. From this more expansive context, Kluger judges the constricted, domestic world of observant Jewish women as a world of “tablecloths and silverware.” This is not a world she identifies with any longer, but, paradoxically, Kluger feels bound by Jewish legal traditions, especially the proscription of a woman reciting the Kaddish.

We might wonder about Kluger’s reasons for feeling so restricted by a tradition she rejects anyway. Even as she accepts the prohibition of a woman publicly reciting the Kaddish, she seems to be aware of a latitude to pick and choose among the mitzvot. For example, her family ate pork and ham on Rosh Hashanah and did not remove all leaven (hametz) from the house before Pesach: “we were of the opinion that dietary laws weren’t valid for us” (p. 43). Why couldn’t she adopt this individual freedom to choose how to perform the “relevant” mitzvot in her own adult life? Indeed, her anonymous interlocutor asks her incredulously: “Who is preventing you from saying any prayer you want?” (p. 30). To this, Kluger does not give a complete answer, but it seems clear that there is much at stake for her in not being able to say the Kaddish. Kashrut, relegated in her memoir to the private, domestic realm, did not have the same intrinsic value. It therefore bore no relevance to the work of grieving for the Holocaust in a publically identifiable—and, it is implied, “acceptable”—way.

Religious Language and Gender in the Camps

Experience at Auschwitz

In the latter part of her memoir, Kluger richly describes an incident in Auschwitz in which her life was saved. Her retelling incorporates the theological concept of “grace,” which Kluger connects to the concept of “free will.” These twin notions are solidly rooted in Christian theological tradition. Debates about “nature and grace,” “free will” and “determinism” recur in patristic theology, medieval scholasticism and post-Reformation Christian theology. Parallel concepts are not lacking in the Jewish tradition, but they do not take the same terminological formulation. Kluger’s choice of categories does not mean that she gives a Christian theological explanation to her experience in Auschwitz; it may simply reflect her tertiary education in a Catholic seminary in postwar Germany (p. 163). In narrating the event of having her life spared in Auschwitz, she combines religious language with feminist reflections on what she calls the “gender gap” operative in the event itself, as well as in the perpetration of Nazi crimes more generally.

The incident occurred not long after Kluger and her mother arrived in Auschwitz. A Selektion in which “women between the ages of fifteen and forty-five were to be chosen for a transport to a labor camp” was announced (p. 103). The word Selektion was frightening—“it usually meant the gas chambers”—so there was some mistrust among the inmates as to whether there was a “labor camp” at the end of the process.
Nevertheless, Ruth’s mother decided to enlist for the selection together with her daughter. Ruth was reluctant because she was only twelve, and she felt that she did not appear old enough to be selected for physical labor.

The selection was conducted by two SS men, who stood with their backs to the rear wall of the barracks, while the women stood naked in front of them in two lines. When Ruth's turn came, she was peremptorily turned away:

The selector in whose line I had stood had a round, wicked mask of a face. . . . I told him my age, and he turned me down with a shake of his head, simply like that. Next to him, the woman clerk, a prisoner too, was not to write down my number. He condemned me as if I had stolen my life and had no right to keep it, as if my life were a book that an adult was taking from me, just as my uncle had taken the Bible from me because I was too young to read it. (pp. 104–105)

Kluger likens her life to a book unjustly taken from her as if it were never her possession to begin with, explicitly comparing her condemnation by the “wickedly masked” SS man with her great-uncle taking the Bible away from her when she asked him about the book of Ruth. Somewhat disconcertingly, Kluger’s patriarchal great-uncle merges with the Nazi selector, and both authority figures are seen as disempowering the child Ruth. This equivalence is foregrounded by Kluger’s reference to her youth as the reason that her great-uncle took away the Bible. Yet, when narrating that episode earlier in her memoir, Kluger explained her uncle’s action as relating to her gender, not her age. By thus connecting her experience of gender bias in her Jewish upbringing with the Nazi power over life and death, she asserts the complex reality of how she suffered both as a Jew in Nazi Germany and as a female in a Jewish household.

Ruth’s mother had meanwhile been accepted for transfer to the labor camp, and she urged her daughter to try again with the second guard and to say this time that she was fifteen. Kluger comments: “The lie which my mother proposed was so transparent: three years! Where was I to find them?” Her mother insisted, telling her that if she was rejected again, then she herself would stay with her in Auschwitz. Ruth agreed to retry. Deciding to herself that she would say she was thirteen, not fifteen, she reentered the room, unobserved by the two SS men, undressed again and stood in the other line. Breaking her narrative, Kluger comments on the way her life was saved:

What happened next is loosely suspended from memory, as the world before Copernicus dangled from a thin chain from Heaven. It was an act of the kind that is always unique, no matter how often it occurs: an incomprehensible act of grace, or put modestly, a good deed. Yet the first term, an act of grace, is perhaps closer to the truth, although the agent was human and the term is religious. For it came out of the blue sky and was as undeserved as if its originator had been up in the clouds. I was saved by a young woman who was in as helpless a situation as the rest of us, and who nonetheless wanted nothing other than to help me. (p. 106)
The line moved toward the other SS man, who was "in a good mood" (p. 107). He had a female clerk, herself a prisoner.

When she saw me, she left her post, and almost within the hearing of her boss, she asked me quickly and quietly and with an unforgettable smile of her irregular teeth: "How old are you?" "Thirteen," I said, as planned. Fixing me intently, she whispered, "Tell him you are fifteen." (p. 107)

When Kluger's turn came and she gave her age of "fifteen," the clerk continued to intercede for her. The SS man—"the master over life and death"—pondered aloud: "She seems small." The young woman countered, "But she is strong; look at the muscles in her legs. She can work" (p. 108). The SS guard agreed, and the clerk noted Ruth's number for the selection. "I had won an extension on life," Kluger concludes.

"She didn't know me, so why did she do it?" asks Kluger (p. 108). In her frequent reflections upon this scene as an adult, she is always "astonished" about its "essence" (p. 107)—namely, that someone was capable of "making a free decision to save another person, in a place which promoted the instinct of self-preservation, to the point of crime and beyond." The language of "instinct" evokes biology, but Kluger asserts, "Neither psychology nor biology explains it. Only free will does." Free will is Kluger's explanation of this "act of grace" (cf. p. 106). Yet the religious term "grace," as Kluger acknowledges, assumes divine causation, not human agency. This tension between the human and the divine is present in the above-quoted paragraph: The young woman's action is unexpected ("out of the blue sky"), undeserved ("as if... up in the clouds") and proffered by a fellow-prisoner as helpless as she. But Kluger explains it as the result of "free will," even as she calls it her "lucky accident" (p. 108). The very memory of the event dangles before her like a "chain from Heaven," as though held in her mind through divine design, but it is the woman's ability to choose to do the good deed that most impresses Kluger. For her, "grace" departs from biology—from the predetermined—to be aligned with the human freedom to choose the good.

When relating this scene "with wonder" as an adult, Kluger was frequently disappointed by its reception. Her listeners would "wonder at her wonder," concluding simply that "some people are altruistic" (p. 108). Kluger singles out the example of "a young American rabbi" who listened to her story eagerly but was disappointed by its perceived anti-climax: "He [had] expected a more heroic tale." Perhaps, Kluger comments, the rabbi had "seen too many action films, or read too many Bible stories, the kind that tout male virtues, muscle over mind, noise over quiet resolve" (ibid.). Going back to the scene, Kluger invites her readers to ponder it closely: "But... there were two of them: the man who had power he could exert on a random object, for better or for worse. ... Just then it suited him to listen to his clerk. And she is the other. I think his action was arbitrary, hers voluntary." Expanding on this, Kluger reflects on Simone Weil's suspicion of literature, because it "tends to make good actions boring and evil ones interesting, thus reversing the truth" (p. 107). But the "good action" Kluger
remembers the young woman performing was “incomparable and inexplicable” and truly good—for it did not have “a proper cause outside itself,” and because it did not “reach for anything beyond itself.” She relates this distinction to gender difference: “Perhaps,” she concludes, “women know more about what is good than men do, since men try to trivialize it.”

Kluger refers to gender difference not only in discussing the woman’s free action in the contrasting context of the biological instinct for self-preservation, but also in assessing the balance of power between the SS man and the female clerk. The SS man had arbitrary power over perceptibly “random” human “objects,” while the woman had no power; she was a fellow prisoner. Yet, in Kluger’s estimation, it was the woman who acted freely. The man had the power, but not the predilection for free choice. Kluger’s reflections on her experience at Christianstadt, the labor camp for women, extend this line of reasoning to the point of espousing a gender-based essentialism. She presents the evil of National Socialism as a distinctively male evil: The women were not brutal to the degree that the men were, and the men who “occasionally turned up” were “obviously the real power” (p. 115). The SS was “strictly a men’s club,” while the concept of “SS women” is a “misnomer.” Although Kluger does not exculpate the female guards, she declares starkly that the “evil they did shouldn’t be overestimated”; men were “the real culprits.”

When she relates these thoughts to others, Kluger notes, she typically meets with “bitter objections” (p. 115). But, she asks her reader, “How are we ever going to understand what happens when a civilization comes apart at the seams, as it did in Germany, if we fail to see the most glaring distinctions, such as the gender gap?” Men, in her view, not only had the real power to execute “arbitrary violence” (p. 107), but they were also inherently more capable of being “easily trained” than women. With “a touch of feminism,” Kluger asserts that men could be “trained” as Nazi recruits, while “Jewish housewives could not” (p. 118). The inferior social status of Jewish women coincided with their superior moral status, inasmuch they were not as docile to the machinery of war as men—who were the perpetrators. This male docility is echoed in Kluger’s remarks about SS men being indistinguishable to the point of stereotype: “I can’t keep SS men apart—to me they are all the same uniformed wire puppet with polished boots” (p. 107). Their “different personalities” were “irrelevant.” Hannah Arendt, she continues,

pointed to the simple fact that evil is committed in the spirit of mental dullness and narrow-minded conformity—what she called banality. Her reflections on evil caused much indignation among men, who understood, though perhaps not consciously, that this deromanticization of arbitrary violence was a challenge to the patriarchy. Perhaps women know more about evil than men, who like to demonize it. (p. 107)33

The objections with which Kluger routinely met when relating her reflections on the “gender gap” in Nazi Germany may have had something to do with the implicit
corresponding hierarchy of victimization that these distinctions evoked. If men were the real perpetrators, were women the real victims? Kluger’s generalizations about the male propensity to power and evil could imply that women are essentially prone to be disempowered and victimized, to be acted upon by evil rather than to enact it. Her views on violence, which are tied to her understanding of the power imbalance between the sexes, are mostly cast in essentialist terms, producing what sometimes looks like an inverse form of sexism. However, Kluger objects to men’s essentialist, misogynistic views about women. For example, she rebuts a friend’s notion that an inherent biological drive compels men to rape women, “as if the problem were merely a matter of the different anatomy of the sexes and not of the perversity of power and violence which always victimizes the weak” (p. 183). In accord with her descriptions of the arbitrary power/violence exercised by males, this latter example presents power and violence as products of male social conditioning.

From the perspective of Kluger’s reflections concerning the kind of moral action obtaining when one is completely victimized, however, gender essentialism becomes secondary to her main point of showing that absolute goodness and personal freedom can exist in the brutal, depersonalizing conditions of the camps. The young woman is, for Kluger, “an example of perfect goodness” whose action “broke the chain of knowable causes.” She exhibited “moral freedom at its purest” (pp. 108–109). While the behavior of “amoebas” can be said to be fully predictable, that of human beings cannot. One could never “foresee the mental movement of a woman whom I didn’t know, whom I never saw again, deciding to save me and succeeding” (p. 109). “The closest approach to freedom,” Kluger concludes, “takes place in the most desolate imprisonment under the threat of violent death, where the chance to make decisions has been reduced to almost zero.” In these conditions, a “tiny gap” appears where freedom enters “like the uninvited angel”:

If a prisoner passed on the beatings he received to those even more helpless than he, he was merely reacting as psychology and biology would expect him to. But if he did the reverse? And so one might argue that in the perverse environment of Auschwitz, absolute goodness was a possibility, like a leap of faith, beyond the humdrum chain of cause and effect. I don’t know how often it was consummated. Surely not often. Surely not only in my case. But it existed. I am a witness. (ibid.)

Notice the religious terminology present in this passage: “Charity” is a possible virtue in impossible conditions; freedom is like “an uninvited angel” and goodness like “a leap of faith.” This religious discourse connects Kluger’s reflections on the possibilities of moral freedom with her experience of being saved by the young woman—“an act of grace.” This is not to say that Kluger reclaims the religiosity she had set aside; rather, Kluger’s encounter with what she calls “absolute goodness” in the utterly dehumanizing environment of Auschwitz leads her to stretch the limits of her own language to incorporate concepts she would not otherwise personally embrace.
Free Will
Kluger’s discussion of morality and freedom in the context of the Holocaust gains particular salience in her criticism of the work of the German ethologist and Nobel laureate Konrad Lorenz, whose famous book *On Aggression* analyzed the aggression instinct in mice. Lorenz features three times in Kluger’s text as a proponent of the kind of biological determinism she so strongly disputes. Without detailing the specifics of Lorenz’s theories, she interprets his work as positing a direct analogy between animal and human behavior and as reducing the reality of evil to mere primitive aggression instincts—a move she finds facile and incorrect (p. 157). Kluger argues for a vital difference between animal behavior and human psychology: Humans have the capacity for constant learning, which is attributable to human free will. This claim is framed in distinctively religious language. It is “theologians” who know the secrets of free will; they “have always known that freedom cuts both ways, since it means we can change our minds, learn to be different from what we were, and thus overcome early influences.” In other words, only human behavior can break the “chain of cause and effect.”

Kluger’s unnamed “theologians” are not the only ones who know about the nature of freedom: Her own life demonstrates in what contexts a free decision is possible. One night, during a death-march out of Christianstadt, Kluger, her mother and her adopted sister made the momentous decision to escape. This constituted “a real, free decision,” different in kind from those so-called “free decisions” in life that are really only a “slither into life-changing situations” (p. 130). Kluger “experienced the unforgettable, prickly feeling of what it means to reconstitute yourself, not to be determined by others.” The risk was great: “Inebriated with hope and despair, a heady cocktail, I chose the freedom of birds that can be shot down by any hunter.” This experience needs to be read together with Kluger’s earlier discussion of the appropriateness of her “biblical name” in light of her reading of the book of Ruth, according to which the biblical Ruth made a real, *free decision* to follow her mother-in-law into a new land, effectively reconstituting herself purely out of fidelity to another woman (p. 42). This awareness of true freedom, she believes, counters Lorenz’s “morality derived from science in the service of denial” (p. 157).

After the war Kluger met Martin Walser, who became an eminent thinker in postwar Germany and her lifelong friend. But she found the same kind of problematic reasoning in Walser that she found in Lorenz: “Basically, Martin says, it is not abnormal to hate foreigners. It isn’t right, of course, but it harks back to primeval thought patterns” (p. 167). But Kluger, we recall, argues for a morality based on the recognition of human free will: “The point which [Walser] was making in my hearing was that there is no such thing as evil, there are only habits and primitive behavior structures. Variants on Konrad Lorenz’s point of view” (p. 168). In rhetorical conversation with Walser, Kluger summarizes her thinking on this matter, spread over more than forty pages in her memoir:
I think that the Jewish catastrophe can’t be explained with abstract arguments taken from ethology [. . .] or Konrad Lorenz’s views on the strutting rivalry of male animals. Nazism was the product of a highly developed civilization which was rotting at the edges and fell apart, and no one knew when and how that would happen, while you can predict with a certain amount of accuracy which way primitive behavior will go. What happened in Germany was advanced and therefore fortuitous, arbitrary. Put differently, freely chosen. (p. 168)

At this point, it is possible to gain a broader view of Kluger’s multivalent use of the concept of free will. In the first half of her memoir, while narrating the gender limitations she experienced in the religious sphere, Kluger paints her biblical namesake, Ruth, as a heroine who followed another woman freely and out of loyalty. Another woman—an unexpected and unconventional heroine—saved Kluger’s life in Auschwitz; Kluger connects this act with her notion of the voluntary, uncompelled nature of pure goodness, adding feminist commentary to the effect that gender differences function in the understanding and enactment of good and evil. Her own experiential understanding of what it means to make a truly free decision enables her to articulate it as a reconstitution of the self. In critiquing the rationalizations of evil that she found in Konrad Lorenz and Martin Walser, Kluger argues that the evil performed by individuals and whole societies—like the good—is freely chosen. Finally, for Kluger, the Holocaust is “the Jewish catastrophe”—not an inevitable product of war, or a non-targeted event of mass murder, but genocide against the Jewish people.35 That is, it was selective, masterminded, freely chosen and driven not by Walser’s reducibly “human” xenophobia (cf. p. 168), but by the specific, freely chosen ideology of anti-Semitism.

Despite the consistency of Kluger’s thinking on this matter, there are some tensions in it. Although she is a proponent of the human capacity to change and learn, she denies this capacity to the “SS men” in her experience and narrative, who are “all the same,” like “wire puppets” and “easily trained.” Her association of the primitive with the predictable and, correlatively, of the advanced with the fortuitous, does not hold for the Nazi men in her memoir, whom Kluger calls the products of Germany’s advanced civilization: They are not capable of free decisions. In fact, men in general appear, in Kluger’s narrative, as not fully capable of understanding either the nature of evil, which they try to demonize, or the nature of goodness, which they try to domesticate. So, while Kluger’s critique of behaviorism or social Darwinism, as it might be called, is powerful with respect to the problematic ways these ideologies have been used by the likes of Lorenz and Walser to “explain” the Holocaust, it is complicated by her use of the “gender gap” for the self-same purpose. Even as she argues against Lorenz’s determinism, the gender-essentialism governing her other reflections carries with it the risk of a contradictory determinism of its own that might not further our understanding.

Perhaps the most problematic element in the complex intersection of gender and religious language in Kluger’s memoir is her subsuming of the Jewish male members of her family within the scope of her criticisms of patriarchy and the Nazi/male evil.
We have already seen the merger of her great-uncle with the wicked-faced SS man at the Selektion. Another example can be found in the final part of Kluger's text, in which she narrates her move to New York as a young adult. Struggling with "culture shock" and anxiety (p. 185) and consequently doubting her worth as a woman, she begins seeing Dr Lazi Fessler, a fellow Viennese Jewish expatriate and onetime friend of her father's, for psychoanalysis. Kluger secretly wishes to extract some information from Fessler about her father during the sessions, but, removed and patronizing, he ultimately reinforces her already low self-esteem by suggesting she fix her dishevelled appearance. Never abandoning his "paternally punitive" attitude (p. 187), he finds Ruth arrogant, unwilling to conform, lacking in respect and full of sinful pride (p. 189). Eventually, Kluger stops attending the sessions (p. 190). The complexity of her emotion is evident in her final comment about Fessler:

It was as if, in the person of this Jewish doctor, the Nazis obtained a spiritual authority which they never had for me in Germany, in the sense that here was a man who didn't let me be what I was (and that implies, does it not, a denial of the right to live and is a kind of death sentence) and yet who sounded like my father. (p. 192)

Once more, religious language appears in this complex passage: Through Fessler, in the US, the Nazis obtain a "spiritual authority" over Ruth. His connection with her father might have led her to expect some form of spiritual guidance from him; she might almost have wished, through him, to access her father's ghost (p. 190). In this she was bitterly disappointed; instead, she was reminded of the SS man who attempted to deny her the right to live. When one of Kluger's uncles in New York adopted a similarly condescending and reproachful attitude, precisely when she moved out to forge her own life and career, she recognized in it a sign of his projected guilt (p. 201–202). “Today,” she writes,

I understand (although still not fully) that these men had their own agenda: The Jewish catastrophe was mainly and merely a resounding humiliation to them. . . . What these male refugees who had spent the war in America—my uncle, Lazi Fessler, all of them—held against us was that we were the mothers whom they had left behind, we were the women and children whom they should have protected. (p. 187)

The men of Kluger's family experienced the Holocaust as a shameful feminization, leading them to project this shame onto their womenfolk through anger and authoritarian behavior (p. 202).
Conclusion

Kluger's final discussion of gender difference is given a psychological rationalization, particularly with respect to the Jewish men of her acquaintance (Fessler) and her family (her uncle). From them, however, she generalizes to Jewish male survivors as such: Their domineering behavior was due to the humiliation of being emasculated by the Holocaust. In her retelling, however, male perpetrators of the Holocaust (symbolized by the SS man at the Selektion) overshadow and merge with these Jewish men, as they had with her great-uncle, who headed the Seder at Pesach and who took the Bible from her as a girl. His spiritual authority reappears fleetingly in the SS man at Auschwitz; when confronted by Lazi Fessler, however, Kluger explicitly admits that through this Jewish survivor, the Nazis assumed a "spiritual authority" over her that they never had in Germany. In the authority figure of this professional Jewish man, who reminded her of her father, she experienced a denial of her right to life. From the perspective of feminist historiography of the Holocaust and its ethical discontents, we can say that Kluger's text, at times, almost elevates the female difference to a position of inherent moral superiority.

Kluger does not make an explicit case for essential gender differences between male and female survivors of the Holocaust, except in her final section about Lazi Fessler, and there, ultimately, it appears as an effort at understanding a complex psychological difference. On the whole, her argument relates to the gender difference of the perpetrators and essentialist male propensities toward, and (flawed) understandings of, evil. But this does, in a highly problematic way, redound to Jewish men, the survivors and sufferers of the Nazi evil. Kluger's religious language—her biblical intertexts, her festival memories, her critique of the Judaism of her childhood, and her exposition of moral philosophy—functions as the mediating device that enables her discussion of "essentialist" gender differences. None of this, of course, is to deny the value and legitimacy of ongoing feminist interpretations of Kluger's text, much less to side with early critics of bringing women's studies to bear on the Holocaust. Kluger's narrative is rich and variegated. Her use of religious language is a prism through which some of her deepest insights are refracted. However, this essay also illustrates, albeit tentatively, some of the problematic implications of Kluger's intersecting discourses on religion and gendered identity.

Notes:

Ruth Sheridan  


8. Tobe Levin, “Holocaust and Women’s Studies: An Uneasy Rapprochement,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 7 (2000), p. 245. Of course, the field has moved on since then; but these were the early, reactionary voices.  

9. Cf. Kremer, “Gender and the Holocaust,” (above, note 6), p. 765. It may be that the whole debate between advocates and critics of bringing women’s or gender studies to bear on the Holocaust is outdated and insufficiently nuanced on either side. I nevertheless frame this essay with reference to it because, as we shall see, Kluger’s text does alert its readers to differential—perhaps “essentialist”—constructions of gender, in the context of memory and discussion of the Holocaust. Without reducing Kluger’s text to one side or the other, it is this purpose of this essay to probe some of the issues Kluger raises and to explore their nuances through an analysis of her religious language.  


Gender and Religious Language in Ruth Kluger’s Still Alive


26. Kluger’s father was killed in Auschwitz—or so she thought, as she relates in *Still Alive* (pp. 39–40), until a French woman who had read *weiter leben* contacted her and provided her with more specific information, according to which her father was transported to either Lithuania or Estonia and killed there.

27. The only other festivals that Kluger recounts are Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. As in other parts of her text, Kluger’s commentary on the High Holy Days includes some feminist critique, albeit understated. For her family, Rosh Hashanah warranted “an exceptional visit to the synagogue” (p. 43). Kluger recalls: “I sat upstairs with the women, listened to the men below praying in a language I didn’t understand [Hebrew], and was bored out of
my wits." The architectural barrier—the relegation of the women to the balcony—seems to have been less of a problem than the language barrier.

28. See Smale, "Ungelöste Gespenster" (above, note 21), p. 780. The text of *weiter leben* includes Kluger's poem "Mit einem Jahrzeitlicht für den Vater" (pp. 36–37), absent from *Still Alive*, but on the whole *Still Alive* incorporates more religious discourse than *weiter leben*.

29. Of course, this was not Kluger's decision but her parents', but, by referring to it in this context, Kluger seems rhetorically to endorse the liberal presuppositions that underpin it.


31. Cf. the talmudic notion of *behirah hofshit* (BT *Sukkot* 53a, *Niddah* 16b).

32. An exact literary reference to Copernicus viewing the world as dangling on a chain from heaven is not easily come by, and I do not know of scholars who have tried to trace Kluger's source here. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* (II: 1052), we do find the astronomical notion of the "pendent world" hanging "on a golden chain." It is possible that this text influenced Kluger, and that she incorporated Copernicus's heliocentric revelation as well.


34. Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (English transl. by Marjorie Kerr Wilson; New York–London: Harvest, 1996); published in German as *Das sogenannte Böse* (Münich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1963). Lorenz argues that aggressive drives in the animal kingdom are an essential part of life-preserving processes; more complex animals (like humans) are able to suppress aggressive drives so as to permit the sharing of scant resources and so to co-exist. Despite the work's influence, Kluger is correct to read it as reductive and incapable of addressing human morality as such.

35. Raul Hilberg was the first to adopt this expression; see his *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).
Copyright of Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues is the property of Indiana University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.