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CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES

Ghettos 1939–1945
New Research and Perspectives on
Definition, Daily Life, and Survival

Symposium Presentations

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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**A TALE OF TWO DIARISTS:
A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENCES IN
EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE¹**

Alexandra Garbarini

Hundreds and probably thousands of European Jewish men and women from different national backgrounds and linguistic-cultural traditions and in various wartime contexts kept diaries during the Holocaust.² The diaries that have been recovered (through painstaking care taken by the writer and/or by chance) comprise an extraordinary body of source material, offering insights into individuals' attempts to make sense of and adapt to a world of constantly shrinking prospects. In their diaries Jewish men and women recorded their shifting interpretations of Nazi persecution, which eventually culminated for some in the realization that their fate was collective annihilation. Looked at together, diaries represent a broad social, intellectual, and cultural phenomenon that often unwittingly linked European Jews during the war years.

THE DIARISTS

Despite the commonality of diary writing, Jews wrote diaries for many reasons. We can compare the divergent responses of two diarists—Chaim Aron Kaplan (born 1880, Horodyszcze, Belorussia; died 1942 [?], Treblinka [?]) in the Warsaw ghetto and Lucien Dreyfus (born 1882, Westhouse, Alsace; died 1943 [?], Auschwitz-Birkenau [?]) in the south of France—to the suffering and murder of European Jews, and the roles that diary writing played for each of them.³ By means of their preexisting belief systems, both Kaplan and Dreyfus attempted to make sense of the Nazi persecution of Jews and the complicity or indifference of most non-Jews and the Allied nations. Neither was able to assimilate Jewish wartime experiences into his prior conceptions of God and humanity. Kaplan questioned the Hebrew God and relied on rationalism and historical justice to ensure that Jews' suffering would not be forgotten and would have meaning in the future. Dreyfus became disillusioned with European liberal enlightened society and invested history with theological significance to fill the existential void. The story of these diarists' responses does more than elucidate two of many possible reactions. It establishes spectrums of Jewish responses: between those who moved toward deeper religiosity and those who could no longer believe in divine providence, and between those who despaired of and those who continued to place their faith in

liberal enlightened society. Many Jews may not have responded in the same ways as Kaplan and Dreyfus, but they were pulled in these opposing directions. Indeed, the moral and theological questions with which Kaplan and Dreyfus struggled were central not only for Jews during the war, but also for Holocaust survivors and postwar theologians and philosophers.

Kaplan's and Dreyfus's perceptions were complex products of their backgrounds and wartime experiences. The national and geopolitical contexts in which their lives unfolded were obviously distinct. Kaplan was born in Belorussia, received a Talmudic education at the celebrated yeshiva in Mir, attended the Government Pedagogical Institute in Vilna, and settled in Warsaw around 1902, where he founded a Hebrew elementary school that he ran for forty years.⁴ Dreyfus was a native Alsatian and strong French patriot who deserted his rabbinical studies in Berlin at the turn of the century and subsequently taught modern languages and history at a high school (*lycée*) in Strasbourg.

In other respects, however, Kaplan's and Dreyfus's biographies bore striking similarities. Each belonged to the generation of writers born in the 1880s whom literary scholar David Roskies identified as having authored "some of the central responses to the Holocaust" because of the perspectives on upheaval and catastrophe gained over their lifetimes.⁵ Both men were educators, published writers, and Zionists. Dreyfus, like his Eastern European counterpart, had kept a diary for several years prior to the war and continued to record entries until deportation. Furthermore, during the war both Dreyfus and Kaplan were separated from their children, who had reached the safer shores of the United States and Palestine, respectively.

THE MEANING OF THE HOLOCAUST

Despite these shared traits, these two men interpreted the meaning of the Nazi destruction of Jewish life and the function of diary writing in dramatically different fashion. The actions of the Nazis and other Europeans against the Jews provoked a crisis of identity for Dreyfus, but they did not for Kaplan. Kaplan had always embraced a particularist conception of his Jewish identity that supported the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and opposed Polish acculturation.⁶ The events of World War II confirmed for Kaplan that he had been right all along, that Zionism was the only viable political option for Jews. He placed his hope for the Jewish future in the creation of a Jewish state, and German and Polish antisemitism only deepened that conviction.⁷

Like Kaplan, Dreyfus's support for Zionism predated the war; however, his backing of a Jewish nationalist politics had not precluded his adopting French culture.⁸ He had defended the premise that Jews could "have Jewish souls, [while] speaking the French language"⁹ and believed that the Jewish and French aspects of his identity were complementary, a conviction that was consonant with the ideology of "Franco-Judaism."¹⁰ France's collapse and the Vichy regime's anti-Jewish policies called into question his identity as equally French and Jewish and, what was more, provoked him to question the fundamental morality of Western civilization.¹¹ During the first two years of the war, his confidence in the humanitarian instincts of bourgeois society collapsed entirely, and he became convinced that "the success of the patron of Berchtesgaden [Hitler] can only be explained by the complicity of the entire European bourgeoisie who shared his antipathies or exploited them."¹² He conjectured that, ultimately, the bourgeoisie's hateful instincts and need "to be superior to their fellow man" had fueled disdain for the stranger and made war a necessity.¹³ Thus he condemned as amoral all of European bourgeois society.

The news that Dreyfus first heard in early July 1942 about the massacre of 700,000 Jews in Poland only served to confirm his belief that the entire Western world shared responsibility for "the catastrophe of this war."¹⁴ "Everyone is guilty," he declared.¹⁵ From his perch on the Mediterranean coast, he did not comprehend the full scope of the ensuing Nazi extermination of the Jews, but he still regarded Western civilization as having become morally bankrupt. He attributed its decline to people's abandonment of religion, and wartime events proved to Dreyfus—who had struggled with his faith before the war—that religion was as necessary to human society in modern times as before.

The decline of the religious idea facilitated the explosion of anti-Jewish hatred and the catastrophe of this war. . . . That which does not agree with science and human reason can all the same be indispensable to life in society. It is necessary to prove that science and reason have in themselves destructive tendencies, and this reflection forces a person to the necessity of recognizing a [higher] authority.¹⁶

Dreyfus assigned responsibility for the war and the murder of Jews to liberal enlightened society (the proponents of "science and human reason") as well as to the obvious perpetrators, the Nazis. He determined that science and reason were themselves harmful, and this conclusion led him to despair of the possibility that human

beings would create a just society without religion.¹⁷ His turn to religious faith was a desperate effort to rescue hope in justice and morality.

KAPLAN'S FAITH IN HISTORY

Whereas Dreyfus rejected science and reason as systems of morality and meaning-making tools, Kaplan did not undergo a similar disillusionment with Western civilization. Indeed, Kaplan's faith in liberal enlightened society was the fundamental underpinning of his belief that modern history would render Jewish suffering meaningful. Convinced as he was that "Hitlerian Nazism will ultimately be defeated, for in the end the civilized nations will rise up to defend the liberty which the German barbarians seek to steal from mankind," he wanted to ensure that the Allied nations would know about the Nazi crimes against the Jews.¹⁸ He considered his diary to be a contribution to future justice, and as a diarist he sought to participate in the struggle to defend liberty against German barbarism.

As was the case with many Eastern European ghetto diarists, Kaplan's drive to preserve evidence of the Nazi treatment of Jews was also driven by his deep historical consciousness. His sense of the importance of history emerged in part from his knowledge that in the past Jews had written history in response to tragedy. However, his historical consciousness was equally a product of the centrality of modern Jewish historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "as a cultural and spiritual phenomenon within Jewry itself."¹⁹ Indeed, essential to his Zionist vision was the role that history played—a rationalist, positivist history—in defining Jewish national culture. Furthermore, his use of Hebrew in his diary was as much an outgrowth of his Zionist vision for a new Jewish future as it was a reference to Jewish literary tradition.²⁰ His imbrication of the traditional and modern reflected his Eastern European Jewish milieu as well as his notion that modern Jewish culture represented both a continuation of and a departure from the Jewish past.

From his first wartime entry, in which he stated that "[w]e are now witnessing the dawn of a new era in the history of the world," Kaplan suggested that his impulse to write was not merely in keeping with the tradition in Jewish culture to bear witness to history as the realm of God's activity.²¹ He sensed from the beginning of the war that the events then transpiring were unlike any that had come before. Within this "new era," he viewed himself as a witness to this break with the past and to the daily occurrences of "these historic times." He promised himself that he would write every

day in order to preserve some sort of record because, among other reasons, he was filled with foreboding about the implications of this new era for Jews. On September 1, 1939, Kaplan declared, “Wherever Hitler’s foot treads there is no hope for the Jewish people. Hitler, may his name be blotted out, threatened in one of his speeches that if war comes the Jews of Europe will be exterminated.”²²

Throughout the first two years of the war, Kaplan conveyed a tension between looking at the present from a modern historical viewpoint—in which he sought to identify and analyze the specificity of Jewish persecution by Nazi hands—and from a literary-archetypal viewpoint, in which he regarded the present in cyclical terms as a return to the past or revival of the past.²³ In his early entries, on the one hand, he conveyed his sense that Jews were on the brink of untold persecution and that the nature of such persecution was potentially unprecedented. On the other hand, his formulation for cursing Hitler (“Hitler, may his name be blotted out”) recalled the curse against Amalek, the biblical enemy of the Jews. This traditional imprecation placed Hitler, the new Amalek, in line with past enemies of the Jewish people. In so doing, Kaplan suggested that the suffering of the present resembled that of the past and that, like other times in history, the Jewish people would persevere.

Whereas Dreyfus had come to distrust science and reason, Kaplan had tremendous faith in them, attributing to them not only analytical properties but also ethical ones. He trusted that future historians would be able to understand and explain the motives of the perpetrators through psychology and social science analysis, and he recorded what he judged to be the key elements of Nazi psychology in order to assist them. He adduced that “when an individual is afflicted with a psychological illness it is a private matter for the doctor who is treating him. But when an entire community has been afflicted with a psychological illness it is a sign of the times, and is of interest to historians of the future as well.”²⁴

Even with this sense of the historically new, what did conform to a historical pattern in Kaplan’s eyes was the Jewish response to persecution, which—despite its heterogeneity—he for the most part characterized as a display of “adaptability” in keeping with the creativity of Jews in the Diaspora. Kaplan continued to place the present loss of Jewish lives on a continuum with past catastrophes. “We live broken and shattered lives; lives of shame and dishonor; lives of suffering and grief. But the power of adaptability within us is miraculous. . . . From historical experience we have learned that there is no permanence in life; that everything changes; that all is

transitory.”²⁵ In other words, the historically unprecedented nature of the perpetrators’ actions did not provoke a concomitant response in the victims; they showed a hopefulness and resourcefulness much as they had throughout time.

The community’s survival made Kaplan’s writing particularly valuable for him since he felt accountable to the Jewish nation and its history. During the first two years of the war, he imagined that the author and primary audience of future history writing would be the Polish Jewish community. On October 26, 1939, he wrote, “Individuals will be destroyed, but the Jewish community will live on. Therefore, every entry is more precious than gold.”²⁶ He inscribed a “scroll of agony” of the Jewish people to help them remember these events in the future.²⁷ Of the role that he would play in the community’s memorial effort, he “sense[d] within me the magnitude of this hour, and my responsibility toward it, and I have an inner awareness that I am fulfilling a national obligation, a historic obligation that I am not free to relinquish. . . . My record will serve as source material for the future historian.”²⁸ He hoped that his diary would be an essential contribution both to the community’s future memorial effort and to future historians’ analyses of their experience.

A modern historical consciousness had taken root in Eastern Europe to such an extent that Kaplan—who was not a historian—looked to history writing as a form of collective memory and a guarantee of earthly justice. While lamenting the dearth of poets who would be able to immortalize the suffering of Polish Jewry under the Nazis, Kaplan attributed more space in his diary to history’s potential to ensure the transmission of memory.²⁹ The historian, along with the poet, became a “primary custodian” of Jewish memory.³⁰ Eastern European Jews’ ghetto diaries often reflected this modern historical consciousness as much as traditional Jewish “archetypes of destruction.” Indeed, in Poland and Lithuania during the interwar period, autobiographical writing had become associated with the efforts of Jewish social scientists to document the history of the Jewish nation.³¹ Kaplan was not atypical in hoping that historians would confer meaning on the death of untold numbers of Polish Jews. His trust in history attested to his abiding faith in science and reason as essential frameworks of understanding. Through his diary Kaplan sought to contribute to Western civilization’s triumph over barbarism.

Kaplan’s hope that historians would make sense of Jewish suffering was linked to his struggle with religious faith. The extraordinary suffering that he witnessed in the Warsaw ghetto and the murder of Jews in Lublin caused him to reject the image of the

Hebrew God as historically active and justice seeking, leaving Kaplan only with faith in history. While faith in God's righteousness became attenuated for Kaplan, during the first two years of the war, he still tied the abiding faith of Jews around him to their remarkable will to survive. He analyzed how messianic faith fueled hope in this-worldly redemption and worked as a social glue to keep the community fighting for survival. Kaplan considered the hopes of his fellow ghetto Jews to be illusory and yet drew inspiration from their optimism. He recognized that coping with ghetto life required some form of messianic dreaming, even for him. Faith—like the historical endeavor of diary writing—became a way of acting in the face of evil, a defiant stance against the deprivations of ghetto life.³²

Kaplan became increasingly critical of the Jewish masses' inclination to hope as conditions in the Warsaw ghetto became more horrific in the months prior to deportation. At that time he deduced, as many Jews did not, that they would not live to see the defeat of Nazi Germany.³³ With news of the extermination of the Jews of Lublin, Kaplan realized that the Nazis were acting and would continue to act in a manner entirely consistent with Hitler's apocalyptic pronouncements about the fate of European Jewry. As metaphors became reality and words became meaningful in horrifically literal ways, Kaplan persisted in planting "the seed of history," convinced that "[f]or future generations, every word will be valuable."³⁴ Now, however, the historian for whom Kaplan continued to collect documentary material would not belong to his own generation, but to a succeeding one.

Implicit in Kaplan's hopes for history was his sense that history could function either as a medium of redress or as a final stage in the extermination of a people. While the Germans endeavored to destroy all traces of their murder of European Jewry, Kaplan—like many other victims of that genocide—produced a written testament in order to ensure that the memory of their extermination would not become the Nazis' final victim. Kaplan's loss of faith in divine justice left him with the hope of historical justice, but even the latter was not guaranteed. Kaplan's final words attested to his fear that his exhaustive efforts to preserve evidence for the future historian would fail. "If my life ends," he wrote, "what will become of my diary?"³⁵

DREYFUS: FROM HISTORY TO FAITH

For Kaplan history was a nationalist endeavor associated with the continuity of the Jewish nation—and thus tied to tradition and modern Jewish culture and politics.

Dreyfus also contemplated the value and implications of history writing, and he also regarded history as a nationalist endeavor. However, he associated history with French nationalism during the Third Republic rather than Jewish national politics, and thus tied it to reason and science and the failure of liberal enlightened society.³⁶

Not surprisingly, therefore, in contrast to Kaplan, Dreyfus did not place his confidence in history to render Jewish suffering meaningful, nor does it seem that he envisioned his diary as a contribution to the historical enterprise. Quite the contrary: since he had lost faith in Western civilization, he was highly critical of its commitment to history writing.³⁷ Even before the outbreak of the war, he had been skeptical of historians' belief in their ability to be rational and objective, and the experience of wartime dislocation only reinforced his distrust of historians. His critique of history was part of his broader critique of science and Third Republic intellectuals. Whereas history for Kaplan was both a scientific and moral pursuit, for Dreyfus the historical project that Kaplan esteemed was part of the wider culture that had betrayed him.

Religious faith filled the void created by Dreyfus's disillusionment with France and Western civilization. He yearned for a theological explanation to account for Jewish suffering. He linked the Jews' present suffering to the dilemma of how to reconcile belief in a just and all-powerful God with the existence of evil in the world. He explained:

These ideas correspond to my temperament, and if in these notebooks I occupy myself with nothing other than the highest principle of man, the fact is that the rest of what preoccupies my loved ones, even the war, is nothing vis-à-vis the problem posed by the Bible. There is a God who punishes and rewards. . . . I will not seek to convince those opposing, but I intend to keep intact the spiritual traditions that date back to Sinai.³⁸

To account for Jewish suffering, he returned to a traditional Jewish view of history. Beginning with the Bible, Jews injected history with meaningfulness (as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi explained) since "it was human history that revealed his [God's] will and purpose."³⁹ God was radically other, his ways inscrutable, and yet human history offered clues about how God judged his creation's exercise of free will. Dreyfus thus revisited what Yerushalmi deemed "the paradoxical struggle between the divine will of an omnipotent Creator and the free will of his creature, man, in the course of history; a tense dialectic of obedience and rebellion."⁴⁰ Dreyfus resorted to theodicy in his attempt to make known God's reasons for "punishing" the Jews. He speculated—as did

many Orthodox Jews during and after the war—that Jewish assimilation had provoked God’s wrath.⁴¹

During the war diary writing became part of Dreyfus’s theological quest, yet his theological reflections did not preclude him from using his diary for other, more quotidian purposes. In particular, he used his diary to communicate with his absent children, a function that was not uncommon among Jewish parents who were separated from their children.⁴² Since he could neither talk to them nor send a letter, he recorded in his diary his desire to tell his children that they had been right to leave France.⁴³ A few weeks later, he transcribed a letter that he had received about the sale of their jewelry by the Commissariat-General for Jewish Affairs so that “the children know the text of the letter.”⁴⁴ Dreyfus clearly imagined his children reading his diary in the future, and through it he communicated information that he could not relay to them by other means.

Dreyfus’s religious belief remained intact until his diary was interrupted on September 20, 1943: shortly thereafter he was deported to Drancy and then to Auschwitz-Birkenau. However, the solace that Dreyfus found in faith was not the same as that for the Jewish masses in Warsaw depicted by Kaplan. Religious faith allowed Dreyfus to believe that there was a reason for Jews’ suffering, but it did not lead him to hope for a this-worldly redemption—in other words, that he would survive the war. He seemed to know that he was going to die in the impending catastrophe. The prospect of seeing his life, as well as the lives of massive numbers of other Jews, end prematurely did not alter his belief that divine justice would prevail. Possessing no other choice for action than to determine his attitude toward death, he responded with dignified resignation and faith.

CONCLUSION

Kaplan’s Eastern European background made his wartime trajectory fairly predictable, whereas Dreyfus’s Western European background made his trajectory more surprising. Unusual among Polish Jewish ghetto diaries for being written in Hebrew and not Yiddish or Polish, Kaplan’s diary nevertheless exemplified the trilingual cultural “polysystem” of interwar and wartime Polish Jewish life.⁴⁵ Although scholars have more often pointed to the contrasts between Kaplan’s diary and the “historical” diaries of Emanuel Ringelblum (who spearheaded the creation of the Warsaw ghetto’s underground archive) and Herman Kruk from the Vilna ghetto, their similarities in

focus and intention are striking.⁴⁶ As different as the writers' tones may have been (Kaplan's diary has been described as "a diary to bare one's soul"), they all recognized the importance of modern historical methods in preserving evidence of the suffering of the Jewish masses.⁴⁷

Like Ringelblum and Kruk, Kaplan stressed the objectivity and comprehensiveness of his writing. He did not perceive an inconsistency between his tone of lamentation and his goal to record "facts," writing that "a future historian will find material here that may be relied upon, not just stories out of the imagination."⁴⁸ He shared the perspective of his contemporaries, for whom "there was no felt contradiction between a subjective point of view, an intimate narrative voice, and strict adherence to observable reality."⁴⁹ As Kaplan himself contended, "It is beyond my capabilities to record every event in organized form. Perhaps other people will do this when the appropriate time comes. But even events recorded in reportorial style are of historical value."⁵⁰ Kaplan, like many other Jewish diarists, produced a written testament out of his steadfast confidence in the morality of Western civilization. He wanted to ensure that the civilized world would learn about the Nazis' barbarity and that the memory of the victims would be passed down to future generations.

Dreyfus's religious awakening was not representative of French Jews. Indeed, he felt alienated from other French Jews—a likely product of the different path that he took during the war. Yet from the perspective of Jewish tradition, his turn to God for answers was a familiar response to catastrophe. Indeed, his theological interpretation was common among Orthodox Jews during and after the *Shoah*. Dreyfus's attempt to render meaningful the catastrophe befalling the Jews recalled the process at work in the biblical book of Lamentations. As described by Hebrew literature scholar Alan Mintz, the

[a]lleviation of the pain comes only when, by asserting a willed recollection of past truths, the sufferer makes the connection between suffering and sin. This realization releases him from his isolated victimization and allows him to join in a communal appeal to God. God remains silent in Lamentations, but the sufferer's emergence from soliloquy to prayer enables him at least to recover God as an addressable other.⁵¹

During the war Dreyfus recovered his faith in God and developed a notion of divine justice out of his loss of faith in mankind. Since he could no longer participate in the

French society and culture that had betrayed him, he turned to the divine realm for answers. In so doing, he made use of an age-old Jewish strategy of interpretation: he incorporated the Jews' new suffering by placing it within the framework of past suffering, which rendered history as theologically meaningful.

Both men sought to understand the causes of Jewish suffering and hoped that some meaning could be attributed to it or extracted from it. In their respective searches for meaning, they ultimately grappled with different questions. For Dreyfus the theological question of why this calamity was befalling the Jews was the central issue. The question that Kaplan sought to answer was how to historically contextualize and explain the underlying causes of the Nazi extermination. For both men the function and meaning that they attributed to diary writing were inextricably related to their strategies of interpretation.

NOTES

1. This article is based on research that I conducted for my dissertation. See Alexandra Garbarini, “‘To Bear Witness Where Witness Needs to Be Borne’: Diary Writing and the Holocaust, 1939–1945” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2003).

2. Emanuel Ringelblum (“O. S.,” in *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor! Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives “O. S.”* [Oneg Shabbat], ed. Joseph Kermish [Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1986], p. 18), the Polish Jewish historian and head of the Warsaw ghetto’s underground archives Oneg Shabbat, estimated that perhaps hundreds of Jews kept diaries in the Warsaw ghetto alone, although the vast majority of them were lost or destroyed in the massive deportation of Warsaw’s Jews to Treblinka and in the demolition of the ghetto by the Nazis following the ghetto uprising in April 1943.

3. This article relies on the published English translation of Kaplan’s Hebrew-language diary (Chaim Aron Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*, trans. and ed. Abraham I. Katsh [1973; reprint ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Museum, 1999]). My analysis of Dreyfus’s diary is based on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s (hereafter cited as USHMM) microfiche copy of the original notebooks, which were written in French. All translations from Dreyfus’s diary are my own. Dreyfus’s diary was donated anonymously to the USHMM Archives. It was mailed to the museum without a sender’s name or address, one notebook at a time, by regular, uncertified first-class mail. There are seven notebooks spanning the period from January 22, 1925, to September 24, 1943. Gaps in the chronology and notebook numbering suggest that notebooks that once existed are now missing. It is possible, therefore, that more notebooks of the diary exist in private hands or were lost in the mail. Lucien Dreyfus, RG–10.144.02–08, Lucien Dreyfus Collection, USHMM.

4. For biographical information on Kaplan, see Yisrael Gutman’s foreword and Abraham Katsh’s introduction to *Scroll of Agony*, pp. 5–7 and 9–17 respectively. For information on Dreyfus, see Joseph Bloch, “In Memoriam Lucien Dreyfus,” [Periodical Unknown and n.d.] in Folder “General Information on Lucien Dreyfus,” RG–10.144.10, Dreyfus Collection, USHMM.

5. David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 200.

6. Kaplan had harsh words for Jews who were not Zionists, especially for “Polonized” Jews or Jews who were Polish identified. He rejected the particularism of the Jewish Socialist Bund, which sought the recognition of Jews as a separate nationality within the Diaspora. “As far as we know,” he wrote in *Scroll of Agony* (p. 320 [entry for April 26, 1942]), “Bundism and Zionism have nothing in common, but the Nazi ‘sandwiches’ them together and ‘eats’ them as one.” He expressed tremendous rancor toward Jewish

converts to Christianity (for example, see *ibid.*, pp. 78–79 [entry for November 30, 1939]).

7. When Palestine too faced the threat of German occupation, Kaplan (*Scroll of Agony*, p. 366 [entry for July 2, 1942]) feared that “if she [Palestine] is conquered,” it would constitute “total destruction for the hope of a people.”

8. Dreyfus criticized French Jews who did not support the Zionist settlement of Palestine. See Dreyfus, January 1, 1926, RG–10.144.02, USHMM.

9. Dreyfus, September 17, 1925, RG–10.144.02, USHMM. His support of Zionism was typical of Alsatian Jews. According to Renée Poznanski (“Le Sionisme en France pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale: Développements institutionnels et impact idéologique,” in *Les Juifs de France: Le Sionisme et l’Etat d’Israël*, vol. 1, ed. Doris Bensimon and Benjamin Pinkus [Paris: Actes du Colloques International and Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, 1987], pp. 194, 215 n. 9), the Zionist movement in Alsace was better organized and more widely supported than elsewhere in France before the war. Freddy Raphaël and Robert Weyl (“La double demeure: Les juifs d’Alsace et le sionisme,” in *Regards nouveaux sur les juifs d’Alsace*, ed. Freddy Raphaël and Robert Weyl [Strasbourg: Librairie Istra, 1980], p. 271) maintain that the majority of Alsatian rabbis and notables supported Zionism because they saw it as a means of preserving Judaism against the pressures of modern urban life.

10. On “Franco-Judaism” see Vicki Caron, *Between France and Germany: The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, 1871–1918* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 9.

11. See Dreyfus’s entries from December 20, 1940, and March 16, 1941, *Cahier A*, RG–10.144.04; June 23, 1942, July 4, 1942, and July 6, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06 (all USHMM).

12. Dreyfus, March 16, 1941, *Cahier A*, RG–10.144.04, USHMM.

13. Dreyfus, May 14, 1941, *Cahier B*, RG–10.144.05, USHMM.

14. Dreyfus, July 6, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM. Dreyfus recorded the news about the murder of 700,000 Jews in Poland in an entry for July 4, 1942 (*Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM), but did not cite his source for this information. The BBC first broadcast news of the killing of Jews on July 2, 1942; it is also possible that Dreyfus read an anonymous pamphlet circulating in Nice saying that 700,000 Jews in Poland had been shot, drowned, or killed by gas. The pamphlet (“Circular enclosed in dispatch from American Consulate in Nice to U.S. Embassy in Vichy,” NARA, RG–59, Box 18, 841.1-Jews) cited by Mary Felstiner in *To Paint Her Life: Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 192, 269n), urged the French to help their Jewish neighbors. On the dissemination to the West of news about the

extermination of Polish Jewry, see Dariusz Stola, “Early News of the Holocaust from Poland,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11 (1997), pp. 1–27. Stola disagrees with Gutman and David Engel and argues that the Polish government-in-exile did not purposefully suppress news of the killings of Polish Jewry.

15. Dreyfus, July 4, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM.

16. Dreyfus, July 6, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM.

17. Dreyfus’s view of science and reason powerfully resonates with the writing of other thinkers, most famously in the thesis of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno that civilization and barbarism stand in dialectical relationship to one another within “enlightenment.” Indeed, according to Horkheimer and Adorno (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming [1944; reprint ed., New York: Continuum, 1997], pp. xvi–xvii), “[n]ot merely the ideal but the practical tendency to self-destruction has always been characteristic of rationalism, and not only in the stage in which it appears undisguised.” Zygmunt Bauman (*Modernity and the Holocaust* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989], p. 12) argued, “I propose to treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society.”

18. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 19 (entry for September 1, 1939).

19. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 87. On history as a response to tragedy, see Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 34–39, chap. 3.

20. This argument differs from that made by James E. Young (*Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988], p. 27), who interpreted Kaplan’s use of Hebrew as evidence of his desire “to locate events in the sanctified linguistic sphere of scripture, rabbinical disputation, and covenant.” Young’s contention does not take into consideration Kaplan’s longstanding personal commitment to the use and vitality of Hebrew as a modern spoken language. Kaplan’s Hebrew-language school taught Hebrew as a spoken language. Furthermore, as a public speaker at Zionist gatherings in the Warsaw ghetto, Kaplan elected to deliver his speeches in Hebrew even when his fellow speakers used Yiddish.

21. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 19 (entry for September 1, 1939). On the traditional Jewish concept of history, see Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 5–26, 31–52.

22. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 20 (entry for September 1, 1939). See also his entries for September 5 (pp. 25–26) and September 14, 1939 (pp. 30–31).

23. I am proposing a literary-archetypal viewpoint that other scholars have argued is historical. For example, Roskies (*Against the Apocalypse*, p. 202) wrote that the Nazis' employment of images from the past in their persecution of Jews made all Jews into historians because they sought and found historical analogies to their present suffering. I would argue that this "search for archetypes" is precisely not historical because it regards the present not in its particularity, but as a return to the past.

24. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 334 (entry for May 19, 1942).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 86 (entry for December 13, 1939).

26. *Ibid.*, p. 58 (entry for October 26, 1939).

27. As early as September 14, 1939, Kaplan (*ibid.*, p. 30) referred to his diary as a "scroll of agony."

28. *Ibid.*, p. 104 (entry for January 16, 1940).

29. *Ibid.*, p. 79 (entry for November 30, 1939).

30. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. xiv.

31. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 197. On the development among Polish Jews of a modern historical consciousness and the professionalization of history writing in Poland, see David Roskies, "Landkentenish: Yiddish Belles Lettres in the Warsaw Ghetto," in *Holocaust Chronicles: Individualizing the Holocaust through Diaries and Other Contemporaneous Personal Accounts*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1999), p. 12; Artur Eisenbach, "Jewish Historiography in Interwar Poland," in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, eds. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz, and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989), pp. 453, 459–60; David Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 16–20, 32, 35–36; Lucjan Dobroszycki, "YIVO in Interwar Poland: Work in the Historical Sciences," in Gutman, et al., *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, pp. 494, 498–99. On the influence of sociologists W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki on Polish social scientists—Jewish and non-Jewish—to gather autobiographical materials for the study of social phenomena and personal experience, see Janina Markiewicz-Lagneau, "L'autobiographie en Pologne," *Revue française de Sociologie* 17 (1976), pp. 591–93; Daniel Soyer, "Documenting Immigrant Lives at an Immigrant Institution: Yivo's Autobiography Contest of 1942," *Jewish Social Studies* 5 (1999), pp. 219–20. For an analysis of the relationship among autobiographical writing, reading, and concepts of individualism within Jewish society in Eastern Europe during the interwar period, see Marcus Moseley, "Life, Literature: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Interwar Poland," *Jewish Social Studies* 7 (2001),

pp. 1–51. A volume of YIVO’s collection of youth autobiographies from the interwar period was recently published in English: Jeffrey Shandler, ed. *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth before the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

32. See Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 46 (entry for October 5, 1939), pp. 57–58 (entry for October 26, 1939), p. 111 (entry for January 31, 1940), p. 139 (entry for April 12, 1940), p. 192 (entry for September 5, 1940), pp. 209–10 (entries for October 14–15, 1940), pp. 234–35 (entry for December 26, 1940), pp. 268–69 (entry for October 10, 1941).

33. See *ibid.*, pp. 296–97 (entry for February 2, 1942), pp. 312–13 (entry for April 7 [sic], 1942), pp. 347–48 (entry for June 7, 1942).

34. *Ibid.*, p. 314 (entry for April 7 [sic], 1942).

35. *Ibid.*, p. 400 (entry for August 4, 1942).

36. On the role of history in France in the Third Republic, see François Dosse, *New History in France: The Triumph of the Annales*, trans. Peter V. Conroy, Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), chap. 1; Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times*, 5th ed. (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 80.

37. For Dreyfus’s view of history writing, see his entries for June 10 and June 23, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM.

38. Dreyfus, June 18, 1941, *Cahier B*, RG–10.144.05, USHMM.

39. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 8.

40. *Ibid.*

41. The most visible postwar proponent of this view was Rabbi Yoel Taitelbaum, leader of the ultra-Orthodox Satmar movement and author of the 1952 tract *And It Pleased Moses (Vayo’el Moshe)*. See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 307–08.

42. Examples of diarists who specified writing for their loved ones are Erich Frey, RG–10.041.03, Alfred H. Elbau Papers, USHMM; Max and Frieda Reinach, diary, 1939–42, Acc. 1999.A.0215, USHMM; Grete Steiner, diary from Scheveningen, Holland, File no. 1064, Lohamei Ha’Ghetaot; A. B., diary from Theresienstadt, JM/13, Yad Vashem Archives; and Richard Ehrlich, “The History of Our Negative Emigration,” ME 1101, Richard A. Ehrlich Collection, Leo Baeck Institute Archives.

43. Dreyfus, May 13, 1943, *Cahier D*, RG–10.144.07, USHMM.
44. Dreyfus, May 27, 1943, *Cahier D*, RG–10.144.07, USHMM.
45. On the concept of a trilingual polysystem, see Chone Shmeruk, “Hebrew–Yiddish–Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture,” in Gutman, et al., *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, pp. 285–311.
46. On the “historical diaries” of Ringelblum and Kruk, see Samuel David Kassow, “Vilna and Warsaw, Two Ghetto Diaries: Herman Kruk and Emanuel Ringelblum,” in *Holocaust Chronicles: Individualizing the Holocaust through Diaries and Other Contemporaneous Personal Accounts*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1999), pp. 171–215. See the discussions of Kaplan’s diary in Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, pp. 27, 35–36; Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey through Language and Culture* (New York: Free Press, 2000), pp. 195, 198–202. Roskies (*Against the Apocalypse*, pp. 200, 209–11) grouped Kaplan apart from “historical diarists” such as Ringelblum and Kruk, thereby deemphasizing the incredible historical awareness displayed by Kaplan and his fundamental questioning of biblical archetypes and faith to confer meaning on Jewish suffering.
47. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 200.
48. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 58 (entry for October 26, 1939).
49. Roskies, “Landkentenish,” pp. 13–14.
50. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 121 (entry for February 20, 1940).
51. Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 4.