"Je Vis dans un Être Double" a Theory of Doubling in Charlotte Delbo's Texts

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"JE VIS DANS UN ÊTRE DOUBLE" A THEORY OF DOUBLING

IN CHARLOTTE DELBO'S TEXTS

By

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I dedicate this work to Perry and Olivia.
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ABSTRACT

Most of the research on Charlotte Delbo has remained within the realm of Holocaust studies, and her writing, in particular, has been seen as a means of witnessing and preserving memory. Labeled solely as “Holocaust survivor” and subsequently overshadowed by male writers of the Holocaust, Charlotte Delbo has not been adequately read and appreciated as a writer of the 20th century. Although her experiences in Auschwitz are one of the main subjects of her writing, I do not focus explicitly on her experiences, but rather on the methods and literary devices that Delbo uses to (re)construct and articulate these experiences. Delbo breaks the traditional template that labels her as a survivor by using a combination of two or more literary genres, known in general as generic hybridity, to create a unique literary form that captures her struggles with the social and cultural demands of post-World War II France. My dissertation will attempt to convey salient aspects of this unique literary form which I will call doubling.

In this study, I investigate the various ways that identity, narrative settings, literary characters, time frames, and narrative forms are doubled. Doubling, I believe, is a result of Delbo’s gendered experience in the camps and in France after the war. Not only do we witness the experience of Delbo trying to maintain a unified self in the camps as the Nazis relentlessly strip away her humanity, but we also follow Delbo’s experiences of trying to understand her own duality as she resettles back in France- homeless, jobless, and a widow. As a woman, writing about women, in a women’s camp, Charlotte Delbo gives us a unique perspective, not yet explored, of what is was like for her and the 230 women in her convoy to experience, and for a few- to survive Auschwitz.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO CHARLOTTE DELBO AND TO A THEORY OF DOUBLING

"J'ai cherché très longtemps un langage permettant de «rendre compte» par le canal de la sensibilité. Seul un langage fort, précis, capable de décharger l'émotion. C'est le pouvoir de la poésie. J'ai trouvé, mais c'est très très difficile" (Charlotte Delbo in an interview with Hélène Renal in 1971, 29).

Introduction

One Sunday in early September 1941, Charlotte Delbo learned that her friend and fellow communist, André Woog, was arrested in May for having "tracts contre les nazis" (100)\(^1\). He was condemned to death and guillotined in August. This event became a catalyst for what would eventually be the most horrifying and tragic five years of Charlotte Delbo's life. Born in 1913 in a suburb of Paris, Vigneux-sur-Seine, Charlotte was the oldest of four children. She began her university studies in Paris studying philosophy at the Sorbonne and joined la Jeunesse Communiste in 1932. She eventually met her future husband, Georges Duduch, through this group in 1934. It was by coincidence the Delbo also met actor and director Louis Jouvet during this time. Working for a student newspaper, Delbo was sent to interview him and two days later she received a letter from Jouvet asking if she wanted to be his secretary. She immediately accepted and worked by his side during all his theatrical rehearsals. She took notes on "tout ce qui s'y passait, tout ce qui s'y disait" (158)\(^2\). In 1940, Delbo travelled with Jouvet and his theatrical group to Buenos Aires. It was here that she learned of Woog's death and immediately returned home to help her husband Georges despite Jouvet's pleas to stay.

Charlotte and Georges rented a studio apartment in Paris under false names and continued to transcribe foreign radio and newspaper articles for *Lettres Françaises*, one of many underground newspapers for the French Resistance. On March 2, 1942 five police officers

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\(^1\) See Charlotte Delbo's *Le convoi du 24 janvier*.

\(^2\) Biographical information is given about Charlotte Delbo in a 2001 republished book (HB édition) containing her two plays "Une scene jouée dans la memoire" and "Qui rapportera ces paroles".
raided their apartment and arrested them. Both were imprisoned at La Santé in Paris; Georges was offered "to enlist as a "volunteer" for the German war effort" but he refused knowing that most likely it meant death (Lamont 494)\(^3\). Georges and Charlotte were allowed to see each other one final time, a scene retold in several of her texts, in the early morning of May 23, 1942 before Georges was assassinated at Mont Valérien prison. After five months of detention at La Santé, Delbo was sent to Romainville for another five months where she met the other 229 French women who would travel with her to Auschwitz-Birkenau in January 1943. Only 49 of these 230 women would survive this experience\(^4\). Delbo and a select few would eventually be moved on to Raisko and then Ravensbrück where they were rescued and repatriated by the Swedish Red Cross between April and June 1945. Although 49 survivors out of 230 seems astonishing low, this percentage is very high considering that most women, and men, entering Auschwitz did not survive. Sylviane Gresh explains that "Elles [Charlotte et les 229 Françaises] auraient dû être dirigées vers un camp de concentration et non vers un camp d'extermination d'Auschwitz. Charlotte Delbo et ses 229 camarades ont donc partagé presque les mêmes affres que les Juifs. Leurs conditions de détention et de travail sont presque les mêmes. Mais justement cet à-peu-près qui fait toute la différence" (117)\(^5\). Once back in Paris, Delbo immediately returned to work for Jouvet, but her health kept her from maintaining this job for long\(^6\). Because of her skills as a stenographer and her knowledge of several foreign languages, Delbo took a job at the United Nations (l'ONU) in Geneva until 1960. After quitting the United Nations, Delbo returned to Paris to work with Henri Lefebvre\(^7\) at the CNRS\(^8\). Charlotte Delbo died of cancer March 1, 1985.

Although Delbo wrote about her experiences in Auschwitz immediately upon her return home to France in 1946, it seems that she began writing more prolifically between the 1960s and

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\(^3\) See Lamont's article "The triple courage of Charlotte Delbo."

\(^4\) Delbo tells in her introduction to *Le convoi du 24 janvier* that by April 10, 1943, 73 days after their arrival, only 70 of the 230 women in her convoy had survived.

\(^5\) Delbo, in her introduction to *Le convoi du 24 janvier*, questions why their conditions were slightly better than the Jews. She believes that it could be because they were the only group of French women under the title "politique" and because they had a few influential women in their group, particularly Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier whose father was "éditeur, directeur de journaux" (281), Marie Politzer, who was married to Georges Politzer (236), and France Rondeaux, who was "cousine d'André Gide" (251), to name a few.

\(^6\) At the Bibliothèque Nationale in the Fonds Louis Jouvet, there are several letters from Charlotte and one from her sister Odette to Jouvet explaining the precariousness of her health between September 1945 and April 1946.

\(^7\) Delbo had known Lefebvre for a long time because he directed her university studies before she left to work for Louis Jouvet (Godard).

\(^8\) Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research).
early 1980s. Delbo was inspired mostly by contemporary history, which is evident in all her texts. Delbo published several essays, plays, and books during this twenty-five-year period. Her best known work is undoubtedly *Auschwitz et après*, a trilogy that recounts her arrival at Auschwitz through her release nearly two years later. In a 1971 interview Hélène Renal asked Delbo why she became a writer. Delbo replied saying "Parce que j'ai été déportée, parce qu'il a eu Auschwitz; c'est un des événements marquants de notre génération. Il m'a paru impératif de rendre compte, c'est-à-dire de «donner à voir» aux autres ce qu'avait été cette expérience. Il fallait le faire d'une manière exemplaire; je crois que ce qui atteint l'humanité ne peut pas entre dans la conscience sans passer par l'artiste, par l'œuvre d'art. De toute façon, une œuvre «de qualité». Ce sont les seules qui durent, qui subsistent et résistent au temps, qui portent témoignage" (29)⁹. It is precisely these notions of art and *œuvres de qualité* that have inspired me to look more closely at Delbo's style of writing and how she articulates trauma and survival throughout various narrative forms.

**Delbo's unique writing style: A theory of doubling**

For the last several decades, we have been listening to the voices of both men and women who survived Nazi concentration, labor, and even death camps. Such is the case of Charlotte Delbo. Most of the research on Charlotte Delbo has remained within the realm of Holocaust studies, and her writing, in particular, has been seen as a means of witnessing and preserving memory¹⁰. Although Charlotte Delbo is much less well-known in comparison to Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Tadeusz Borowski, and Robert Antelme, for example, her writing captures camp experiences similar to those of her male counterparts classified under *littérature concentrationnaire*. Labeled solely as a “Holocaust survivor” and subsequently overshadowed by male writers of the Holocaust, Charlotte Delbo has not been adequately read and appreciated as a writer of the 20th century. Most researchers studying Charlotte Delbo analyze and label her work as strictly being within Holocaust studies, because she is first seen as a “survivor”.

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⁹ See Hélène Renal's "Entretien avec Charlotte Delbo".
¹⁰ For an in-depth look at memory in Charlotte Delbo's writing, see Arun K. Pokhrel's article "Representations of time and memory in holocaust literature: a comparison of Charlotte Delbo's *Days and Memory* and Ida Fink's selected stories."
Although her experiences in Auschwitz are one of the main subjects of her writing, I am not focusing explicitly on her experiences, but rather on the methods and literary devices that Delbo uses to (re)construct and articulate these experiences. Delbo breaks the traditional template that labels her as a survivor by using a combination of two or more literary genres, known in general as generic hybridity, to create a unique literary form that captures her struggles with the social and cultural demands of post-World War II France. My dissertation will attempt to convey salient aspects of this unique literary form which I will call **doubling**. I will investigate the various ways that identity is doubled not only psychologically for the author, but spatially and metaphorically for the narrator(s). Delbo separates from herself at various times in the text to create a distance which gives her a new perspective of others’ perceptions and expectations of her. We find that this doubling is a result of her camp experiences and causes Delbo, and the narrator(s), great anxiety at times.

Doubling also occurs in Delbo’s narrative techniques that constantly switch between prose, poetry, and dialogue. Settings, characters, and time frames become doubled as well, as Delbo slips between narrative levels and voices. The switching between narrative forms, characters, and time frames unsettles the reader because of the constant instability. Is Delbo using this form of generic hybridity as a strategy to question society’s expectations of narrative form and of finding a truthful, rational reality within the text itself? Or, is Delbo blending these multiple narrative forms and voices in a way that uniquely portrays the concentration camp experiences aesthetically so that they capture and maintain the reader's attention? Understanding when and why the form switches as well as who is speaking during these moments will help us answer these questions.

In general, this doubling, I believe, is a result of Delbo’s gendered experience in the camps and in France after the war. Not only do we witness the experience of Delbo trying to maintain a unified self in the camps as the Nazis relentlessly strip away her humanity, but we also follow Delbo’s experiences of trying to understand her own duality as she resettles back in France- homeless, jobless, and a widow. As a woman, writing about women, in a women’s camp, Charlotte Delbo gives us a unique perspective, not yet explored, of what is was like for her and the 230 women in her convoy to experience, and for a few- to survive Auschwitz. In my conclusion, I explore in greater detail how Delbo's writing can be seen as a form of women's
writing, and how Delbo's language tells us of her unique experience as a woman not only in the
camps, but as a woman struggling to survive after the camps as a writer.

In this study, I am investigating how and why Delbo uses literary language to describe
her experiences. Beyond the immediate challenge of verbalizing unspeakable horrors, Delbo
wanted to be the voice of the women in her convoy who did not survive. However, I find that her
language captures more than the act of witnessing. There is an element of immediacy and
uniqueness which moves her prose beyond the traditional clichés of her contemporaries; Delbo
does not tell us the typical survivor story in a typical plot formation. Through her language,
Delbo constructs a unique literary form in which she juxtaposes different literary genres, female
and male voices of her past, and literary figures from classic and modern French literature.

In chapter two of this dissertation, we look at how Delbo creates and uses multiple
narrative voices in what I call "doubling of the subject," in an effort to highlight the difficulty of
readjusting to life after the concentration camps. Focusing mainly on Delbo's trilogy Auschwitz
et après, we find that Delbo shares her first person narrative voice with mainly women and a few
men who survived the atrocities of World War II and Nazi concentration camps. Instead of
limiting her narratives to her personal experiences, which is a common practice in many
Holocaust narratives, Delbo chooses to share her narrative voice with others, both as an effort to
tell their story and to creatively capture the emotional aspects of camp life. These first-person
accounts of events give us direct insight into the extreme situations of the camps, which would
have otherwise seemed unbelievable. Doubling of the subject allows Delbo to incorporate a
multitude of narrative voices and a wide-range of experiences that would have otherwise gone
untold.

In chapter three, we look at how Delbo introduces characters that are already pre-
established from Classical French literature and theater in what I call "doubling of the literary
setting." Focusing mainly on Delbo's 1977 text Spectres, mes compagnons, we witness the
characters Alceste, Électre, and Ondine enter a completely new literary setting alongside Delbo's
own literary persona Charlotte. Bringing with them their historical and social backgrounds as
well as their personality and mannerisms, Delbo skillfully rewrites these characters into her
modern-day text as guides and mentors because at some point in their fictional lives they

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11 To separate the author's voice from the narrator's voice in this chapter, I use Delbo to refer to the authorial voice
and Charlotte to refer to the literary persona that represents herself.
experienced the loss of a lover or loved one. Written in the form of a letter to Louis Jouvèt, Delbo uses her knowledge of theater to successfully bring these characters into her modern-day text to make sure that her story of mourning and loss does not become another Holocaust statistic, but rather a literary text that will stand out and be remembered.

In chapter four, we look at how and when Delbo switches between prose and poetry and in what I call "doubling of the literary forms." Focusing mainly on Delbo's final text *La mémoire et les jours*, published posthumously in 1985, we find that Delbo allows the stories and themes of her text to dictate her literary form. We will look at two themes in particular, motherhood and truth. Delbo is perhaps best known for her frequent changes in literary form, however this literary style of switching between prose and poetry is not unique to her. What is unique to Delbo is how and when she implements these switches in form. Throughout each story in this text, we find many women who lived and survived experiences beyond the imagination and who continue to question this terrifying past on a daily basis. Delbo knew the value and uniqueness behind these women's stories and therefore she allows many of these women to speak directly to the reader. Whereas Delbo's narrative forms are often seen as standing alone and having separate functions, I argue that Delbo uses these multiple narrative forms in conjunction with one another, even though they could stand alone, in order to capture both a personal narrative and a broader, universal description that resonates with the reader. In closely studying the context of her poems and prose, I find that Delbo's switches between prose and poetry and the content within function on a deeper level than critics have touched on thus far. Whereas most critics argue that Delbo must supplement her prose with poetry to express deeper emotions, I find that both narrative forms capture equally well the emotions and thoughts of a given situation. What we find is that Delbo creatively intertwines these two narrative forms to capture both an individual and a universal message and to accentuate the themes of motherhood and truth.

In the following three chapters, I explore and expand my theory of doubling by focusing on Delbo's unique writing methods and literary devices that she employs to (re)construct and articulate her concentration camp experiences, her struggle to return to a "normal" life in France, and her endeavor to successfully write about these moments in an artistic manner. It is the aesthetic dimension of her works which sets her writing apart from what we would consider a typical Holocaust narrative and it is precisely what entices the reader to engage further with the text.
CHAPTER TWO

DOUBLING OF THE SUBJECT

"Je ne suis pas vivante. Je regarde ceux qui le sont. Ils sont fuites, ignorants. Sans doute est-ce ainsi qu'il faut être pour vivre, pour aller au bout du temps de la vie. S'ils avaient cette connaissance que j'ai, ils seraient comme moi. Ils ne seraient pas vivants" (The double voice of Charlotte and Mado, Mesure de nos jours 58).

In chapter two of this dissertation, I look at how Delbo creates and uses multiple narrative voices in what I call "doubling of the subject." As we will see throughout each chapter of this dissertation, Charlotte Delbo builds her texts upon instability, whether its through character formation, various time frames, or multiple literary forms. Yet, within this instability, Delbo links together moments and stories of unity and strength through common themes such as death, motherhood, survival, and remembrance. In what initially appears to be random narrative voices in a constant flux between prose and poetry, we begin to find tightly woven stories told by Delbo and other survivors of their daily struggle living in concentration camps and their subsequent efforts to deal with returning home stripped of everything. Through her creative writing process which takes place over a span of forty years, we watch this creation of doubling take place. We find in this chapter that identity is doubled not only psychologically for the narrator/author, but spatially and metaphorically within her texts. This doubling is a direct result of her camp experiences and causes Delbo, as a narrator and author, great anxiety at times. Through the process of writing, Charlotte Delbo creates a narrative self who shares with the reader, from a first-person perspective, her thoughts and intimate dialogues, and as we will see later in this chapter, who shares her narrative voice with others in the camps. This doubling allows Delbo to separate from herself within her literary texts, in order to create a distance which gives her, and ultimately the reader, various perspectives of tragic events in her past. To distinguish these two voices, I label the voice of the author as Delbo and the voice of the narrative self as Charlotte.

If we take a moment to reflect upon the essence of the word *double*, we find that it inherently has multiple meanings. In the process of doubling, we can envision the creation of two objects, which could be similar, duplicates, or different in nature, dualistic or having a double meaning. A very different form of doubling is the creation of an apparition, a vision or a voice of a fictional or dead person; this third type of doubling will be discussed in further detail in chapter
three. In this chapter, Delbo doubles her subjects in numerous ways. I have classified her doubling of the subject into three categories: first, we find one person living in two worlds, France and the concentration camps, and the difficulty of readjustment; next, there are rare moments when Delbo, the author, dialogues directly with the reader in an effort to highlight the act of writing itself and to bring the past events into the present moment; and finally there is a sharing of the first person "je" as Delbo takes a step back to listen to the voices of other survivors. We will primarily be looking at textual examples from Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz et après*, which she began writing immediately upon her return home to France in 1946. We will also look briefly at Delbo's final book *La mémoire et les jours*, published posthumously in 1985, which has very similar narrative features as her trilogy.

**The desire to publish**

We begin with the exploration of how Delbo, the narrator, struggles to reintegrate into French society and write her story after a period of over three years in various Nazi prisons and camps. Delbo was arrested on March 2, 1942, liberated in April 1945, and returned to Paris on June 23, 1945. Delbo's final text, *La mémoire et les jours*, which was written in 1985 and published posthumously within months of her death, truly captures the life-long struggle of Delbo and of her colleagues to live with the horrors of Auschwitz in post-World War II French society. Delbo explains what this "vie nouvelle" was supposed to look like: "se marier, avoir des enfants, travailler, entreprendre des études ou les reprendre, retrouver son travail ou en changer pour partir à neuf: [...] Il fallait comme reconstruire sa personnalité" (136). These ideas seem reasonable in ordinary circumstances, but for Delbo, who was in her mid-thirties, a widow, and childless, it was a long, painful and sometimes unsuccessful process in which she came to the realization that "L'Europe relevait ses ruines, les criminels étaient jugés et condamnés, l'histoire n'avait plus besoin de nous" (136). In other words, people were ready to move on with their lives and put this unbearable and unspeakable past behind them. Yet, for some, there was a strong desire to come forth and tell their story in order to show the world that apparently they had suffered and friends had died for nothing. Several authors admit that they had their story in mind before they ever left the camp, Delbo included. Delbo explains that "quand j'étais à Ravensbrück
[..] je pensais à ce livre¹² (Prévost 41). Delbo states in an interview with her friend and translator Rosette Lamont that "I wrote None of Us Will Return as soon as I regained some strength" (485). Annette Wieviorka, the director of research at CNRS, tries to explain "la rapidité de l'écriture" immediately following the war. She states that "une trentaine sont achevés avant la fin de l'année 1945, et immédiatement publiés. À l'évidence, ils répondent à une urgence intérieure qui s'était fait sentir dès le camp lui-même: désir de se retrouver réhumanisé, jouissant de la possibilité de dire "je" et d'avoir une activité intellectuelle, désir de témoigner, passage à l'écrit pour pallier ce que la parole échoue à dire" (185). Primo Levi, in his book Survival in Auschwitz,¹³ published originally in 1958, speaks of a similar feeling to this urgence intérieure in his preface. He writes that "The need to tell our story to 'the rest', to make 'the rest' participate in it, had taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse, to the point of competing with our other elementary needs. The book has been written to satisfy this need: first and foremost, therefore, as an interior liberation" (9).

Robert Antelme also captures this desire to speak in the introduction to his book L'espèce humaine, written and published in 1947. He opens by saying: "Il y a deux ans, durant les premiers jours qui ont suivi notre retour, nous avons été, tous je pense, en proie à un véritable délire. Nous voulions parler, être entendus enfin. [...] nous éprouvions un désir frénétique de la dire telle quelle. Et dès les premiers jours cependant, il nous paraissait impossible de combler la distance que nous découvrions entre le langage dont nous disposions et cette expérience" (9). This désir frénétique, however, is met with the difficulty of putting these experiences into words. In 1946, one year prior to the publication of Antelme's book, Delbo writes Aucun de nous ne reviendra, her first text about Auschwitz, but she does not publish it until 1965. She explains in an interview that same year that the texts published immediately following the war, although "extremémement utiles," only capture the hard facts in what Delbo describes as "des livres informatifs" (41). Having no desire to contribute to this thirst for factual information, Delbo explains that she waited until she believed people were ready for "une information plus haute, inactuelle, c'est-à-dire plus durable, celle qui ferait sentir la vérité de la tragédie en restituant l'émotion et l'horreur" (41). Delbo's text, I argue, separates itself from des livres informatifs through her narrative strategy of doubling and thus captures l'émotion et l'horreur that she hoped

¹² Delbo is referring to her text Aucun de nous ne reviendra written in 1946 and published in 1965.
¹³ Survival in Auschwitz was originally entitled If This Is a Man, a direct translation of the Italian title Se questo è un uomo.
to transmit to future readers. On a more humble note she admits to Lamont: "I had no idea it would stay there for close to twenty years. I never showed it to anyone, never thought of myself as 'a writer' " (485).

**One person, two worlds**

So how does one cover the gaping distance between experience and words that troubled and intimidated so many survivors, writers or not? Literature. It is here that the imagination covers this distance allowing Delbo, and others, a creative space to play with character formation and genre as they find a distinctive way to transcribe History into a personal narrative, a personal history. Jorge Semprun, a survivor of Buchenwald, goes as far as to say that only literature, art, can capture and convey the concentration camp experience. He states in his opening chapter to *L'écriture ou la vie* that "Seul l'artifice d'un récit maîtrisé parviendra à transmettre partiellement la vérité du témoignage" (23). He reiterates the importance of literature later on saying "la vérité essentielle de l'expérience, n'est pas transmissible... Ou plutôt, elle ne l'est que par l'écriture littéraire..." (136). Delbo knows personally that this creative process has only taken shape after the camps through the process of remembering and writing. She recounts that "Au camp, on ne pouvait jamais faire semblant, jamais se refugier dans l'imaginaire. [...] j'ai essayé souvent de m'imaginer que j'étais ailleurs. J'ai essayé de me voir autrement, comme lorsqu'on est transporté hors de soi, au théâtre, par exemple. Non. [...] La réalité était là, mortelle. Impossible de s'en abstraire" (*La mémoire et les jours* 12). Through the process of remembering and commemorating the women in her convoy as well as the long and difficult process of readjustment, Delbo's unique form of doubling emerged, which like the works of her contemporaries captures the horrific experiences of camp life, but also captures experiences unique only to women.

Delbo makes a striking resemblance between herself and a snake as she tries to capture a physical metamorphosis which accurately describes her feelings of being double or being one person in two worlds. She explains that upon her return to France, she shed "une peau usée" which was "marquée de tous les coups qu'elle avait reçus pour me retrouver habillée d'une belle peau propre" (11). Like a snake, Delbo is able to leave behind the physical traces of camp life, but she goes on to explain that the psychological scars are deeply buried in her memory and can
never be shed. Delbo calls this area "la peau de la mémoire" which "ne se renouvelle pas" (12, 13). Delbo momentarily dialogues with the reader or perhaps herself to delve deeper: "- Alors, vous vivez avec Auschwitz? - Non, je vis à côté. Auschwitz est là, inaltérable, précis, mais enveloppé dans la peau de la mémoire" (13). After forty years, Delbo seems to have come to a certain understanding of how she personally deals with her tragic past. This past continues to haunt her in her dreams where "la souffrance est si insupportable, si exactement la souffrance endurée là-bas, que je la ressens physiquement, je la ressens dans tout mon corps [...] je me sens mourir" (13). In her dreams, her past becomes a present reality that emotionally and physically overtakes her. It is only after days that she is once again able to separate from her past self and "parler d'Auschwitz sans marquer ni ressentir trouble ou émotion" (14). These feelings of being doubled both emotionally and physically become more apparent in the following examples as the narrator separates from her Auschwitz self.

Due to the horrific nature of Auschwitz, Delbo finds it hard to believe at times that she was ever there. Delbo does not doubt her experiences, but she explains that "moi, j'ai le sentiment que celle qui était au camp, ce n'est pas moi, ce n'est pas la personne qui est là, en face de vous. Non, c'est trop incroyable. Et tout ce qui est arrivé à cette autre, celle d'Auschwitz, ne me touche pas, moi, maintenant, ne me concerne pas [...] Je vis dans un être double. Le double d'Auschwitz ne me gêne pas, ne se mêle pas de ma vie. Comme si ce n'était pas moi du tout" (11). Delbo purposely separates from her 'Auschwitz-self' as a means of self preservation, as we note the negative connotation that she associates with this 'other' person who is only referred to as "celle", "la personne", and "le double d'Auschwitz". Thus, Delbo's identity is doubled psychologically as a means of survival and even mental stability. Delbo goes on to explain this necessity by saying: "Sans cette coupure, je n'aurais pas pu revivre" (11). The choice of 'revivre' in this last sentence is a powerful indication of what Delbo is struggling to overcome; not only is she reliving her past through her writing, but as we will see, Delbo and her colleagues are dealing with a much deeper issue of trying to live after dying at Auschwitz. Many writers share this same feeling of having died in the camps and Semprun captures it in his own unique way: "Une idée m'est venue, soudain [...] la sensation, en tout cas, soudaine, très forte, de ne pas avoir échappé à la mort, mais de l'avoir traversée. D'avoir été, plutôt, traversé par elle. De l'avoir vécue, en quelque sorte. D'en être revenu comme on revient d'un voyage qui vous a transformé:
transfiguré, peut-être" (24). Whereas Semprun sees himself as having "parcourue" death "d'un bout à l'autre," Delbo sees her current self separately from her Auschwitz self (24). In the following excerpts from her trilogy *Auschwitz et après*¹⁵, Delbo speaks explicitly about being double, living in two worlds, and dying.

In volume one, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, we follow Delbo from her arrival at Auschwitz in January 1943 through her first year there. Delbo tells us story after story of her daily struggle to survive in Auschwitz-Birkenau as a political prisoner. Delbo points out that "Les Françaises, c'était notre convoi. Nous n'étions pas, de loin, les seules Françaises à Birkenau, mais nous étions les seules qui y fussent sous l'étiquette "politique" (*Le convoi* 16). Although they were spared the initial "tri" or "gazés tout de suite", Delbo and her colleagues lived in the same wretched camps with everyone else. Often times, after a hard day's work, Charlotte and her colleagues were forced to run as the SS or Kapo beat them with sticks. Those who fell were sent to block 25¹⁶ and then to the crematorium. During one of these moments, which appears to be game-like and comical to those in charge, Delbo realizes the seriousness as well as the insanity of the situation. She explains that "seul un spectateur du dehors aurait vu la folie, car nous étions aussitôt pliées au fantastique" (I 62). As she is running, Delbo admits "j'avais eu envie de rire. Ou plutôt non, j'avais vu un double de moi ayant envie de rire" (64). To an outsider, and in this case Delbo's *double*, this scene was laughable, but it is evident that this laugh could only come from a place of fear and uneasiness, because nothing was comical, only ridiculous. Delbo's double, who takes on this role of a *spectateur du dehors*, is able to see momentarily the absurdity of the situation in which these women, young and old, completely exhausted, who are running, as she explains, like ducks with their heads cut off. It is only through this literary recreation of this scene that this double is able to emerge and to look in on this situation from a new perspective.

In volume two, *Une Connaissance Inutile*, of her trilogy, we follow Delbo and her colleagues through the winter of 1943-44 in Birkenau and their subsequent transfer to Raisko and then to Ravensbrück in January 1944. Charlotte Delbo concludes this volume with two short poems; the first one has no title, and the second poem is entitled “Prière aux vivants pour leur

¹⁴ See Semprun's *L'écriture ou la vie*.
¹⁵ From here on, *Auschwitz et après* will be referred to as the trilogy or the Auschwitz trilogy. Page numbers will be given according to volume, which I have labeled using roman numerals.
¹⁶ Block 25 is where prisoners are taken to die by isolation and starvation before being transported to the gas chambers.
pardonner d’être vivants.” Delbo gives the reader, for the first time, a sense of how difficult it was to return home to France after surviving multiple concentration camps. In the first poem, she struggles with comprehending where she ever was or perhaps still is, as we see in the following lines:

Je reviens d’un autre monde

dans ce monde

que je n’avais pas quitté

et je ne sais

lequel est vrai

dites-moi suis-je revenue

de l'autre monde?

Pour moi

je suis encore là-bas

et je meurs

là-bas (II 183).

In these stanzas, we begin to see how she herself conceptualizes and creates a doubling of the self. She is clearly stuck between two worlds: one in France and one back in the camps as she admits "je ne sais plus quel est vrai/ du monde-là/ de l'autre monde-là-bas" (184). While in Auschwitz, we find evidence in Delbo's writing that these two worlds were distinctly different. Prisoners told stories of their past lives and of their families; they imagined what life was like back home and how it would be when they returned. However, once home and completely stripped of everyone and everything, this veil of hope that was critical for survival quickly fell to reveal a different reality. As Delbo explains in these lines, she died over there. Thus the desire to revivre, as we saw earlier, is one of starting over with nothing. Most survivors did not return to relive their past lives- the dream cultivated in the camps, but rather they returned home with a new past that would prove hard to separate from as we will see later in her third volume.

Delbo concludes this first poem above by explaining the near impossibility of communicating her camp experiences with her friends and family in France. Here is her final stanza:
Je suis revenue d’entre les morts
et j’ai cru
que cela me donnait le droit
de parler aux autres
et quand je me suis retrouvée en face d’eux
je n’ai rien eu à leur dire
parce que
j’avais appris
là-bas
qu’on ne peut pas parler aux autres (188).

Not only does Delbo find it impossible to talk about her experiences in the camps, but she finds herself in a similar situation in France to that in the camps with regard to her inability to speak to others. Other than at night in their bunks, most prisoners were not allowed to talk to one another during the work day. The Nazis knew communication amongst prisoners was detrimental to their plan of complete control of every aspect of camp life. Therefore, Delbo had limited conversations with her colleagues during the day, and she explains that after a day’s work, most were too tired to speak at night, which is echoed in L’espèce humaine as Antelme explains: "c’était trop fatiguant de tenir une véritable conversation. Il fallait faire tenir ce qu’on avait à dire en peu de mots" (210). The death rate was also so high that Delbo tells of confusing who is dead and alive; “Viva, où es-tu? Non, tu n’étais pas dans l’avion avec nous. Si je confonds les mortes et les vivantes, avec lesquelles suis-je, moi ?” (III 10-11).

As we saw in the first poem above, Delbo has just returned d’un autre monde. She continues to build on this idea in the final poem as she refers to herself as a revenant, a word which itself takes on a double meaning of not only somebody returning after a long absence but it also refers to somebody returning from another world, a phantom or an apparition. Here is the final stanza of the second poem entitled “Prière aux vivants pour leur pardonner d’être vivants”:

mieux vaut ne pas y croire
à ces histoires
de revenants
plus jamais vous ne dormirez
si jamais vous les croyez
ces spectres revenants
ces revenants
qui reviennent
sans pouvoir même
expliquer comment (II 191).

Delbo plays with the meaning of the word revenant, creating a confusion that leads to the doubling of the identity; is she returning alive from a long absence or is she an apparition, a transparent figure of her former self? Delbo in fact finds herself in both positions. While reading Delbo’s texts, we are often confronted by images of fantômes, revenants, and spectres. The following chapter is dedicated to these unique identities and their textual re-creation; Delbo creates a doubling of the setting by superimposing well-known characters and books from classical literature into her texts.

The inability to explain from where she just came, which we see in the stanza above, is a theme that runs throughout Delbo’s work. This sentiment echoes back to the first two pages of La mémoire et les jours (1985) where Delbo opens by saying "Expliquer l'inexplicable" and questions herself a few lines later "Comment ai-je fait pour m'en dégager au retour, pour vivre aujourd'hui? Une question qu'on me pose souvent, à laquelle je cherche une réponse, sans la trouver" (11, 12). What we find in these sentences and in these texts is this lifelong search to explain what can never be explained to those of us who never experienced the Nazi camps. Jorge Semprun explains that it would take "des heures, des saisons entières, l'éternité" to explain what camp life was like (22). Elie Wiesel in his preface to Night says "Only those who experienced Auschwitz know what it was. Others will never know" but he continues by saying "And yet, having lived through this experience, one could not keep silent no matter how difficult, if not impossible, it was to speak" (x). Wiesel concludes his introduction with the ultimate motive behind his writing. He states: "When we speak of this era of evil and darkness, so close and yet so distant, "responsibility" is the key word. The witness has forced himself to testify. For the youth of today, for the children who will be born tomorrow. He does not want his past to become their future" (xv). Delbo, like Wiesel, cannot explain the events of her past nor give answers, but
she can testify to her experiences. This testimony, this search, is a literary creation that captures a story and creates meaning that might have otherwise vanished into the past. Delbo warns us above that *ces histoires* are not to be believed if we do not want to face the consequences and the sleepless nights that knowing the truth might entail; Delbo continuously plays with this word *histoire*, which beautifully carries the double meaning of being a story and the past, and which both seem unbelievable to her.

Delbo concludes her final paragraphs of *La mémoire et les jours*, and perhaps her final pages ever written, with a similar statement of responsibility as we saw above with Wiesel. However in her final words, Delbo leaves us with a desperate plea: "il y a encore des camps. Vérité insupportable. [...] Alors, comment tiennent-ils ceux qui sont enfermés dans les camps de Sibérie, condamnés pour des années? [...] Camarades, ô mes camarades, nous qui avons juré de ne pas oublier nos morts, que pouvons-nous pour ces oubliés-là? Il y en a qui sont encore vivants. Il y en a qui espèrent encore" (137-138). In this final text, Delbo seems to have stepped out of the narration to face her public as herself, as the author, to demand who is going to take political action for the atrocities that continue around the world. She is not only addressing her colleagues, but the reader is also implicated in this *nous*. Her voice and her opinions resonate loudly in these last paragraphs as she pleads with her colleagues and ultimately her readers to take action, or at a minimum, to not forget those who are still suffering. In the following section, I examine this authorial voice in more detail.

**One person, two time frames**

We have seen how Delbo creates a double self, "le double d'Auschwitz," as a means of psychologically separating from her past. In this section, I highlight how Delbo doubles herself within multiple narrative time frames as she switches between author and narrator. This technique creates immediacy in the act of writing and brings the reader and the events of her past into the present moment. This direct voice of the author is rarely used in Delbo's earlier texts, but it is very effective in jolting the reader from one narrative time frame to another. As we will see in the following examples, Delbo makes a point, on only three unique occasions, to draw our attention to her act of writing in the present moment. There are two additional moments when
the narrative time frame doubles, and these occur when Delbo inserts current newspaper articles concerning France's involvement in Algeria and in Vietnam into her own narrative. Delbo finds several similarities between these events and several incidences that occurred in the concentration camps in what seems like, to Delbo, a continuation of acts of violence. Delbo creates double time frames, switching from narrating the past to actually writing the past, to show the reader her own process of reflection, remembering and writing. In these unique instances, we begin to hear more of the author's personal thoughts and actions as she invites us into her daily life of reading and writing. We see the actual process of how the past becomes her story. Delbo takes this process one step further by inserting daily newspaper articles that still echo the torture and pain that many had hoped and assumed ended after World War II. Thus, we see almost an exact repeat of a past event in Auschwitz taking place in modern day society.

We return back to volume one, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, which Delbo began writing in 1946 immediately upon her return home to France. In this segment, Delbo is standing outside in the snow for the daily headcount watching a woman who has just fallen down an icy slope. Then abruptly, her eye falls upon a second figure in front of Block 25:

"Debout, enveloppé dans une couverture, un enfant, un garçonnet. [...] La couverture s'écarte. C'est une femme. Un squelette de femme. Elle est nue. [...] Un squelette de femme qui danse. [...] Il y a des squelettes vivants et qui dansent.

*Et maintenant je suis dans un café à écrire cette histoire- car cela devient une histoire.*

Une éclaircie. Est-ce l'après-midi? [...] Des heures se sont écoulées depuis que j'ai réussi à ne plus regarder la femme dans la fossé" (I 44-45, my emphasis).

In this brief segment, Delbo moves us unexpectedly between multiple narrative strands and time frames. First, we are watching a helpless woman desperately pull herself up a snowy incline. Next, we are observing a hopeless emaciated woman wait for the doors to the death block to open. Then, abruptly, we hear the unforeseen voice of the author sitting in a cozy Parisian café, and once again we are immediately thrown back again into the narration to the woman stuck down the snowy incline. Within this brief moment we have a doubling of time frames whereby Delbo becomes the voice of the narrator and of the author in order to switch between narrative levels. Not only does this rapid movement between narrative levels jolt the reader into the present moment, but Delbo uses this moment to emphasize the word "histoire". I
hear an ironic, saddened tone in her phrase "car cela devient une histoire" because Delbo consistently speaks of wanting to use her writing as a means of telling rather than recounting, or in other words "dire" rather than "raconter". In a 1965 interview, the year she published *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, she responds to the question of why she has chosen literature as her means of explaining camp life. She answers by saying "Je n'ai pas trouvé d'autre moyen de m'exprimer, de dire ce que j'avais à dire. [...] Je voulais donner à voir, non pas aux déportés qui étaient encore tout saignants, mais à ceux qui n'auraient jamais entendu parler du camp" (Prévost interview 43).

As we will see later in chapter four which is dedicated to narrative form, it is precisely her telling and her dialogues that capture her experiences; never does Delbo follow a traditional narrative form with descriptions of exact times and places. However, Delbo knows that these *histoires* inevitably become a part of our History that she is struggling to preserve.

In finishing her story about the cold winter day, Delbo gives us graphic details of the death of the woman who slipped down the snowy incline. Abruptly she switches to the second woman:

"Devant la porte du block 25, la couverture aux pieds nus, à la tête rasée, n'a pas cessé de sautiller. La nuit vient.

Et nous restons debout dans la neige. Immobiles dans la plaine immobile.

*Et maintenant je suis dans un café à écrire ceci*" (I 49)\(^1\).

Again, we hear the direct voice of the author following this tragic scene which captures the death of two innocent women- one who has fallen down an icy slope and another who is waiting before block 25, as Delbo and her colleagues stand completely helpless to the situation. Not only are they immobile because of the extreme cold, but stepping out of line insures immediate death by the SS as everyone just witnessed with the women who slipped in the snow. Delbo, as the narrator of this story, tries to separate from the two women's situations on an emotional level because she knows the consequences of her actions would mean death for her as well. This separation is reinforced spatially in the text with spaces inserted between the narrating voice and the author's voice who is in the process of remembering and writing these scenes.

These switches between narrative levels and time frames occur quite infrequently but it is

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\(^1\) This final line is separated in the original text but the italics are my emphasis.
a very effective and powerful use of narration to shock the reader out of the story and back into the present day situation of how this story is being created and told to us. The reader begins to have an emotional investment in the suffering of these two helpless women, and then we are quickly removed from this bitter scene to a warm, inviting café that is almost devoid of any emotional elements. Delbo, I find, wants to show the reader how to make these shifts, how to go back into the past and relive these experiences, but also how to be aware of the present. Delbo knows it would be hard to drag the reader through endless chronological camp scenes just because she herself has already lived it and continues to relive it in her dreams. Therefore, to be an effective writer and to draw her reader into her world, she must show us not only an intriguing selection of stories but she must do so in a creative, artistic way that captures our attention and makes us relive the emotions and the horrors as she did. Delbo explains how her writing, devoid of dates, numbers, or measurements, takes hold of the reader. She asserts that "si vous écrivez dans un livre: elles allaient travailler à trois kilomètres du camp... le lecteur pensera: trois kilomètres, ce n'est rien. Mais si vous montrez comment nous allions, comment nous nous y trainions, les lecteurs, sans savoir à combien de kilomètres c'était, se rendent compte que c'était une épreuve terrible" (Prévost 44). Delbo's creative writing sets her apart as a poet and not just another survivor writing a "témoignage comme une simple donnée du réel," (Wieviorka 313). Playing with the narrative voice is one of these effective writing techniques of capturing and maintaining the reader's attention, because we, the readers, must pay close attention to the constant switches. It is easy to become entangled in every aspect of her writing from characters, to setting, to form, because Delbo wants us to struggle with these texts, to reread them, and to realize the complexity and even the impossibility of putting her past into words.

In volume one of her trilogy, we find only these two instances just mentioned above where Delbo, the author, speaks to us directly. In volume two, a similar authorial voice is again only heard on very rare occasions when she talks to us using the present tense, which can be difficult to distinguish from the alternating present and past narration; these instances are brief, subtle, and easy to pass over. For example, Delbo and her colleagues decide to "récrire Le Malade Imaginaire, de mémoire. Le premier acte achevé, les répétitions commencent. J'écris cela comme si c'avaït été aussi simple" (II 91). It is easy to read over these sentences without catching the subtle details of how Delbo draws the reader into the past, which becomes a temporary present moment as les répétitions commencent, but then we are torn from the narrative
into the immediate act of writing by the author herself. Both of the verbs "commencent" and "écris" are in the present tense, but they are actually taking place at two very distinct times. As Delbo thinks back on rewriting this famous text by Molière, which ironically plays on their real fragile physical state in the camps, she begins to question how she is writing and presenting her current text; she realizes that in describing these two moments, rewriting the play at Auschwitz and writing down this memory in a Parisian café, she has made them both seem effortless. Each text, however, has taken an extreme amount of effort and time. It is at this moment that Delbo, the author, realizes the power of her words to recreate the past, so she returns back in time to re-narrate in detail over the following five pages, the slow process of rewriting and performing this play in secret. Inserting this authorial voice gives the reader an intimate look into Delbo's thoughts toward her own writing and her reflections on how to better capture an experience. Thanks to her time as secretary and stenographer for Louis Jouvet, Delbo has learned how to dissect and rebuild single moments, much as Jouvet did when directing; when the authorial voice intervenes, there is a feeling of hearing a stage manager\textsuperscript{18} orchestrating from afar.

In addition to this rather hidden and infrequent voice of the author writing in the café, we see for the first time a different style of doubling the voice of Delbo and her time frame in volume two of her Auschwitz trilogy, \textit{Une connaissance inutile}. At two moments in this volume, Delbo inserts what appear to be current newspaper articles. The first article is found near the beginning of this volume immediately following a story entitled "La Marseillaise Le Cou Coupé," which tells the story of four Frenchmen condemned to death in Auschwitz for trying to start a fight and then attempting to escape. These four Frenchmen, while singing the Marseillaise, were beheaded Delbo tells us "pendant l'été 1942" (II 32). Immediately following this story, we find the following paragraph only separated graphically by two spaces and quotation marks:

"... La semaine dernière, un acte d'une même incohérence, suivi aussitôt de plusieurs autres, fut décidé par le nouveau pouvoir: l'exécution dans la cour de la sinistre forteresse de Montluc, à Lyon, du patriote algérien Abderrahmane Laklifi. Samedi à l'aube, il eut la tête tranché, accompagné jusqu'à l'échafaud par le chant de tous ses camarades, derrière les barreaux de leurs cellules" (L'Express, 4 août 1960) " (32).

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{The American Heritage Dictionary} defines a stage manager as someone who "directs or manipulates from behind the scenes, as to achieve a desired effect."
These two situations, taking place 18 years apart, have striking similarities, and Delbo links them in a seamless continuation of illogical acts of violence. Delbo, who has lived her life questioning the cruel and unusual punishment of certain political regimes, especially the National Socialist party, seems to be perplexed and even saddened at how even the French could perform such a task. We are not given the details of Abderahmane Lakofi, but Delbo tells us that he is a "patriote" as were the four Frenchmen in Auschwitz who were killed for demanding freedom. In 1961 Delbo published Les Belles Lettres, which is a collection of newspaper articles and letters written by those opposed to the French military situation in Algeria. Delbo begins and ends the opening page with the following: "Pourquoi écrit-on des lettres? Parce qu'on éclate d'indignation. [...] Privé d'autre moyen d'agir, on écrit des lettres" (9). Although there are a few commentaries by Delbo among the letters, her goal in writing this text was to collect and reprint the voices of those who had cried out with indignation over the situation in Algeria, particularly those signing the Manifest des 121, which was a manifesto signed by French artists and intellectuals who supported French soldiers who did not want to serve in the war against Algeria. The State sanctioned and punished many of the signers of the manifesto. Rothberg explains that "Not only was the manifesto banned from publication, but all signers were banned from appearing on television and radio, and academics" (175). By reprinting these banned letters the following year, Delbo is uniting her voice with individuals who felt isolated and silenced in their actions in order to recreate a new more powerful text which continues to echo the violent conflicts of the past. This strength in joining voices is exactly what Delbo is trying to achieve by reprinting these newspaper articles side-by-side with her own experiences in Auschwitz for a new public to read.

Delbo inserts a second newspaper article into her text entitled "Le voyage". After a year in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Delbo and several of her colleagues are transferred to Ravensbrück. Over several pages we go through the preparations of their transfer: papers, doctors, showers.

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19 For a discussion on the social and political climate in France at this time and in particular Delbo's motivation to publish Les Belles Lettres prior to volume one of her trilogy, see Michael Rothberg's recent article "Between Auschwitz and Algeria: Multidirectional memory and the Counterpublic Witness." Critical Inquiry, 33, 2006, 158-184.
20 Rothberg goes into more detail on this manifesto known as the "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission." For more information on this manifesto, Rothberg cites the following text: "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie," in Patrick Rotman and Hervé Hamon, Les Porteurs de valises: La Résistance française à la guerre d'Algérie (Paris, 1979), pp. 393, 392.
Then, "c'est là que nous avons assisté à la scène la plus extraordinaire. Taube - Taube que nous avons vu envoyer des milliers de femmes au gaz, que nous avons vu lancer son chien sur plusieurs des nôtres et les faire dévorer [...] Taube, le SS le plus cruel, s'il y avait un plus de la cruauté chez les SS- Taube s'agenouille devant Carmen et, avec son canif, retaille les bouts des lacets pour qu'ils passent dans les œillet" (II 106-107). Delbo tells us that it would have been less astonishing if he had taken them all to block 25 to die. Eventually they board the train to Germany and Delbo decides to try and speak to the SS officers to find out "ce qu'était un SS. Comment, pourquoi, est-on SS?" (110). She finds out that they are Slovenian and they were forced into the SS. During the train ride, they offer Delbo and her colleagues cigarettes and coffee. The story ends upon their arrival in Berlin and the following article is inserted:


Without passing any judgment on their personal character, Delbo shows us briefly an alternative perspective of Taube, the SS officers, and lieutenant Calley. Volume one, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, was written immediately upon her return home, so the distance between the narrative voice and that of the author was very close. However, here in volume two, Delbo is able to present this alternative perspective because of the twenty year time difference between the events and writing about them. She might even be showing us how ordinary both the prisoners and these officers are in these horrific situations. As Christopher Browning explains in his study of otherwise normal Germans in the Reserve Police Battalion 101, tellingly entitled *Ordinary Men*\(^{21}\), this group of men who ended up killing over 38,000 Jews in a sixteen month period\(^{22}\), were "from the lower orders of German society. They had experienced neither social nor geographic mobility. Very few were economically independent. [...] virtually none had any

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\(^{21}\) It is interesting to note that "ordinary" is defined as being usual, no exceptional ability, of inferior quality in *The American Heritage* dictionary. For further information on these officers and soldiers, see Daniel J. Goldhagen's 1996 book *Hitler's willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust.*

\(^{22}\) This same battalion deported over 45,200 Jews in a nine month period, August 1942 to May 1943, which coincided with the executions they were continuously carrying out (226).
education after leaving Volksschule (terminal secondary school) at age fourteen or fifteen" (48). In fact, most had no previous military experience and were "exempted from conscription into the army" if they joined the Order Police, which was considered a "police army" (5). Just as Browning shows us how ordinary these killers can be, Delbo does the same in her text to illustrate that under certain circumstances, individuals carry out extremely heinous acts, which they are trained to do

As we saw with the first newspaper article, details from this second article have many parallels with the narrative it follows. Delbo wants to bring these stories to our attention, to reprint them, to retell them, and to show us the terrible realities of war. These two articles are used in her text to show that the violence at Auschwitz and other camps is not a unique event. War, torture, and killing continue to happen around the world. Even though Delbo defines herself as "une jeune communiste ardente" she realizes that "la haine ne sert à rien, le plus grand recours, c'est de parler. C'est ça qui sauve. Parler de tout. C'est une façon d'exister, le seul mode d'existence" (Chapsal interview 76).

As I mentioned earlier, Delbo's last text written in 1985, La mémoire et les jours, has a tone of exasperation, which we did not hear in the trilogy. Towards the end of the text, we find, as we did above in volume II of the trilogy, a doubling of the narrative voice for the final time. However, this time there is no declaration of "j'écris" as we saw before and there is no insertion of newspaper articles; it is simply Delbo's voice, alone, separated and spaced apart from her main text and written in italics:

La torture en Algérie
Des hommes ont fait de ma langue le langage de tortionnaires
Des villages brûlés au napalm en Indochine
Des Algériens pourchassés par la police de Paris, un jour
d'octobre 1961, des Algériens dont on a repêché les corps dans la Seine.

Que souvent j'ai pensé à toi, Hannelore (133).

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23 For discussions on how we study, understand, and classify evil and perpetrators in WWII Nazi camps, see Jennifer L. Geddes' article "Banal Evil and Useless Knowledge: Hannah Arendt and Charlotte Delbo on Evil after the Holocaust." and Hannah Arendt's book Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.
The main text is a dialogue between Delbo and her friend Hannelore, a German and a "demi-juive" as she describes herself (131). Hannelore, extremely ashamed of her German roots, spends the rest of her life trying to "[ne] plus être allemande. Je ne peux pas. Je ne veux pas" (127). Delbo tries to reason with Hannelore by asking "Tu ne veux pas marquer une différence, comme j'espère je ferai, entre les nazis et le peuple allemand?" to which Hannelore quickly responds "Et d'où sortent-ils, les nazis, sinon du peuple allemand? [...] Tous sont solidaires. Ils ont été lâches" (129). Hannelore speaks last in this dialogue asserting that "On n'efface pas l'histoire, rien à faire. Un jour, il faudra répondre aux questions des enfants" (133). Following this dialogue, there is an entire blank space before we fall upon this italicized voice of Delbo. In this blank area, Delbo pauses with the reader to reflect and to empathize with Hannelore. Perhaps she is correct that Germany has a collective responsibility for their past that is inevitably passed on to future generations. France's violent actions in Indochina and in Algeria carry this same sentiment of shame for many French citizens who realize that is it a reflection of the entire country and not just the few individuals involved. We can easily note the parallels between the italicized voice of Delbo here in 1985 and the two newspaper articles in her trilogy which were written over fifteen years earlier. Over her forty year span of writing about her experiences in Auschwitz, Delbo has continuously woven in her personal reaction to France's involvement in these very violent colonial wars that run parallel to lingering memories of Nazi genocide.

In the previous section, "one person, two timeframes," I discussed how Delbo as a writer and a reader remembers and documents her past. Delbo doubles her voice, on a few rare occasions, to become simultaneously both the narrator and the author. This authorial voice is subtly and accurately intertwined into past events as a means of breaking the traditional narrative flow and bringing the reader into the present moment. This additional voice creates small fissures in the text that are shocking to the reader as we are forced to jump from one narrative time frame to another. Yet, despite our momentary disorientation as we find our grounding, Delbo's descriptions draw us closer not only to these past events of the Holocaust but to her act of writing decades later. As Delbo retraces her past, she uses this authorial voice to connect directly with us; in other words the writer speaks candidly to the reader. Delbo even goes one step further using newspaper articles to show how as a writer, she must also become a reader; finding parallels between the past and the present, Delbo teaches us how the two are interconnected. Delbo writes to retrace her past in an effort to share these details with future
generations. Delbo achieves this act by doubling her voice and her narrative time frame. What we find in these texts is the desire to tell the reality of the camps as it truly was and continues to be in some parts of the world. In the third and final section of doubling the subject, we find that Delbo extends her first-person narrative voice to others so that they too can tell their story.

Two people, one voice

The third form of doubling that I explore examines multiple characters sharing the first-person narrative voice "je". Delbo often shares this voice with other characters so that they can speak directly to the reader, which allows the reader to have a more intimate dialogue with these characters. Initially, this sharing of the narrative voice confuses the reader because Delbo never alerts us to this switch. As we saw in the previous forms of doubling, switches in narration occur frequently and without warning. I want to return briefly to the story mentioned above of the young woman stuck in the snowy incline. This story, "Un jour", is one of the first texts that Delbo writes upon her return to France. Delbo opens the scene with "Elle était accrochée au revers du talus" (40). Immediately we find this woman in a fragile, secondary position to those looking down at her- the other prisoners and the armed SS guards. Delbo continues using "elle" throughout the following paragraphs as she explains this tragic, painful, and impossible struggle to climb up the icy slope. Inevitably, "elle retombait au fond du fossé" (41). Woven within these descriptions given by the narrator, Delbo slips in the following paragraph which begins with a direct question: "Qu'ont-elles toutes ces femmes à me regarder ainsi? Pourquoi sont-elles là et pourquoi sont-elles rangées en lignes serrées, et pourquoi restent-elles là immobiles? [...]" (41). Our immediate reaction is to ask "who is speaking?" because it appears that this person does not understand the line formation. The desperation in the voice escalates as we realize that it is the fallen woman who is pleading: "Pourquoi ne m'aidez-vous pas, vous qui êtes là si près? Aidez-moi. Tirez-moi. Penchez-vous. Tendez la main. Oh, elles ne bougent pas" (42). It is difficult to know if these are her thoughts or her actual words. However, it appears that these are simply her thoughts, because we return back to the original narrator who tells us that "nous étions là immobiles, quelques milliers de femmes de toutes les langues," so we are not even aware of what language this poor woman speaks (43). The narration changes again as we suddenly shift back
in time to a brief description of a young girl talking to her "maman" about her dying dog, Flac. This narration becomes intertwined with the fallen woman; we are told "il allait mourir. La femme va mourir" (46). This juxtaposition of the young narrator's dying dog and the immediate situation in the camp is startling, yet these two tangled stories begin to make sense as we watch this young woman's fate unfold. She is eventually helped out of the icy slope and she approaches an SS officer who "tient son chien en laisse. [...] Le chien bondit sur la femme" (48). For the first time we actually hear the voice of the woman; "La femme crie. Un cri arraché. Un seul cri qui déchire l'immobilité de la plaine" (48). This shift from third-person narration to first-person narration is startling for the reader because we are forced to juggle multiple narratives and multiple narrators, both which have been somewhat unstable since the beginning of this first volume of *Auschwitz et après*.

In the first and second volumes of her trilogy, Delbo shares this narrating voice only a few times. The narrative "je" is almost always her voice, her experiences, her thoughts unless she engages in a brief conversation. Published in 1971, a year after volume two, Delbo's third volume *Mesure de nos jours*, begins in a very similar manner to her previous two texts. Volume two ends with Delbo's liberation by the Swedish Red Cross and volume three picks up with "Le retour," and her extreme difficulty of returning home and facing endless questions. Following this story of Delbo's return, we come to "Gilberte," which begins with "Moi, c'est tout de suite que j'ai été perdue, dès le retour à Paris" (21). Again, we follow a first-person narrative of returning and resettling. A third and forth homecoming story follow, each intertwined with a poem, sometimes with a title, but often times left blank. Small details are dispersed throughout each story, but the reader is led to believe that the narrative voice, the repetitive "je," is still that of Charlotte Delbo. It initially seems as if she is retelling this painful process from different perspectives in hopes of revealing something hidden or lost. She explains that returning home takes more effort than we, the reader, could ever imagine because "celui qui a survécu, il faut qu'il entreprenne de reconquérir sa mémoire, qu'il faut qu'il reconquière ce qu'il possédait avant: son savoir, son expérience, ses souvenirs d'enfance, son habileté manuelle et ses facultés intellectuelles, sa sensibilité, son aptitude à rêver, à imaginer, à rire" (III 44). Thus, it appears that Delbo tells over and over again this story of returning home in an attempt to recapture something lost in the camps. It is not until overtly different details are given that do not coincide with what we know about Delbo that the reader becomes aware that each story is being narrated
by a different voice. Sometimes we know who is speaking to us if a story carries a title, for example "Gilberte" or "Mado" or "Poupette." Yet other times we are left guessing, for example in the third story which is left untitled. If we pay close attention to grammatical details, we find out that a man is narrating this text; he says "C'est ainsi que je partage les gens depuis que je suis rentré" (42). We are hearing a voice of desperation as this individual struggles, like all the other voices, to return home and to reintegrate back into society. It is only this very minute grammatical detail, reduced to a missing "e" on "rentré," which signals us that Delbo is sharing her narrative voice with a male concentration camp survivor. We never know who this individual is, but Delbo wants his story to be told and to be heard; remaining anonymous, for whatever reason, allows this individual's story to resonate as a multitude of voices of those who suffered similar fates. Delbo expands what has been a predominantly female voice to one that is more universal to the concentration camp experience. It seems that Delbo allows this male voice to be heard as she herself begins to introduce subtle details about her husband, who was "fusillé le 23 mai 1942 au Mont-Valérin," less than three months after their arrest together in Paris on March 2, 1942 (Le Convoy 102). In volume three of her trilogy, Delbo talks about Georges, her husband, very rarely, but she speaks of love and the desire to be loved in her poems, which are dispersed among her prose narratives. Delbo even concludes this third and final volume with a poem entitled "Envoi," which alludes to the "matins des mont-valérin" and to a man who died so that others could live. I will discuss Delbo's use of poems and the references to Georges in more detail in the following two chapters.

Not only does Delbo share her narrative voice, in volume three, with the woman in her convoy and with two men, one anonymous and one named "Jacques," but Delbo even dialogues with one of the 49 survivors from her convoy, "Germaine," who died "d'un cancer généraliste le 4 octobre 1968," three years before the publication of this book. Lying in repose with her hair fixed beautifully, Delbo recognizes "Germaine avant le camp [...] Germaine comme elle était avant" (138). Delbo tells us that she approached the body and that she took "une des mains de Germaine et je l'ai tenue dans la mienne" (139). At the moment Delbo grabs her hand, Germaine begins to talk to Delbo with "sa voix tendre, où il n'y avait ni rancune ni reproche, seulement du regret" (139). Speaking in a first-person voice, Germaine questions Delbo on why she has never come to visit her except on this day of her death. Delbo, "accablée de remords," can only stand there and wish that she had thanked Germaine for all her help and support in the camps (142).
Holding Germaine's hand, Delbo remarks that "j'ai été saisie de terreur. Je voyais Carmen et Lulu qui étaient là, de l'autre côté du lit [...]. Devant moi, ce n'était plus Germaine [...] c'était Sylviane qui étaient couchée sur des planches pourries" (143). Over the next six pages, Delbo returns back to the camp and recounts visiting Sylviane in a room full of "squelettes les uns contre les autres, mille Sylviane, si serrés" (144). As they are leaving Sylviane, who they know is moments from death, Carmen tells Charlotte to kiss Sylviane good-bye "comme si c'était tout naturel d'embrasser une mourante qui a la bouche salie de bave mortelle" (148). Completely repulsed by this idea, but under the watchful eye of her friends, Delbo attempts a fake kiss and is ashamed of herself. Realizing that she is actually standing beside Germaine and that neither Carmen nor Lulu are there, Delbo tells herself "Il ne faut pas avoir de honte, il ne faut pas avoir de regrets" (148). Initially full of guilt towards those who have died, Delbo realizes that her role as a survivor is to tell their story. Sharing her narrative voice with Germaine is Delbo's way of not only speaking directly with her friend one last time and recording her story as a survivor, but also of working through the feelings of remorse and shame as a survivor. Delbo notably accentuates this internal struggle in a poem prior to this story of Germaine:

    Il faudrait expliquer
    l'inexplicable
    expliquer
    pourquoi Viva qui était si forte
    est-elle morte
    et non pas moi
    pourquoi Mounette
    [...]
    et non pas moi
    pourquoi Yvonne
    [...]
    et non pas Lulu
    pourquoi Rosie
    [...]
    et non pas Lucie
    [...]

28
pourquoi pourquoi
parce que tout ici est inexplicable (79).

Speaking with Germaine, which is ultimately a reflection and an internal dialogue, becomes on the narrative level, a doubling of voices and a sharing of the first-person "je" with her deceased friend. This dialogue allows Delbo to say the things that have remained unsaid and to explain the things that have remained mysterious, because unfortunately, "là-bas, on ne disait pas ces choses-là" (142). Delbo, in an attempt to approach and to name experiences that are beyond the imagination, shares her entire third volume with silenced individuals, men and women, dead and alive, to let them speak and share their struggles of returning. While we find that this gracious sharing of narrative space allows new individuals to speak one on one with the reader about their difficulties returning home, Delbo seems to have stepped aside not knowing what to do with herself other than listen and write.

As I mentioned earlier, Delbo begins this book with her own personal story of returning home. In this story, Delbo tells us how she slowly gained her senses back: "la vue, l'ouïe. Petit à petit, je recouvrais les couleurs, les sons, les odeurs. Les goûts, beaucoup plus tard. Un jour j'ai vu- oui, j'ai vu- les livres sur ma table de nuit, sur une chaise près de mon lit. Tous étaient à ma main" (15). Delbo explains that these books sat here, "à côté," for a very long time. When she finally tries to open one, it is so pitiful that she immediately puts it back down, for years. Eventually she admits, "Un jour, j'ai pris un livre et je l'ai lu. Je voudrais pouvoir dire comment cela s'est fait. Je ne m'en souviens plus du tout. [...] C'était un livre parmi tous les autres, celui qui m'a rendu tous les autres" (18). Scholars have continually hinted that perhaps this book is Delbo's book\textsuperscript{24}. I do not think there is any question here. I believe that it is undeniably Delbo's book. In fact, all of Delbo's books were there, figuratively or literally, as well as her friends, and their stories. When she says that \textit{tous étaient à ma main}, can we not interpret this that everything and everyone in this pile of books was not only within reaching distance, but that they were created by her hand through the creative writing process. It is at this very moment when Delbo realizes that she will live that her senses come back, and that she sees and hears the stories of

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\textsuperscript{24} Elizabeth Scheiber makes this suggestion in her recent article "\textit{Car cela devient une histoire: Issues of Representation in the Imaginative and Collective Memoirs of Charlotte Delbo}". For a more in-depth analysis of metaphors in Delbo's writing see Scheiber's article "Figurative Language in Delbo's \textit{Auschwitz et après}" and Patricia Yaeger's article "Testimony without Intimacy."

29
those around her and thus unfolds the following two hundred pages. Inevitably Delbo rejoins us at the end of her book with no solutions to the plight of her colleagues, because she too is struggling to make sense of her life. Just as Delbo explains at the beginning that she "flottai[t] dans un présent sans réalité" and that books were "des objets sans usage," she echoes this emptiness about her life at the end of the trilogy as well. On a blank page, separated from the other stories, Delbo utters in a questioning voice:

Je ne sais pas
si vous pouvez faire encore
quelque chose de moi
Si vous avez le courage d'essayer... (212).

Writing this text and lending her voice to others has allowed Delbo to better understand this universal struggle of her friends' lives after Auschwitz, but we see that Delbo, at the end of this trilogy, is still unsure if her endeavor has been adequate or successful. As the title of this final volume suggests, Mesure de nos jours, Delbo has set out to determine the value of their lives back home as if there was a level of normalcy that she and her friends have hoped to achieve. As each of these individuals has come forward and told their story, Delbo and the reader realize that reintegration has been difficult and nearly impossible for most survivors. In the above quote, Delbo questions if she can still make something of her life and even approaches the reader knowing the impossibility of this task. Delbo seems to be lending her voice to the reader at this point as she ends mid-phrase with nothing more on this blank page, and now it is up to us to decide what to do with this knowledge.

Conclusion

In chapter two of this dissertation, I took a close look at how Delbo creates and uses multiple narrative voices in what I call "doubling of the subject," in an effort to highlight the difficulty of readjusting to life after the concentration camps. We mainly focused on Delbo's trilogy Auschwitz et après because it captures in detail the arrival to Auschwitz, the two years of imprisonment, and finally the return home to France. It is interesting to watch the progression in
Delbo's trilogy as she moves from being the dominant voice in the first two volumes to almost completely fading into the background in volume three to join the reader and to listen to others. In all three texts, Delbo shares her first person narrative voice with mainly women and a few men who survived the atrocities of World War II and Nazi concentration camps. We also looked briefly at her final text _La mémoire et les jours_, which is written in a similar format to the trilogy; this book summarizes the forty year time span from Delbo's liberation to her death and her reactions to France's involvement in other tragic wars during this time. Within these four texts, Delbo could have only talked about her personal experiences, which is a common practice in many Holocaust narratives. Yet, she chooses to share her narrative voice with others, both as an effort to tell their story and to creatively capture the emotional aspects of camp life; this unique literary style, I believe, sets Delbo apart from other writers of the Holocaust. To better understand this sharing of the narrative voice, we looked at how and why Delbo doubles her subjects. First, we witnessed the difficulty of initially returning home to France and what Delbo expressed as one person living in or stuck between two worlds; she referred to herself as _un être double_, unable to separate from _le double d'Auschwitz_. Next, we examined the rare moments when Delbo the author presented herself, separate from the narrative voice, in order to draw attention to the immediate act of writing, which pulled the reader from the past narrative into the present moment. In the final section, we saw Delbo sharing the first-person narrative voice with other survivors and almost completely fading out as the narrator but always present as a listener.

To conclude, first-person accounts of events give us direct insight into the extreme situations of the camps. Delbo knew that camp life "wasn't 'like' anything one had ever known. It was profoundly, utterly 'unlike.' And so, I knew I had to raise before the eyes of a future reader the hellish image of a death camp" (Lamont 485). These horrific events appall readers as Delbo and her colleagues drag us through their daily routines in the freezing snow and scorching sun. Delbo takes us back to the immediacy of the event with her narrative voice in what would otherwise seem like an unbelievable tale. She forces us to see these horrors, to feel the frozen ground, and the extreme thirst so that we can begin to understand the extreme depths of the human psyche, of human pain, and of the human will to survive and to die. Her first-person voice allows us direct access to these experiences as we see through her eyes the most unbelievable events, the most painful moments, the most horrific scenes, which immediately engulf the reader from within. This first-person voice not only allows us to witness these events, but it also gives
us access to the narrator's personal thoughts and emotions during them so that the experience becomes complete as we see and feel the extreme nature of the camps. Delbo assures us a wide-ranging experience by doubling and sometimes multiplying narrative voices; it is extremely important that Delbo's texts are polyphonic because her goal was to be the voice of the 230 women in her convoy. Just as often as we find the individual "je," we also find the collective "nous." She allows these women, sometimes dead, to tell their personal story. Combined and told together, these stories have a certain feeling of credibility or perhaps support as the narrative voices realize they are not alone in their impossible journey to make sense of their horrifying and unsightly camp experiences. Similar stories of violence and cruelty reaffirm the atrocities of camp life and make the reader look at these dark moments of our fairly recent past; a task that many choose to ignore or forget. What Delbo does in her narrative however, does not alienate the reader from these moments, but rather invites the reader to look closely and to dialogue. She questions the reader just as much as the reader questions her. The reader is approached throughout Delbo's texts as she directly and distinctly singles us out with her "vous." Delbo makes us, the reader, question ourselves and our willingness to accept responsibility for injustices in our modern-day lives. Doubling her subject and opening her narrative voice to men and women, victims and survivors, allows the reader to hear a multitude of different experiences in a repetitive fashion that becomes engraved in our own memory and in our own lives.

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For a closer look at the meaning of this collective "nous", see Thomas Trezise's article "The Question of Community in Charlotte Delbo's "Auschwitz and After." See also Alain Parrau's article "Le Retour."
CHAPTER THREE

DOUBLING OF THE LITERARY SETTING

In chapter two, we looked at the doubling of subjects, whereby Delbo shared her narrative voice with colleagues mostly from her convoy to Auschwitz. In chapter three, *Doubling of the literary setting*, the subjects are well-known characters from Classical French literature and theater, and several even originate from Greek tragedies. Focusing on Delbo's 1977 text *Spectres, mes compagnons*, these imaginative figures enter a completely new literary setting alongside Delbo's own literary persona Charlotte. These classical and mythological characters have, therefore, already been established and defined by specific tasks, mannerisms, and social settings in their original texts. As Delbo re-writes these characters into her modern-day work, they bring with themselves predetermined and encoded characteristics, which Delbo builds upon because the public already recognizes the underlying message that each one carries. Delbo relies heavily upon these characters in *Spectres*. It seems that these characters would be faced with adjusting to new settings and new challenges in Delbo's text situated before, during, and after Auschwitz, but we find no awkwardness, instability, or confusion in their actions or words. Having studied these characters extensively while working with Louis Jouvet, Delbo uses this knowledge to introduce these legendary figures as characters into her story to show the timelessness of their pain and struggles which helps Delbo express her own difficulties of resettling in France as a widow. Moreover, on a larger scale, I find that Delbo wants to show us that her text and her characters are equally timeless, and that the atrocities of war and of Auschwitz are not singular. Albert Camus had a similar faith in his text, *La Peste*, in which he ends by saying "il savait ce que cette foule en joie ignorait, et qu'on peut lire dans les livres, que le bacille de la peste ne meurt ni ne disparaît jamais, [...] le jour viendrait où, [...] la peste réveillerait ses rats et les enverrait mourir dans une cité heureuse" (335, my emphasis). Delbo, like Camus, shows us that literature has the ability to expose social injustices through the resonate voice of well-known characters.

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26 I abbreviate the title as *Spectres* from here on in the text.
Although Delbo makes references to nearly twenty characters in Spectres, I look primarily at the characters that Delbo mentions multiple times, characters that have extensive dialogues with her, or ones that visit her and help her during and after the concentration camps; these characters are Alceste, Electre, and Ondine. Delbo does not randomly choose these characters; she knows them well from her work with Louis Jouvet from 1937 to 1941. As Jouvet's personal secretary and stenographer, Delbo watches, records, and studies the development and performances of numerous plays at the Théâtre de l'Athénée in Paris. Electre and Ondine, both rewritten by Jean Giraudoux, are directed by Jouvet at this theater in 1937 and 1939, respectively. Le Misanthrope by Moliere is directed by Jouvet during his tour of Latin America in 1942 and although Delbo leaves Jouvet and his theater company in November 1941 to return to France, it is likely that she helps with these rehearsals.

Spectres is an unusual text for Delbo in comparison to her trilogy Auschwitz et après or La mémoire et les jours, because it is written in the form of an unfinished letter addressed to Louis Jouvet. The letter begins with "Cher Louis Jouvet" and we are left with this elusive short explanation on the last page: "Ainsi ne s'achève pas cette lettre que sa mort, en 1951, m'a empêchée de terminer et d'envoyer à Louis Jouvet; que je publie aujourd'hui, alors que tous les souvenirs me reviennent... Paris, 1975." (50). The italicized text begins as a reflection on past dialogues between Charlotte Delbo and Louis Jouvet about character formation in novels versus theater. This dialogue with Jouvet continues, to some degree, throughout the text as Delbo weaves in descriptions of her arrest and subsequent deportation to Auschwitz. During these solitary and tragic moments, Delbo is visited by several characters, both from theater and fiction who either assume their traditional roles or begin to take on a new role in their new settings. In addition to the literary and theatrical characters that Delbo mentions, there are also references to "G.", which refers to Charlotte's husband Georges who was assassinated in the Mont Valérien.

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27 Here is a brief list of some of the characters mentioned: Eurydice, Julien Sorel, Sim Tappertit, Dom Juan, Hamlet, Hermione, Rodrigue, Phedre, Oriane Guermantes and Arnolphe.

28 Charlotte and George's friend André Woog was arrested in April 1941 for making flyers denouncing the Nazis. Although she knew of his arrest before she left with Jouvet in May 1941, nobody knew he would be guillotined. Delbo explains that "il a été condamné à mort par le tribunal spécial créé en aout 1941 par Pétain pour juger les terroristes" (Le convoi 100). Feeling guilty of having left her husband and friends behind in this underground battle, Delbo decides that she must immediately return home. Charlotte and George continue the effort until their own arrests on March 2, 1942 (Le convoi 101).

29 At the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, in the Fonds Louis Jouvet, there are many hand-written letters from Charlotte Delbo to Louis Jouvet which nearly all begin with a formal "Cher Monsieur Jouvet" which contrasts to the rather informal salutation in this published "letter".
prison after their arrest in Paris. This unfinished letter ends in a quite unusual manner as well. Delbo inserts word for word her short story entitled "Le retour" from volume three of her trilogy, Mesure de nos jours, into the final pages of this unfinished letter, perhaps as a reiteration of the difficulty of returning home or maybe as an indication of how characters, and in this case Delbo herself, are able to double and reappear in new settings. Her final words in this letter to Jouvet return back to "G." and the extreme difficulty of losing the one person that ever loved her.

The characters that Delbo speaks to or about in Spectres have all experienced impossible and sometimes tragic love stories. These tragedies of love bind the characters together on a superficial level, yet their new roles in Delbo's text have a more reflective, philosophical purpose as they help her navigate through the most painful, heartbreaking moments of her life and reintroduce her to writing and the literary world. The main focus of this chapter, doubling of the literary setting, is an in-depth look at three well-known literary personages: Alceste, Électre, and Ondine. I look at the original setting of these characters, the new roles they play in Delbo's text, at what point they are introduced into their new setting, and what their literary reincarnation or doubling into a concentration camp setting means for the modern text and the reader. In addition to their original settings in ancient plays and myths, Ondine and Électre are also briefly studied in Jean Giraudoux's plays, which is where Delbo came to know them best. The tragic love stories of Alceste, Électre, and Ondine, though left relatively untold in Delbo's modern text, resonate in their actions and words as they help Charlotte endure her own tragic past. Their misfortunes and loss become a symbol of her own personal experience. The use of these well-known characters and their new roles in this text gives us a clue into the thoughts and desires of Delbo, the writer, and her faith in literature to continue to confront and question human tragedies. Delbo sheds light on an almost incomprehensible set of events in her life by recreating these past experiences that her literary counterpart Charlotte will endure for the first time. Delbo is able to elaborate on these experiences by including characters who have had similar experiences and thus two literary worlds, two literary settings, become doubled. Characters,

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30 There are moments in Spectres when Charlotte seems to conflate Louis Jouvet, Alceste and G., her husband. On several occasions she questions whether or not Alceste loves her instead of Célimène. Addressing Alceste with "tu" instead of "vous", Charlotte is initially embarrassed but then realizes "une intimité qui existait déjà entre nous depuis longtemps" (27). After G.'s death, Charlotte is accompanied and comforted by Alceste who transforms momentarily into Jouvet as she arrives at Auschwitz. Since the reason for this conflation of characters can only be speculative, I will not address it in my dissertation. Colin Davis in his article "Charlotte Delbo's Ghosts" talks briefly about Alceste being "an idealized version of Jouvet" and how "Alceste is, then, both Jouvet and a substitute for the husband" (12).
such as Alceste, that were exclusively associated with one literary setting are now re-emerging in a new setting which is not too different from their own in terms of social injustices. Alceste, as we will see in the following section, plays one of the more crucial roles in the text not only because he is one of the few characters who dialogues with Charlotte, but because he travels with her to the concentration camps which shows a unique flexibility and movement between literary texts due to his character and his loyalty to Charlotte.

**Molière's Alceste**

Before we look specifically at the role of Alceste in *Spectres*, we first return to volume two, *Une connaissance inutile*, of Delbo's trilogy to a short prose story entitled "Le Misanthrope," which sheds light on the importance of this text to Delbo (122-125). Charlotte explains that "elles [les gitanes] vendaien toutes sortes de choses qu'elles avaient chipées ici et là [...] Il n'y avait qu'un prix: une ration de pain" (122). It must be noted that giving away or losing one's daily ration of bread frequently means death for most prisoners. One evening Charlotte is approached and shown *Le Misanthrope* and she immediately offers her bread without even bargaining. Whereas most people sacrifice their one daily meal for a new pair of underwear or shoes, Charlotte is shocked by this small treasure and does not realize that this text holds little value to most of the prisoners in the camps. As she returns to her barracks, her friends are "à souper, c'est à dire à manger leur pain avec de la margarine" (123). Initially upset at the idea that Charlotte might have traded her bread for a cigarette, each one "a coupé une tranche de son pain pour [lui] faire une ration" when she shows them the small book and offers to read to them (124). Not only does Charlotte sacrifice her measly ration of bread for a text that will nourish her mind and soul, but by sharing these verses with her friends, Delbo receives back perhaps a larger ration of bread than she had initially traded.

Scared that she might forget certain memories in the monotonous, insipid camp, Charlotte invents "toutes sortes d'exercices pour faire travailler [s]a memoire" (124). These memory games include reciting telephone numbers, metro lines, poems, and now *Le Misanthrope*. She explains that she memorized the text "par cœur, un fragment chaque soir, que je me répétais à l'appel du lendemain matin" (125). Charlotte keeps this sacred text near her chest every day until her
departure from the camps. Towards the end of the war, some of the camp prisoners receive packages from the Red Cross. Amazed at having powdered coffee, Charlotte makes a double dose, drinks it and returns to her bunk bed. She immediately feels a "sensation bizarre" and she feels her heart beat violently. Delbo rushes outside and "déboutonné ma robe. Le Misanthrope, [...]qui m'avait même tenu chaud pendant l'hiver, Le Misanthrope me gênait. Je l'ai jeté à mes pieds. [...] J'allais mourir maintenant que je savais Le Misanthrope par cœur et que je n'en aurais plus besoin" (169). Delbo slowly gains control and eventually returns to bed. The following day, Delbo and her friends are miraculously released into the hands of the Swedish Red Cross. Delbo ends this short story by saying "Je me suis aperçu, en me déshabillant le soir, au Danemark, que j'avais oublié mon Misanthrope" (173).

It is evident from this story, dedicated entirely to Moliere's famous play, how valuable this text is to Delbo. Whether or not Delbo ever physically possessed this text in the camps is of little importance because she has recreated its significance here in her own book. Not only does the text keep her mind occupied, but, placed against her chest, it also provides her warmth. This tragic comedy is appropriately introduced into the disintegrating atmosphere of the camps towards the end of the war as the Nazis slowly lose control and power in their highly structured camps. The feelings of solitude and disgust of the main character Alceste are echoed in the voice of Charlotte and her colleagues on a daily basis. As the title of Delbo's book implies, Une connaissance inutile, there is some knowledge that is not useful beyond a certain context.

Whereas the Misanthrope was initially a cherished object to help keep her memory active and pass away the endless hours of standing in roll call, Charlotte realizes that she could die at any moment and what use has this text been to her? It has become gênant, bothersome. She even admits losing her Misanthrope once evacuated, as if the text, and quite possibly the solitary attitude, was only relevant to camp life. Even as Charlotte physically loses this text, we find that the play and in particular the character Alceste, become involved in her successful return home to France and in her own texts, particularly in Spectres, mes compagnons. We will now look specifically at this text and the character Alceste in a double setting, as Delbo rewrites this classic character into her concentration camp experience.

31 Carol Rittner and John Roth indicate that "death claimed 92,000 of Ravensbrück's total prisoner population [132,000]. That number included some 32,000 who had been gassed in the camp's final months when the Germans evacuated [...] In the end, no other concentration camp in Germany had such a high percentage of murdered prisoners" (8). Delbo's short story "Le Misanthrope" takes place during her time in Ravensbrück.
Charlotte Delbo's Alceste

In *Spectres*, Alceste returns, alone this time, to play an integral role in Charlotte's journey to and from the concentration camps. Having said good-bye for the final time to her husband, who would soon be executed, Charlotte finds herself "solitaire et dépourvue, encore plus vulnerable" on a "wagon obscur" "vers l'est, toujours plus vers l'est" (26). Charlotte shouts out helplessly into the void and a voice responds saying "Pourquoi redouter tellement la solitude? Elle est parfois plus riche que la compagnie, et moins décevante..." (27). Startled by this voice Charlotte asks the obscure figure "Qui es-tu, toi, qui ne redoutes ni solitude ni éloignement?" (27) The voice responds "Alceste" (27). Charlotte does not understand why he is traveling "avec nous" and he quickly corrects her explaining that he is only "avec toi" (27). Although Alceste "prénait corps dans l'obscurité," Charlotte clearly separates this unique character from the other women sitting next to her (27). Searching for a reason why Alceste is on the train, Charlotte asks "C'est pour partir dans le désert que tu pars avec moi? Curieuse façon d'entendre le désert..." (27). In this reference to *le désert*, Delbo links Alceste's banishment from society in 1666 to this journey that he and Charlotte are now taking in 1943. Alceste responds quickly saying "Ne ris pas, [...] le vrai désert existe à peine dans notre monde, sauf sur cette partie éloignée de la planète, où tu vas. Je n'ai pas le choix" (27). In *Le Misanthrope*, Alceste tells Eliante, Philinte, and Célimène: "dans mon désert, où j'ai fait vœu de vivre/ Vous soyez, sans tarder, résolue à me suivre" but we find in Delbo's text that Alceste is accompanying Charlotte who has also been banished from society (Act V, scene IV, 324). In Molière's text, the editor draws our attention to the word "désert" to explain that "Alceste va pour toujours se retirer dans son château à la campagne. Pour les gens du XVIIe siècle, c'est un enterrement" (378). From the beginning of act I scene I of *Le Misanthrope*, Alceste has already decided he cannot continue to live within the constraints of this polite, yet hypocritical society exclaiming that "Je n'y puis plus tenir, j'enrage, et mon dessein/ Est de rompre en visière à tout le genre humain" (241). Delbo makes a reference to this *désert* in *Le Misanthrope*, where Alceste originally decided to abandon the

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32 Delbo refers to these women as "camarades. Elles ont des qualités solides" whereas Alceste remains more of a shadow or specter (35). However, upon leaving the camp Delbo and her comrades all "devenir spectres" (42).
33 I find that initially the narrator interprets this last sentence "Je n'ai pas le choix" as meaning that Alceste had no choice in fleeing society because he was banished in *Le Misanthrope*. However, we will see later that Alceste has no choice because Delbo has chosen him to come with her in *Spectres*.
34 I am referencing the édition de Georges Couton published by Folio Classique, Gallimard.
world and accept his social death. In Spectres, however, there is some bewilderment on the narrator's part, who has been brutally forced towards this désert, as to why Alcesté would accompany her to an almost sure physical death in an unknown concentration camp somewhere in the east. Who would choose this fate?

During the three day ride, Alcesté stays by Delbo's side as they discuss why other characters: Célimène, Dom Juan, and Hamlet, to name a few, have not come with her. Delbo feels abandoned yet grateful that at least Alcesté has accompanied her. However, she slowly realizes that "il m'offrait avec d'amitié le réconfort de sa conversation, de sa compagnie, de sa sérénité, que je me demandais s'il était juste de le dire misanthrope. [...] il était maintenant l'exemple même de la solidarité des hommes" (32-33). Alcesté's double role here, as both the misanthrope and Charlotte's only companion, seems initially conflicting when we consider his venomous phrase "je hais tous les hommes" (242). Even to Philinte he spitefully cries out "Moi, votre ami? Rayez cela de vos papiers" (238). Yet, we find in Delbo's text that Alcesté understands and even seeks the consequences of this train ride explaining that he is not afraid to die. He explains to Charlotte that where they are going is "le vrai désert, celui où sont abolies définitivement les passions humaines. Ici, l'homme dépouille l'humain. Ici, l'homme cesse d'être lui-même, cesse d'être" (33). Finally free from Célimène and her "pouvoir sur moi," Alcesté freely chooses death in both Le Misanthrope and Spectres.

In Le Misanthrope, Alcesté unreservedly speaks out against the hypocrisies of society explaining that "nous aimons qu'on nous flatte" and that this flattery overrides our true human nature and speech (253). Thus, Alcesté refuses to falsely compliment Oronte's verses which he finds are "jeu de mots [...] ce n'est point ainsi que parle la nature" (255). Alcesté favors a verse where "la passion parle" and which comes from within the writer himself rather than verses which follow a set style or rime (255). Placing Alcesté within Spectres, Delbo knows that this character's misanthropic, yet honest views on society and human nature reverberate in the concentration camp setting. The narrator, however, is not initially aware that she herself has summoned Alcesté to join her. As he stated earlier when he first appears: "Je n'ai pas le choix," he has not exactly come on this trip on his own accord although he admits leaving Célimène has given him liberty. At the arrival to Auschwitz, Delbo realizes that "Alcesté sauta en même temps que nous [...] J'allais pousser un cri d'étonnement lorsqu'il disparut. Je le vis disparaître d'un pas rapide [...] j'ai su alors que le destin d'Alcesté était de vouloir s'en aller et de ne le pouvoir,
toujours retenu par quelque aspect de la vérité humaine" (34-35). Delbo accurately highlights the duality of Alceste's character of wanting to flee society yet realizing the true impossibility of ever really being able to do so for the simple fact that his passion for Célimène seems to override his expectations of her and her infantile games. Alceste's internal struggle to remain an honest man is juxtaposed with Delbo's own efforts to understand how her activities with the communist party could have ever led to Georges' death and her dire situation in Auschwitz. This tragic love story between Alceste and Célimène also runs parallel to Delbo's tragic loss of her husband Georges and her deep shame of not being able to save him.

It is not until Charlotte finally returns home to France that she realizes why Alceste did not stay with her in Auschwitz. After a long recovery period, Charlotte wakes up one morning to a familiar voice which had "un timbre qui remontait d'un temps très lointain, du temps oublié, et elle frappait à ma mémoire, elle faisait tomber la porte de ma mémoire" (48). Eventually realizing who it is, Charlotte yells out "O Alceste! C'est toi. Tu es donc bien toujours là? Tu te souviens de moi?" and he answers "Je me souviens de toi. C'est toi qui m'avais oublié. [...] Je ne t'avais pas quittée. C'est toi qui ne voulais pas revenir. J'étais au royaume des ombres tout le temps que tu y étais toi-même. Je n'en reviens que parce que tu reviens" (48-49). This revelation is shocking for the reader as well as for the narrator. Believing that she had been abandoned, we realize the psychological barrier that Delbo built when she entered Auschwitz. She had to sacrifice her creative endeavors in order to survive. Survival in the camps, as we saw in chapter two, takes precedence over everything and there is no room for the imagination.

Eventually returning back to France as a widow, stripped of everything, physically and emotionally exhausted, Delbo struggles to survive, to revenir. When death seems easier than living, we can understand why Delbo struggled to return to a somewhat "normal" life. Writing Delbo realizes, is what saves her and we find that in Spectres, the literary recreation of Alceste, not only captures the hate and solitude that Delbo inevitably feels, but he also represents her artistic endeavor to write a text that is worthy of his presence and that will carry their message of pain and discontentment as Le Misanthrope has done for nearly 400 years. Spectres finishes as Alceste symbolically hands Delbo's books to her, reintroducing literature back into her life, and suddenly "tous se pressaient autour de nous" as all the characters gather around Charlotte's bed (49).
Électre and Ondine

"quand le crime porte atteinte à la dignité humaine, infeste un peuple, pourrit sa loyauté, il n'est pas de pardon" (Électre, Giraudoux 199).

Just as Delbo recreates the role of Alceste in the previous section as a means of representing the negative and cruel side of human nature, we find the same process of artistic representation in the literary recreations of Électre and Ondine. These two women, however, take on very different roles that capture Delbo's personal feelings of guilt and helplessness at the loss of her husband Georges. Both very willful and powerful women, Électre and Ondine set out in their original ancient texts to accomplish specific goals while always remaining faithful to the ones they love; Électre seeks vengeance for her father's murder whereas Ondine risks losing her immortality to marry the knight-errant Hans. Although Delbo rewrites these characters into a new setting with new tasks, their original characteristics of loyalty and affection remain unchanged as they help the narrator Charlotte navigate through modern-day social and moral constraints. Originating in classical literature, Électre from Greek mythology and Ondine from Medieval French mythology, these two women have survived through time due to their mythological and universal nature, as they have been constantly rewritten into new settings over the centuries by mainly male authors. Charlotte Delbo carries these two female characters into contemporary literature from the standpoint of a woman writer who, in the Nazi concentration camps, experienced what has typically been associated with men's war experiences: torture, extreme deprivation, and death. Experiencing firsthand what these two female literary characters have endured, Delbo blends the literal and the literary by introducing Électre and Ondine into her text alongside her fictive persona Charlotte in an artistic endeavor in which Électre and Ondine help guide and ease the pain of the less experienced Charlotte.

To better understand how Électre and Ondine function in Delbo's text, we will briefly revisit their original setting and then we will explore their roles in Jean Giraudoux's plays, which directly influence their reappearance in Delbo's text. There is no doubt that the passion and pain that Électre and Ondine suffer at the loss of loved ones relates strongly to Delbo's personal experiences. Yet, beyond these initial tragic associations, Delbo has deliberately chosen these literary characters for another reason; Delbo has them appear and disappear at specific moments.
for specific purposes in her text, because ultimately they are prompts which trigger memories of what the characters fundamentally stand for in their original setting. Électre and Ondine, just like the character Charlotte, represent a complex network of characters that have been created to symbolize social change within their respected time frames. When and why Électre and Ondine reappear in this double setting alongside Delbo's own fictive character Charlotte is the focus of this section.

**Greek Mythology's Électre**

Électre in Greek mythology is the daughter of a forced marriage between Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra. Not only does Agamemnon kill Clytaemnestra's first husband and go "away to a war which promised never to end," but he also has twins with another woman, Cassandra (Graves 52). Clytaemnestra, with the help of her lover Aegisthus, plans the deaths of Agamemnon and Cassandra while he is away in the Trojan war. After their murder, Électre attempts to avenge her father's death with the help of her brother Oreste, who was cast away as a young boy, while their other siblings remain silent and live comfortably. With the help of Électre, Oreste eventually kills both his mother Clytaemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. This basic story has gone through numerous variations in Euripides' *Orestes* and *Electra*, Homer's *Odyssey*, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Liberation-bearers*, and Sophocles' *Electra*.

Robert Graves explains that these myths have "survived in so stylized a dramatic form that [their] origins are almost obliterated" (55). He goes on to say that the variations "are of interest only as proving that the Classical dramatists were not bound by tradition. Theirs was a new version of an ancient myth; and both Sophocles and Euripides tried to improve on Aeschylus, who first formulated it [the lovers' death scene], by making the action more plausible" (64). Just as these classical writers join the Greek mythological world to their historical world to make the story more believable, we will see that Giraudoux, and later Delbo, construct their texts on a similar design which brings these heroes face to face with modern

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35 Électre's other sisters accepted their fate and the death of their father for the good of the larger society. Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra threatened to banish Électre to "some distant city and there be confined to a dungeon where the light of the sun never penetrated" for speaking out against them and labeling them 'murderers' (58).

36 Graves gives detailed references in volume two of his text *Greek Myths* as to which author changes or elaborates on characters and events.
society. John PinSENT explains that "For the Greeks, heroic mythology was ancient history. They constructed genealogies which related all the human personages of the myths [...] In the earlier periods, writers felt free to improve and even invent myths, doubtless maintaining that they were simply telling for the first time the real truth" (6). PinSENT believes that these stories continue to be told because "they satisfy some psychological need in the minds of their hearers" (7).

Giraudoux and Delbo, both writing during and about modern-day wars, realize that these great myths based on murder, seduction, exile, and constant loss, capture the eternal questions of our humanity and morality. Taking the basic structure that supports the Agamemnon myth, we turn to Jean Giraudoux's theatrical rendition that forms the foundation of the character Électre that will later reappear in Delbo's text.

Jean Giraudoux's Électre

In May 1937, Jean Giraudoux's play Électre is performed for the first time at Louis Jouvet's theater, the Athénéée, with only slight changes to the original Greek characters and setting. Working full-time with Louis Jouvet\(^3\) during this theatrical production, we can speculate that Delbo's character Électre in Spectres is greatly constructed upon the role in Giraudoux's play. Attending rehearsals and taking tedious notes on actors' stage directions, it is likely that Delbo knew all the intricacies of this play and thus was instinctually drawn back to the character Électre as she found her own family and society crumbling around her only a couple years later.

Jean Giraudoux builds upon the original Greek character of Électre by transforming her initial quest for vengeance into a search for truth. It is this subtle, yet principal change in Électre's role that captures our attention as she relentlessly questions those around her at the expense of losing her only living parent and allowing ruin and defeat to befall their city. Repeatedly asking her mother to admit that Egisthe is her lover, Électre wants to hear Clytemnestre admit her wrongdoings. Clytemnestre pleads with Électre saying "Alors, cesse d'être ma fille. Cesse de me haïr. Sois seulement ce que je cherche en toi une femme," to which Électre retorts "Je ne suis pas inscrite à l'association des femmes" (150). She continues to berate

\(^3\) Louis Jouvet was not only the director of this play, but he also played the role of the Mendiant.
her mother saying "Je sais qu'on a beaucoup de droits dans la confrérie des femmes. Si vous payez le droit d'entrée, qui est lourd, qui est d'admettre que les femmes sont faibles, menteuses, basses [...]. Le malheur est que les femmes sont fortes, loyales, nobles. Alors tu te trompes" (152). Électre is set on obtaining a verbal confession from her mother. Through this quest for truth, we find that Électre must also defend the role of women, which her mother has so poorly exemplified as the murderous queen and ruler of Argos. This mother-daughter "guerre," as Clytemnestre refers to it, spreads throughout the family and is echoed in the angry mobs approaching the castle as well as the warring Corinthians who have "pénétré la nuit dans notre territoire par bandes" (172).

War and conflict have broken out not only on an interior level for Électre who must kill her mother in order to restore justice and honor to her family name, but there is external conflict as well, as Electre tries to find something good in their town Argos, which she considers a "ville d'hypocrisie, de corruption" (186). Électre envisions that "la tendresse et la justice" will replace the fraudulent rule of Egisthe (198). She explains to him that "quand le crime porte atteinte à la dignité humaine, infeste un peuple, pourrit sa loyauté, il n'est pas de pardon" (199). In his attempt to belittle Électre, Egisthe proclaims that she is simply speaking "en jeune fille" to which Électre replies "Je parle en femme" (199). Electre's response here not only reclaims a personal authority on the situation, but she also reinforces once again her role as a mature, intelligent woman. She continues by saying that she represents "la vérité [...] les vrais peuples du monde" as she stares him down with "ces énormes prunelles de vérité" (199-200). The word *truth* echoes through these final pages as Électre sheds light on Agamemnon's death and the lies that Clytemnestre and Egisthe have spread to maintain their rule.

What becomes apparent in Giraudoux's text is that Electre's internal conflict not only reverberates within herself and her family, but it is actually the catalyst for the downfall of Clytemnestre and Egisthe's rule and their city's collapse. Is the truth worth revealing?38 This question represents the fundamental struggle within Électre. Egisthe warns Electre that her truth "fait brûler ta ville, condamner ta race" and that "il est des vérités qui peuvent tuer un peuple" (198, 200). Electre's fate is that she must weigh the hypocrisy and lives of her family and town's people against her personal search for truth which will bring total destruction, but restoration of

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38 Delbo asks herself this same question in her decision to wait twenty years to publish her trilogy *Auschwitz et après*, as well as the twenty-six year delay between apparently writing this letter to Jouvet and actually publishing it as *Spectres, mes compagnons*. 

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honor and morality. In this mythical text, the tragedy must end in death which inevitably leads to a new beginning. Électre explains that "s'ils sont innocents, ils renaîtront" (225). Will she truly find resolve and justice by killing her mother? Repeating the phrases "J'ai la justice. J'ai tout," Électre appears satisfied with her decision, but there is actually no firm resolution to her struggle as she finds herself alone in the end with two beggars. When asked where she is in this final moment, she cannot answer but only repeats "Où nous en sommes?" (226). "L'aurore" are the final words in the play, which take the spectator's imagination towards the rising sun and a new day. Although dawn is associated with a certain optimistic and constructive beginning, we find in Giraudoux's and in Delbo's texts a rather depressing and gloomy tone because this new beginning represents starting over from scratch, completely all alone. For example, in Spectres when Charlotte is faced with this new beginning, she explains: "j'ai essayé de me souvenir des gestes qu'on doit faire pour reprendre la forme d'un vivant dans la vie. Marcher, parler, répondre aux questions, dire où l'on veut aller, y aller. J'avais oublié. L'avais-je jamais su?" (43). Who other than Électre, who has lived through these same dire circumstances, is fit to guide Charlotte through these difficult and painful moments in her own fate of witnessing and surviving one of history's most recent examples of complete moral deterioration and the destruction of millions of innocent victims. Will McLendon cautions us that in Giraudoux's writing, we should not "mistake the fanciful world in which so many of his creatures evolve for an established paradise. Innumerable clues remind us that, despite first appearances, his heroes live also in our world" (197). Delbo, following Giraudoux's example, brings these heroes into her own text and into her lived reality, this time to dialogue with her own fictionalized character Charlotte, to show us the power of characters, both literary and factual, to influence our lives and teach us valuable lessons on human morality and suffering. What becomes evident in the following section is how Delbo artistically weaves together both fact and fiction in order to capture a painful historical moment in her life that equals if not surpasses the trials and defeats of these heroic, classical characters.

Delbo opens her socio-historical text Le convoi du 24 janvier with the following quotation "«Voici comment tout s'est passé, et jamais je n'invente.» Electre, Acte II, sc. IX. J. Giraudoux" (7). We find a similar message from Delbo in her opening to the Auschwitz trilogy as she states: "Aujourd'hui, je ne suis pas sûre que ce que j'ai écrit soit vrai. Je suis sûre que c'est véridique" (7).
Charlotte Delbo's Électre

Delbo begins *Spectres* with a reference to Eurydice who went on "une plaisante excursion" in comparison to the hell that her character Charlotte experienced in Auschwitz and in Ravensbrück. Opening with Eurydice and making a direct comparison between this legendary character and her own personal experiences, Delbo is placing her character Charlotte within the established group of classical literary characters in order to problematize the concentration camp situation and the public's ignorance of the prisoners' experiences there. Her attention, however, turns quickly to Électre. Unsure anymore of what is real and what is a dream, and considering that camp life and even survival to many is unimaginable, Charlotte herself included, she questions her past asking "était-ce moi? Ou cette Électre insensible? Je ne sais plus" (7).

Let us consider momentarily this adjective *insensible*. Are her senses dulled to the point that she no longer feels any pain because she has tragically lost nearly everyone in her family? Or, is she morally insensible to the threats of society and the expectations that she must accept her fate silently? Électre, as we just saw, exhibited both physical and moral insensibilities due to her peculiar family situation. Delbo, recognizing similar qualities within herself, introduces the character Électre in her opening paragraph through the thoughts of her fictive persona Charlotte in order to establish their tragic connection and set the tone for their upcoming journey. Unsure of who she really is, where she ever was, and what is real versus imagined, this instability and constant questioning brings Charlotte face to face with Électre in the opening paragraphs as an indication of what is to follow as Charlotte sets out to understand and process her tragic situation. The character of Électre not only alerts the reader to the gravity and tragedy of the situation, but mistaking herself for Électre immediately places Charlotte on a parallel quest to find truth and resolve in the loss of her husband. Introducing the character Électre also sets Delbo in pursuit of literary success as she introduces this well-known and successful character into a text; not only does the introduction of these figures shed light on camp atrocities, but it does so in a creative and artistic fashion that sets Delbo's text apart from those of others who were fortunate enough to survive and tell their stories.

As Delbo begins to recount her tragic arrest and deportation, Électre's character is no longer present. Delbo states: "J'ai fait un bien extraordinaire détour pour retrouver Alceste et
Électre " (15). This détour, we know, is her two years of imprisonment and it is not until years after her return that both Alceste and Électre return permanently. Électre does appear unexpectedly in the concentration camp. As the days wear on at Auschwitz, Delbo tries to maintain hope by dreaming of her return home. One day, however, she loses hope asking herself who would ever want to return home "seule? Et dans cette solitude si écrasante, si mortelle" (38). From the far side of the marais where Charlotte is working, we hear the voice of Électre respond "Moi" (38). Électre calls out to other literary characters to come join them in the camps who are "les plus forts, les plus fiers, ceux pour qui la vie est lutte, pour qui le défi est règle de vie" (38). Initially referred to as "insensible," Électre is referred to this time as "inflexible" as she attempts to make "la vérité éclate" (38). Appearing in the camp, in the swamp where the dead bodies and ashes from the crematorium are dumped, Électre is reintroduced a second time to shed light on the reality of the ugliness and darkness of the prisoners' daily work life. Both Électre and Charlotte Delbo have lived on the fine line separating hope and despair, which Lawrence Langer describes as a "dual world of promise and doom that haunted Holocaust victims then and continues to haunt its survivors today "(8)^40. Électre's new role to guide Charlotte is a result of her successful resolution to her plight in her original text. This second appearance of Électre is a critical moment for Charlotte, who originally feels abandoned by these characters. Their appearance in the camp not only motivates Charlotte to continue believing in her release, but they are able to witness and testify to the camp conditions.

Électre appears a third and final time after Charlotte has returned home from the camps. During this touching moment at her bedside when Alceste "[lui] a rendu tous les livres," Charlotte is confronted by Sganarelle who shouts "Mes gages! Mes gages!"^41 (49). Électre quickly intervenes saying "Non, pas à elle. Ne lui réclame rien, à elle. Elle a assez payé" (49). Sganarelle does not initially take Électre's advice saying that "Maintenant qu'elle est revenue parmi nous, elle vivra comme nous. On ne paie pas une fois pour toutes," but he quickly changes his mind mid-thought saying "Ou plutôt, non [...] Une fois suffit. Le désert, elle sait ce que c'est, elle" (49-50). Sganarelle, who originally in Molière's text symbolizes a comic relief and voice of

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^40 See Langer's Art from Ashes.
^41 These famous lines conclude Molière's play Dom Juan, as an inanimate statue accepts Don Juan's offer to eat dinner with he and Sganarelle. Finding Dom Juan insincere and hypocritical, the statue brings God's wrath upon him and he is engulfed in flames. Sganarelle, left alone, shouts "Ah! mes gages, mes gages! voila par sa mort un chacun satisfait: Ciel offensé, lois violées, filles séduites, familles déshonorées, parents outragés, femmes mises à mal, maris poussés à bout, tout le monde est content. Il n'y a que moi seul de malheureux. Mes gages, mes gages, mes gages! " (224).
reason alongside the womanizing role of Dom Juan and who now embodies in Delbo's text the voice of the French people who questioned or denied the seriousness of the camps, approaches Charlotte with the assumption that she is the same person that she was before the camps and that she will readily reintegrate back into his false ideals of a homogeneous society. We do not know why Sganarelle changes his mind abruptly, but rushing in and seeing Charlotte's extreme physical state more than likely shattered any misconception he might have had of her camp experiences. Électre, having lived through her own extreme war-time conflicts, protects Charlotte during this difficult transitional period as she slowly regains her physical capacities and rediscovers her love and passion for literature.

These three visits from Électre occur at pivotal moments in Delbo's text. In the introductory paragraph, Charlotte mistakes herself for Électre which places her on a parallel trajectory towards conflict, loss, and revelation. Having successfully avenged her father's death in her original text, Électre is adequately prepared in this new setting to help Charlotte in her own quest for survival and understanding; Électre, therefore, appears in the marais during one of Charlotte's most difficult and dark moments when Delbo questions whether her life is worth fighting for. To subdue Charlotte's despairing spirit, Électre calls on other theatrical characters who have sought out and fought similar battles. Realizing that these characters are in fact products of her imagination and that she has somehow withstood the Nazis' quest to destroy her human spirit, Charlotte's hope for survival is renewed. Électre's final appearance, however, leaves Charlotte with a conflicting sense of resolution just as Électre had found herself at the end of Giraudoux's play. Back in the company of friends and having reacquired her thirst for literature, Delbo rejoices saying "La mémoire, hélas! J'étais revenue, oui. Je l'ai regretté tout aussitôt. Revenue à quoi? A la vie? Sans doute. Mais quelle vie puisque G. n'y était pas" (50). Hope quickly turns to regret and despair at the realization that she is a widow and alone in her battle to reintegrate into French society. Wishing she could be like Ondine, instantly forgetting her past when she returns home, Charlotte quickly realizes that she does not live in this fantasy land and that to her dismay, her memories surround her, reminding her not only that she is alive, but that she has survived and Georges, her husband, has not.

Électre's guidance and support for Charlotte are secondary roles to who she represents in Greek mythology. Électre's previous encounters and adversaries need not be mentioned in Delbo's text for us to appreciate her companionship and allegiance towards Charlotte. Taking the
character of Électre into the concentration camp setting is Delbo's way of capturing her own indescribable experiences by using an immediately recognizable figure that stands for justice and loyalty. Delbo's artistic talent is her ability to unite the characters Électre and Charlotte in a modern-day setting that intertwines the universal and constant struggles that women face in wartime. Writing, for Delbo, is an opportunity to invite characters into her text that have experiences that resonate with events or emotions in her own life. What is fascinating about the dual role of Électre and the other three characters mentioned in this chapter, is the ease with which they slip into their new setting, which seems to indicate that their struggles and losses are not tied to a particular writer or time period, nor are they extraordinary in any way. Delbo shows us, unfortunately, that the characters in her text, whether based on fact or fiction, are built upon a chain of tragic experiences that all of us witness or feel during our lifetime.

**Ondine**

"There is somebody out there who hates men and wants to tell me all about them. I always refused to listen, I had my own ideas- but now that's over now: now I'll listen to them."

*(Ondine, Giraudoux 190.)*

Ondine, like Électre, provides guidance and support to Charlotte at one of the most difficult moments in her life: the loss of her husband Georges. Whereas Électre represents justice and loyalty, Ondine is recognizable for her mysterious qualities not only as half-woman, half-water nymph, but her ability to move effortlessly between illusion and reality because of her dual nature. In tracing the literary development of this mythical character, we find a woman persecuted because of her husband's actions and victimized by society, which are sentiments that map directly onto the precarious and tragic situations of George's execution and Charlotte's initial imprisonment, eventual deportation, and life thereafter as a widow. We begin to understand the fundamental role of Ondine, originally known as a Mélusine, by first looking at her earliest appearances in twelfth-century texts. As we study the recreation of the character Ondine in Delbo's modern-day text, we will turn also to Jean Giraudoux's play *Ondine* which I speculate greatly influences how Delbo conceptualizes and introduces this character in her own

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42 Rather than imply that George's activities and arrest caused Charlotte's persecution and deportation, I simply want to make an initial association between how their activities as a couple led to it.
text because she is still working alongside Louis Jouvet\textsuperscript{43} during the production of this play in 1939. Moving through these various texts over an 800 year span, the character Ondine evolves as she adapts to the historical and social issues imposed by each writer. Originating from semi-historical circumstances, the character Ondine quickly moves into fiction for several centuries which seals her fate as a purely imaginative creature. It is not until Delbo's text \textit{Spectres} that Ondine re-enters semi-historical circumstances as Charlotte's guide and mentor, immediately following her and Georges' arrest.

\textbf{The Mélu\-sine Myth}

In a 1971 article, J. Le Goff et E. Le Roy Ladurie, writing on the character of Mélu\-sine, explore medieval and modern texts in order to find the origins of this mythical female character and to trace her character development over time. One of the earliest recorded references they have found to the character of Mélu\-sine dates back to a text written by Gautier Map between 1181 and 1193, \textit{De nugis curialium}. Map, a clerk in the royal courts of England, recounts several stories in this text of women who are half human, half dragon/serpent. One of the most notable texts is "Henno aux grands dents" (Henno cum dentibus) which tells the story of the "mariage d'un jeune homme [...] avec une étrange créature" who changes forms between a beautiful woman and a dragon (587-588). Gervais de Tilbury, a contemporary of Gautier Map, is also known for his fairy tales of dragon-women in his text \textit{Otia Imperialia}, written between 1209 and 1214. Both Gautier's and Tilbury's stories are considered to be "situé parmi des personnages et des événements mi-historiques, mi-légendaires" which we find is also the case in Delbo's text \textit{Spectres} (588). It is Tilbury's story, set in the chateau d'Esperver in Valence, France, that inspires two well-known literary texts of the figure Mélu\-sine, one written in prose and the second written in verse. The prose text, written by Jean d'Arras between 1387 and 1394 for the Duke Jean de Berry and his sister Marie\textsuperscript{44}, is known under the following three titles: "Le noble histoire de Lusignan," "Le Roman de Mélu\-sine en prose," and "Le Livre de Mélu\-sine en prose" (590)

\textsuperscript{43} Louis Jouvet is cast as the knight Hans, Ondine's lover.

\textsuperscript{44} E. Sidney Harland in his article "The Romance of Melusine" dates the text more precisely noting that "Jehan d'Arras began the composition on the 20th November (St. Clement's Day), 1387, and finished it on Thursday, the 7th August, 1393" (187).
The second text, written in verse between 1401 and 1405 by a Parisian bookseller named Couldrette, is known under the titles "Le Roman de Lusignan ou de Parthenay" and "Mellusine" (590). Both Jean d'Arras and Couldrette cite real books and oral histories as their sources of inspiration. Couldrette mentions "deux livres en latin" and Jean d'Arras references "les vraies chroniques" and "plusieurs livres" (592). Le Goff, nonetheless, warns us about the veracity of these statements.

Jean d'Arras and Couldrette's texts are extremely important concerning the character Melusine, now portrayed as a "femme-serpent"45, because it is the moment that "l'historiette est devenue roman" (590). Le Goff explains that these two texts are very similar and in what concerns the character Mélusine, he says that they are "identiques" (590). E. Sidney Harland, however, stresses in his article that the prose text by Jean d'Arras is "a political romance in honour of his patron and for the amusement of his patron's duchess" (187). What is important about these fictionalized texts by Jean d'Arras and Couldrette is that these writers take a rather simple semi-historical legend and they evolve the contextual elements in a way that resonates with the audience because they represent and mirror elements of their own society46. D'Arras and Couldrette's texts have become the basis of our modern-day versions of the character Mélusine, who has been transformed into many variations of what we know today as Ondine47.

As we witnessed in the prior section with the mythological character of Électre, various textual changes over time by different authors move the story of Mélusine/Ondine from a legendary and historically-based character into the literary realm of fiction. Le Goff notes that as this fairy tale becomes part of a larger literary tradition, it is not the structure, but the content, that is changing. He explains that "ces transformations ne sont pas le simple déroulement d'un mécanisme interne. Elles sont les réponses du conte aux sollicitations de l'histoire" (598). Maintaining the

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45 Delbo also uses serpentine references when describing herself in the opening paragraphs of *La mémoire et les jours*: "L'image du serpent qui laisse sa vieille peau pour en surgir, revêtu d'une peau fraîche et luisante, peut venir à l'esprit. J'ai quitté à Auschwitz une peau usée [...] Débarrassé de sa peau morte, le serpent n'a pas changé. Moi non plus, en apparence" (11).

46 Harland explains that "political references" added to Jean d'Arras' text may shed light on "the history of the ducal family, on the political relationships with one another and with the German States of the various lordships ultimately incorporated into the Kingdom of France" (187-188).

47 Le Goff explains in detail how the tale of Mélusine has diffused across Europe. There is manuscript from Bruges dated 1467, which is translated and printed in Flemish in 1491. Thuring de Renggeltingen from Bern, Switzerland translated Couldrette's text in 1456, which was printed in 1477 in Strasbourg and in 1491 in Heidelberg. The German translation is then translated into Polish by M. Siennik in 1569 (596). Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué wrote his version entitled *Undine* in 1811, which was "translated into every major European language" and which inspired several modern-day versions including that of Jean Giraudoux (Barkow).
fundamental structure of the story and knowing what degree of the content should be modernized is how writers have successfully brought this ancient mythological character into contemporary settings. Considering that an original source and inspiration for the stories of Mélusine has yet to be discovered, J. Le Goff et E. Le Roy Ladurie speculate that these legends and fairy tales date back even further to oral histories that perhaps have ancient origins across the world\textsuperscript{48}.

\textbf{Jean Giraudoux's Ondine}

Jean Giraudoux's theatrical recreation of \textit{Ondine} is performed for the first time on April 27, 1939 in Paris at the Théâtre de L'Athénée, just months after Kristallnacht\textsuperscript{49} and only four months before the Nazis invade Poland. Capturing an impossible relationship between man and woman\textsuperscript{50}, Giraudoux rewrites this ancient tale bringing in subtle elements of the current-day situation and weaving an element of comedy into the tragic situation with his knight in shining armor Ritter Hans von Wittenstein zu Wittenstein\textsuperscript{51}. Giraudoux's play most clearly resembles the text \textit{Undine} written by La Motte Fouqué in 1811\textsuperscript{52}. There are several contextual elements and personality traits that vary among La Motte Fouqué and Giraudoux's texts, which diverge even further in Delbo's text. Giraudoux takes us immediately into the bizarre family life of a modest fisherman Auguste and his wife Eugénie whose daughter Ondine is out "jumping over ravines, and catching waterfalls in a basin" which "she does all day long" (181). Seeking refuge from a storm, the knight Hans explains to the couple that he likes war because "I like talking. I've got a talkative nature, I suppose. And in war there's always someone to chat with. If you don't find your own lot congenial, you just take a prisoner. [...] you pick up a wounded enemy, and he'll tell you his whole life story" (185). Giraudoux recreates this pompous character Hans, who

\textsuperscript{48} Harland attempts to trace ancient traditions of different types of conditional marriages in Scandinavia, Germany, in Celtic and Slavic regions, in certain Arabic and Indian traditions and even in Japan.

\textsuperscript{49} In retaliation for the assassination of a German diplomat in Paris by a young German Jew, Jews in Germany were rounded up on November 9-10, 1938 and imprisoned in concentration camps. A system of colored triangles was introduced to distinguish prisoners from one another (Lifton, 153). This anti-Jewish pogrom left many Jewish businesses and homes destroyed, hence the name- night of glass.

\textsuperscript{50} See Will McLendon's article "Giraudoux and the impossible couple" for more information on other Giraudoux texts involving impossible relationships.

\textsuperscript{51} This comical, and somewhat ridiculous name, was "Sir Hulbrand of Ringstetten" in the German text written by La Motte Fouqué (1990 Dedalus edition). He is also referred to as "Lord Hulbrand" in the 1896 Gosse edition.

\textsuperscript{52} Giraudoux's printed text, published in 1939 by Éditions Bernard Grasset, has the title "Ondine, pièce en trois actes, d'après le conte de Frédéric de la Motte Fouqué."
contrasts drastically with the calm, humble couple and with the playful, naive nature of the young Ondine, who eventually appears and is so awestruck by Hans' beauty that she asks him to take her away. These tender moments of praise, however, turn immediately to anger as she shouts "I know already that they're liars, and the beautiful ones are really ugly, and the brave ones are cowards. I know I hate them!" (190). This constant switching from intense fascination to strong hatred becomes an unsettling characteristic of Giraudoux's Ondine, \(^{53}\) and it is troubling for the audience, yet this instability adds to the mystery of this strange character. Giraudoux also uses this sense of mystery to perhaps echo the atmosphere of France and the tensions rising in Europe during the months leading up to the Nazi's strategic plans of invading and obtaining new territories for the Third Reich.

In rewriting his text, Giraudoux removes background information on how Ondine came to live with the fisherman and his wife, \(^{54}\) which leaves the reader with an amount of uncertainty concerning her erratic behavior and her fate on Earth. Removing several contextual elements found in La Motte Fouqué's text \(^{55}\) and adding several moments of comic relief with his knight fascinated by war, Giraudoux successfully resets these characters into pre-war France during the 1930s. These changes are taken a step further in Delbo's text written after the war, where we find that Ondine is completely devoid of her playful, adolescent nature as she witnesses the death of Hans/Georges alongside Charlotte. The death of the knight varies in each of these texts as well, which gives us insight into how the concepts of justice and guilt become interwoven into the final death scene. In La Motte Fouqué’s text, the knight is approached by Undine on the day he is to wed his second wife Bertalda. Pressing him tightly in her arms she weeps so hard that her tears drowned him. In the Giraudoux text, Ondine's uncle, the King of the Ondines, kills the knight for his infidelity. Delbo, on the other hand, superimposes the death of Hans with that of her husband Georges as if the two literary texts become one.

\(^{53}\) La Motte Fouqué's character of Ondine is naive and curious but never hateful or spiteful towards others.

\(^{54}\) Chapter two of La Motte Fouqué's text (Gosse edition), "How Undine first came to the Fisherman" tells of how they found her as a baby. There are also strong elements of christianity in La Motte's text that associate Ondine and other worldly creatures as "witches" and "evil spirits" which are all absent from Giraudoux's play. The Fisherman explains how "God has been gracious enough [...] to bestow upon us a little child" and that she was "God's dear gift" (40). They even try to name her "Dorothea" since the name means "God's Gift" but the girl insisted on Undine (45).

\(^{55}\) Alongside the elements of Christianity, there are associations made between Undine and other worldly creatures such as "witches" and "evil spirits" which are all absent from Giraudoux's play. La Motte Fouqué also gives detailed information about the Danube region and the Black forest, which are purposely left ambiguous in Giraudoux's text.
Scholars have continually debated Giraudoux's fascination with tragic love stories, as he wrote about them frequently. McLendon notes that in Giraudoux's texts, the couple is "doomed to failure" (200) and he cites the following couples: "Jerome and Stepby, Florence and the President, Helene and Paris, Hans and Ondine, Jean and Lia, Lucile and the Procureur" (198). He believes that "one would search in vain for a truly happy couple in all Giraudoux's work" (200). Georges May states that "according to Giraudoux, men have the monopoly of love" and he continues that "the couple is the most distinguishing feature, the noblest privilege of mankind. There are no couples of gods. Classical mythology, which so fondly dwells on the love-affairs of the immortals, offers no exemplary couple" (107). May makes a similar statement to that of McLendon's above noting that "the proportion of happy couples in Giraudoux's works is abnormally low [...] Still more eloquent than the scarcity of happily married heroes in the world of Giraudoux, the superabundance of mysteriously ill-assorted husbands and wives. [...] The frustrated and sympathetic reader is never told why. As in life itself, the mystery of human behavior remains unfathomable. All that Giraudoux deems unexplainable is left in his works unexplainable" (108). Delbo employs a similar literary tactic in her writing as well, which forces the reader to face these circumstances himself and to struggle with situations as the characters struggle. Mays states that one of Giraudoux's "unflinching dialectics" is that "unfaithfulness is an inescapable consequence of marriage" (112) which explains why Giraudoux believes that "once love is actualized, made concrete and [...] incarnated in marriage, it vanishes" and becomes a "disappointment of life, the monotony of monogamy" (111). Clytemnestre and Ondine both capture this disappointment with their relationships. Clytemnestre hates Agamennon's "barbe bouclée" and that "il relevait toujours le petit doigt, je l'ai hâ" (Act II, scene VIII, 210). Likewise, Ondine confesses almost immediately to the knight after meeting him that "I'm afraid of you leaving me. He said you'd leave me" (Act I, 192). Why Giraudoux continually focuses on couples in conflict is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I mention it here because Ondine's recreation in Delbo's text Spectres captures a similar fatalistic and unresolved relationship to that found in Giraudoux's text.

56 We find out later that Ondine is referring to the King of the Ondines. She believes Hans will be faithful to her so she makes a pact that if he is unfaithful, than the King can kill Hans and she will return to the underworld.
Charlotte Delbo's Ondine

In the early texts from the Middle Ages, Mélusine was not only half-human, half-animal, but this animal side was from the Christian point of view demonic and cursed, and it was only through her marriage with a man that she could become mortal, live a somewhat "normal" life, and die naturally. However, the traditional story ends tragically because she becomes the victim of her husband's wrongdoings and is in turn, shunned from society. Giraudoux's text strays from tradition by the fact that his character Ondine is not really ever able to live a "normal" life because of her peculiar nature that she cannot seem to hide or control. Ondine's supernatural powers and charm are what attract and repulse the humans. Maintaining her true nature, Ondine is able to effortlessly return back to her world after Hans' death. Delbo, however, takes the character of Mélusine, or Ondine, beyond what has ever been done before. She changes not only the social and political elements of the story but the structure and role of the character as well. No longer are we dealing with a serpent-woman courting a knight to secure her own mortal fate, but rather the recreation of the tragic love affair in which two imaginary couples become intertwined. Delbo's fictionalized version of her final moments with Georges are mirrored against a similar literary moment between Ondine and Hans, and Delbo uses their similarities to blur the line between the two realities and even to morph one character into another.

Having been married only a few years before their arrest and imprisonment in Mont-Valérien prison, Charlotte and Georges's marriage ends in an extremely tragic way under the watchful eye of Nazi prison guards. Delbo initially recounts these final moments in volume two, Une connaissance inutile, of her Auschwitz trilogy in a short story entitled "L'adieu." In the following paragraph taken from this short story, Delbo makes a direct reference to the character Ondine from Giraudoux's text as she says good-bye to her husband Georges.

"Nous avons à peine eu le temps de dire tout ce que nous aurions voulu nous dire. Un des soldats m'a appelée: «Madame!», toujours avec son accent qui donnait aux mots une signification mortelle. J'ai répondu par un geste: Attendez. Une minute encore. Laissez-nous une minute, une

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57 In the traditional texts, the Mélusine baths or nurses in private because she becomes half-serpent/dragon during this time. She instructs her husband to stay away and give her privacy but eventually he peeks at her and her identity is revealed.
58 Delbo explains that she and Georges met in 1934 because they were both members of La Jeunesse communiste. Georges was assassinated May 23, 1942 at Mont-Valérien prison at the age of 28 (Le convoi du 24 janvier, 102).
seconde encore, disait mon geste. Il m'a appelée encore et je n'ai pas quitté la main de Georges. Au troisième appel, il a fallu partir, comme Ondine que le roi des Ondins devait appeler trois fois quand elle disait adieu au Chevalier qui allait mourir. Ondine à la troisième fois oublierait et retournerait au fond des eaux, et comme Ondine je savais que j'oublierais puisque c'est oublier que continuer à respirer, puisque c'est oublier que continuer à se souvenir, et qu'il y a plus de distance entre la vie et la mort qu'entre la terre et l'eau où retournait Ondine pour oublier” (156).  

In this 1970 text, Delbo finds similarities between her situation and that of Ondine's as both are called three times to leave the one they love to die. The act of forgetting is added as a new ending in Giraudoux's text, and subsequently referenced by Delbo, which allows Ondine to return to her water world with no emotional trace of her time on earth. In these final sentences cited above, Delbo realizes that she too will eventually forget the details of these final moments together. This process of forgetting, however, seems two-fold if we consider both the character Charlotte and the author Delbo. On the one hand, the inevitable process of forgetting is welcomed by Charlotte as she tries to move on with her life, to respirer, and yet the act of forgetting allows Delbo to se souvenir, a process which unfolds in her creative act of writing.

Seven years after her Auschwitz trilogy, Delbo publishes Spectres, in which she incorporates once more the character Ondine. Unlike Électre who appears several times, Ondine only emerges once. Although her appearance is brief, Ondine reappears in this new prison setting to guide Charlotte through her final moments with Georges and to show her how to begin to move forward with her life. Ondine also guides Delbo, the writer, as she begins to approach literature as a place where she can recapture her fading memories and artistically recreate her experiences by mixing reality with fiction and ultimately creating a fictionalized version of a very painful event in her life. Ondine's entrance in Spectres, similar to that of Electre's, is abrupt and confusing to the reader. Waiting endlessly in prison, Charlotte's mind runs through numerous questions on the mysteries of life when she suddenly remarks "Je me suis posé cette question jusqu'à l'arrivée d'Ondine" as if Ondine's entrance was to some extent expected or even planned, because she shows no sign of surprise. Charlotte finds that Ondine "avait perdu son mystère. Elle était là, à côté de moi. Etait-ce moi? J'ai eu peur tout à coup [...] peur de ce qui peut-être

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59 Delbo rewrites the last three lines of this passage in Spectres at the moment Ondine leaves her side. I return to this passage later.
était un autre moi-même" (22). This momentary confusion and her question "Etait-ce moi," the same question she asked herself when finding Électre, reinforces the unstable boundaries between these two literary texts, which Delbo uses to her advantage to superimpose one text upon another. This confusion of characters continues as Charlotte confronts an "autre moi-meme." 60 She is momentarily frightened at the thought that she could be in a "théâtre pirandellien" and that this other person, Ondine, is "celui qu'on pourrait être, qu'on redoute d'être, qui peut devenir fou" and perhaps her "dédoubllement" (22).61 Knowing the fate of Ondine and Hans, Charlotte fears this outcome yet nonetheless realizes that her fate will tragically end the same way. Delbo begins to blend together the two tragic love stories, intertwining the characters and their final moments together. Ondine becomes Charlotte's "je" and the prisoner that was initially G., becomes Hans. Although Charlotte sees the tragic similarities between these two tragic love stories, she also finds stark differences in Hans and Georges as she sadly and guiltily realizes that Georges will never accomplish his dreams nor his "longue liste de projets" (24). The reason why these two men must die also greatly differs; Charlotte explains that "Hans devait mourir parce qu'il avait trahi, et G. parce qu'il n'avait pas trahi et sa mort à lui, G., était inéluctable parce qu'à la balance des hommes le sacrifice pèse le poids de la trahison si la balance est fausse, et c'était une époque où toutes les balances étaient fausses" (24). As was the case in the original tale of Mélusine and that of Ondine, the husband was not allowed to know the true identity of his dragon/serpent-wife. Betraying this promise caused her to be shunned by society and their immediate separation. Thus Hans and Ondine knew their tragic fate. Georges and Charlotte also knew their activities in the Résistance were risky, yet she tells us here that G. did not betray anyone. Nobody would have expected immediate death for documenting and transcribing daily events during the occupation,62 but looking back thirty years later, Delbo realizes that Georges' death was inéluctable when considering that justice was never an element in the Nazi's plans.

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60 This "autre moi-meme" also echoes her feelings of being "un être double," which were discussed in chapter one of my dissertation.
61 Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) began his career as a poet but became one of the most well-known playwrights in Italy. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1934 (Giudice). His most famous and controversial play "Six characters in Search of an Author" (written in 1921) is known as the "play within a play" and dealt with "the problem of reality and unreality which has engaged Pirandello in one way or another for more than twenty years" (Livingston v). The confusion of characters in this play is echoed in Delbo's own character Charlotte who finds her reality entangled with that of Ondine's.
62 Delbo explains in Le convoi du 24 janvier that she and Georges collected and transcribed information for Lettres françaises, an underground French literary publication.
What is unique about Ondine's character in this new setting is that her presence is central to the action although she does not speak, which caused her many problems in Giraudoux's text. Charlotte explains that "Ondine présente me donnait la preuve de ma propre présence en me portant avec elle dans le surnaturel [...] Hans allait mourir et non mourir de sa mort de théâtre. Hans allait mourir de sa mort charnelle. Hans me disait adieu" (22). The fact that she specifies the Ondine présente as the one who awakes her to the seriousness of the situation sets this character apart from the previous childlike versions of Ondine. Although Charlotte distinguishes herself momentarily from Ondine in these first few sentences, she traverses the loose boundary separating these two characters as she begins to say good-bye to Hans, who transforms into G.: "Hans mourait et je vivrais encore. Hans mourait et j'oubliais [...] G. devait mourir et moi je devrais l'oublier" (23-24). Due to the extreme nature of the events, we gradually realize that the characters themselves cannot represent stable, fixed identities as they fluctuate back and forth in this heartrending prison scene. Eventually Ondine leaves, Charlotte explains, "au moment où j'avais quitté G" (25). As was noted earlier in the brief passage from the Auschwitz trilogy, Delbo rewrites this curious process that she must go through that she fears, yet is drawn towards: "puisque je mangeais, j'oubliais, puisque je respirais, j'oubliais, puisque je pensais à ce que serait demain, j'oubliais" (24). Although living and breathing means continuing a life without Georges and with each day she forgets a little more, Charlotte also knows that the future entails "des amitiés nouvelles et des distractions obligées, avec une espèce de goût de vivre" (25). Even though these imminent opportunities seem positive in light of the situation, we soon realize that these new friendships and distractions are Charlotte and the 230 women in her convoy who are crammed into cattle cars and headed into obscurity.

It is not until the final pages of Spectres that we truly discover why Charlotte forgets and why she wanted to believe herself to be Ondine. It is during her return home to France that she realizes that she has been living in a "suspension d'existence" (44). She explains that "avec la disparition des autres, je disparaissais" and that her friends "avaient si bien perdu de leur réalité [...] je les avais vues se métamorphoser de minute en minute, s'effacer lentement, imperceptiblement, inexorablement- devenir spectres [...] j'étais aussi transparente, aussi irréelle, aussi fluide qu'elles" (42). After years of living in this suspended existence in which she has to relearn everything, her past memories that she had intentionally forgotten in the camps in order to survive slowly return to her. Finally faced with the stark reality of having survived Auschwitz
and haunted by her memories, Charlotte wishes she could plunge "au fond des eaux" with Ondine to indefinitely forget her past with Georges because everything around her reminds her of him, and the painful reality that she lived and he died (50).

What is striking about these few passages with Ondine is she seems to become a rather mature and tangible character in this new prison setting, whereas Charlotte is the one who fluctuates between worlds, real and imagined, not sure of what she wants or who she truly is. It is undeniable that these concentration camp experiences stripped Delbo of her humanity, of her faculties, and of her will to live at times. Thus, the introduction of the character Ondine, who must desperately fight herself for these things, is appropriately superimposed upon her own narrative self, Charlotte, as she artistically rewrites her past mixing reality with mythology in a constant quest to glimpse answers to life's most difficult questions. Her feelings of guilt and extreme loneliness are disheartening yet important for our awareness as readers. These final moments challenge us rather than reassure us as we realize that Charlotte is still lost in this world as she asks "Revenez à quoi? A la vie? Sans doute. Mais quelle vie puisque G. n'y était pas" (50).

**Conclusion**

Mourning and loss is a central theme in Delbo's texts, which in her literary pursuit to render her Holocaust experiences less journalistic and more aesthetic, permits her to reach far into literary history to find characters who have at some point in their fictional lives experienced similar tragedies to her own. Delbo relies heavily on many literary and theatrical characters in *Spectres* to show that pain and suffering is timeless. These characters also carry with them a specific social and cultural context from their historical time frame(s) that Delbo exploits in order to reintegrate them into a modern setting that in many ways resembles their past. Having lived through various tragic and impossible love stories, these characters, with little or no introduction, are able to effortlessly enter this new setting and use their previous experiences to guide and advise Charlotte as she encounters similar disastrous events in her fictional life for the first time. I have chosen three of these characters for closer analysis: Alceste, Electre, and Ondine, because of their struggles in impossible and sometimes tragic love stories. Delbo's use of these characters are unique because they work on multiple levels bringing their past roles and
lives into this new setting. These characters work simultaneously with Delbo, the author, to show that her text and her characters are universal, and they help Charlotte, her narrative identity, in her desire to show that Georges' assassination and her deportation to Auschwitz were not singular events. The horrors of Auschwitz have been told numerous times and sixty-five years after these survivors had returned home, a large majority of their stories have turned into statistics. There are few texts that continue to capture our attention, that poetically recount these events with a rich, imaginative language, and that leave a lasting image in the reader's mind of what it was truly like to live and survive Auschwitz. Delbo's text stands among these rarities, because of her form, language, content, and her brave pursuit to bring these well-known characters into her text side by side with her own literary character Charlotte. *Spectres*, an interwoven text consisting of classical and mythical characters, many of whom never speak, removes any pre-conceptualized ideas the reader might have about the nature and moral fiber of many of the well-known literary figures that reappear. Delbo does not attempt to categorize nor quantify their past tragic experiences; their purpose in this text is to help guide Charlotte with the knowledge and skills they have attained in previous texts. Even the character Charlotte, we find, over the forty years that Delbo writes about her, gains a certain knowledge as she herself progresses from one text to another witnessing to the senseless and horrific crimes of World War II and the Nazi concentration camps.

In chapter three, doubling of the literary setting, I look closely at how Delbo introduces characters that are already pre-established in literature and theater by their historical and social backgrounds as well as their personality and mannerisms. Delbo specifically chooses characters for their personal traits because she understands the value of their past experiences. In her artistic recreation of her own arrest and deportation to Auschwitz in *Spectres, mes compagnons*, Delbo presents familiar characters as guides and mentors to her own fictional persona Charlotte who is somewhat new to the literary world. Delbo understands the meaning and power that are associated with the reader's knowledge of these characters and she manipulates this familiarity in a way that allows these characters to successfully enter her new literary setting. It is as if these characters have gained knowledge over time from their past literary experiences and thus are able to educate Charlotte who is on this tragic journey for the first time. Each character plays a unique role whether it is support during her imprisonment, guidance in saying good-bye to her husband, or mental and psychological sustenance as she leaves and loses many of her friends and
family. Delbo pushes these characters beyond their limits and challenges them to follow Charlotte into the shocking and dreadful situations at Auschwitz. Most do not go with her; she asks herself why: "Sont-ils inadaptables? Perdent-ils existence quand on les arrache à ce qui les entoure? Je ne sais. Je sais seulement que Madame Bovary ne s'est jamais hasardée dans les marais d'Auschwitz. Ni Anna Karénine. Ni Lucien Leuwen que j'aimais tant. Ni Rastignac" (40). Charlotte, the narrator, cannot understand why she has been abandoned by her friends. It is Delbo, thanks to her literary pursuit, who realizes only after her return home that her mental capacity literally shut down while in Auschwitz, but her character Charlotte must learn this like she did and it is this learning process that unfolds in Spectres as the reader too must relive and follow the guidance of characters who were strong enough or perhaps experienced enough to take the lead in facing isolation, loss, and extreme injustices in the concentration camps.
CHAPTER FOUR

DOUBLING OF THE NARRATIVE FORM

"Chez Charlotte Delbo, prose et poésie s'allient pour porter la violence de l'événement au cœur de notre présent"
(Alain Parrau, Le retour, 99).

"Chez moi, c'est le sujet qui impose la forme" (Charlotte Delbo, interview with François Bott, 1975).

Charlotte Delbo returned home to France "le 23 juin 1945" after three years of imprisonment (Le convoi du 24 janvier 102). Nicole Thatcher explains that during these 3 years that Delbo was detained, "elle n'a passé que douze mois à Auschwitz-Birkenau- dont cinq à Birkenau même, les autres à Raisko, à quelques kilomètres de là- et quinze mois à Ravensbrück" (94). Yet her final text, La mémoire et les jours, like many of her writings, focuses strongly on her time at Auschwitz. She explains in her opening story that "Auschwitz est si profondément gravé dans ma mémoire que je n'en oublie aucun instant" (13). Published posthumously in 1985, just months after Delbo's death, La Memoire et les jours takes the reader back over forty years to not only her time in Auschwitz, but it also spans her lifelong struggles to reconcile this tragic time in her life and the somewhat disappointing endeavor of telling her story and having it fall on deaf ears. Delbo once again shares her narrative voice with other survivors, all women with the exception of one male narrative. This last book is comprised of 21 various texts, which consist of prose, poetry, short stories, dialogues and a mixture of prose- poetry.

Delbo is perhaps best known and characterized by her frequent changes in literary form which is a common practice found in many of her texts, especially the Auschwitz trilogy that is most widely read. La mémoire et les jours closely resembles her Auschwitz trilogy in several ways. First, it deals mainly with Charlotte's time in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Additionally, the text is not only a mixture of forms, but also a mixture of voices. Third, both texts also have strong themes of suffering, death, and survival that are woven in subtly at times and quite forcibly at other times. The Auschwitz trilogy seems to be divided into what could be called chapters arranged in a loose chronological order so that each deal with a specific theme such as "Les
Hommes, L'Appel, La Nuit, La Soif" from volume one, "Le Ruisseau, L'Ours in peluche, Le Voyage, Berlin" from volume two, and "Le Retour, Gilberte, Mado, L'Enterrement" from volume three. La mémoire et les jours, although very similar in form and subject matter to the trilogy, touches on larger, universal themes which continue throughout the entire text, such as motherhood for example. This final text by Delbo was also reprinted in 1995 by Berg International so it is more readily available, like the Auschwitz trilogy, in comparison to many of her works which are out of print.63

For chapter three, I focus almost exclusively on Delbo's final text La mémoire et les jours and her doubling of form; some references, however, come from the Auschwitz trilogy, which is Delbo's initial account of her concentration camp experiences, and from Le convoi du 24 janvier, which provides socio-historical information on her comrades. We have seen throughout chapters two and three of this dissertation how doubling creates aesthetic effects; Delbo goes beyond the simple act of writing her past to create a piece of art that gives eloquent expression to her experiences while showing us the ugliness and extreme nature of camp life, death, and survival. As we delve into the variations of form in this text, we find that the prose, verse, dialogues, and blended forms accentuate two major themes that I speculate haunted Delbo throughout her life and reached a pinnacle in her final years of life. These two themes are motherhood and truth. What is unique about these themes is that they reappear throughout the entire text, especially the idea of motherhood which is found in almost every story. Early in her writing career, Delbo expressed a desire to tell the reader how camp life was and to "donner à voir"64 rather than recount, which in French is the difference between dire and raconter (Lamont vii). Delbo's goal was to "raise the image of the camps for all to see, in this generation and in all generations to come" (vii). This desire to keep a certain immediacy by using mostly present tense in her texts allows Delbo to keep the reader engaged and perhaps more receptive to witnessing the true realities and horrors of Auschwitz. In La mémoire et les jours, however, we find an abrupt shift from "Nous rentrions. Nous dirions l'histoire" to "L'Europe relevait ses ruines, les criminels étaient jugés et condamnés, l'histoire n'avait plus besoin de nous" (136). This shift from speaking

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63 A librarian at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, working in special collections, explained to me that many artists choose small publishing houses which print fewer copies, which seems to be the case with Charlotte Delbo.
64 Rosette Lamont quotes this line by Delbo in her preface to Days and Memory. Delbo says the same thing in an interview with Claude Prevost. See Prévost, Claude. "Entretien avec Charlotte Delbo" in La Déportation dans la littérature et l'art. La Nouvelle Critique (juin 1965), 167: 41-44.
the truth to near silence occurs for two main reasons: first, returning home was nothing like the prisoners had imagined, and second, people were more focused on rebuilding their lives than revisiting the past. We find, perhaps for the first time, a sense of frustration in this text as Delbo highlights the complacency of the general public and even her comrades toward this tragic past forty years after the war. She is determined, despite this complacency, to keep the dialogue open and to expose "le régime concentrationnaire" which she points out continues today in many forms, in many countries (138).

We begin by first focusing on Delbo's use of prose, verse, dialogue, and prose-poetry in what I call doubling of form. These variations in form are used at strategic moments in the text to draw attention to certain themes. Before we explore the themes of motherhood and truth, we take a look at what analysts say about her switches in form, how Delbo describes her own writing style, and finally Delbo's unique blended literary form.

Analyzing Delbo's literary forms

Critics have analyzed Delbo's switches in form to say that "Delbo's shift into poetic form in Auschwitz and After" is used "when she senses that her prose is simply not up to the task of recounting certain traumatic experiences" (Rowland & Eaglestone 1) and that she chooses "to scrap narrative or story in favor of a stream of plural consciousness in a narrative present" (Fridman Hamaoui 248). Fridman Hamaoui also suggests that "where extreme experience renders an experience unavailable (numbing, coldness), poetic language marks the numbing, exploits the fragmenting of the perceptual process, and dwells on those perceptual facts that have to do with the disintegration of the experiencing self within the particular experience. [...] Poetic language, in other words, is a literal transcription and elaboration of perceptual processes and reality" (254-55). Nicole Thatcher, who has done extensive work on Delbo's texts explains her interpretation of Delbo's blended forms: "What can be said here is that her testimony is shaped by poetry. She chooses poetic language to relate her experience, not to hide the reality of the camps through images or to enhance it though dramatisation, but in order to touch the reader by appealing to his or her senses so that he or she becomes part of the vision presented, participates in it, is engulfed by it and does not remain an outsider" (34)65. She goes on to say: "To sum up, both poetic prose and free verse fragments are intended to 'show' the reader the concentrationary

65 See Nicole Thatcher's A Literary Analysis of Charlotte Delbo's Concentration Camp Re-presentation.
reality [...]; however, free verse fragments seem to be used when the narrator wants to express personal emotions or thoughts and communicate them more forcibly to her reader" (165). She reiterates this final point in her closing arguments by saying "I would argue that her recourse to poetry in her prose performs an important role in making us feel her experience. She borrows from poetry the repetitive pattern, reinforced occasionally by typography, which creates rhythm and communicates intensity of feeling" (175). These critics argue that somehow Delbo's prose is not as effective as her poetry in rendering certain traumatic experiences to the audience. This rather simple explanation, I find, only begins to scrape the surface of Delbo's larger project of intertwining multiple forms. How can we, the readers/observers, say that Delbo's prose is less effective than her poetry? I disagree with the idea that her writing can be reduced to a formulaic switching from prose to poetry when she needs to communicate more forcibly an emotion or experience. Switching constantly between forms, which becomes a form itself, Delbo chooses the one that best captures the scene and the emotions for herself and for the reader.

Alain Parru sees Delbo's writing from a slightly different perspective as he explains that "Souvent le poème semble prélevé dans la prose, rythme enfoui qu'il fallait découvrir et délivrer; il peut aussi apparaître comme une réécriture où la douleur et la violence, en quelque sorte précipitées, s'exposent en éclats bruts" (99). Parru continues by saying that "Chez Charlotte Delbo, prose et poésie s'allient pour porter la violence de l'événement au cœur de notre présent" (99). I agree with Parru's idea that Delbo's forms work together, s'allient, to tell a complete story, rather than one form, poetry, being necessary to pick up where another form was inadequate, prose. Although several ideas have been proposed as to why Delbo continually switches forms, many analysts have come to the basic conclusion that poetry captures something greater, something linked closer to our emotions than prose can capture. Whether or not these ideas are true, they do not capture the true nature of Delbo's ever changing form and the themes that are accentuated by the forms themselves. As we move through the major themes in La mémoire et les jours, we will begin to see how Delbo's forms work congruently to highlight and accentuate different aspects of similar stories. Before we look at these themes, let us take a look at how Delbo describes her own style of writing. In the following two interviews she explains why and how she writes.
Delbo describes her own style of writing

In a 1965 interview with Claude Prévost, Delbo describes her style of writing: "Je me suis trouvée aux prises avec une réalité très difficile à décrire. J'ai éprouvé qu'elle résistait à la description triviale et banale. Il faut transcender un objet pour le décrire. Dans ce que j'avais à décrire là, il ne s'agissait pas seulement de paysages, de lieux, d'êtres dans leur apparence, il y avait aussi la Passion, la Passion au sens grand du mot, au sens pascalien, c'est-à-dire ce que des êtres ont subi. Si vous voulez rendre compte de la souffrance, vous ne pouvez pas seulement décrire, il faut transmettre l'émotion, la sensation, la douleur, l'horrer. Il ne faut pas décrire, il faut donner à voir. Donner à sentir. [...] Seuls les poètes donnent à voir. Seul le langage de la poésie permet de donner à voir et à sentir" (42). Although she was initially criticized for her use of poetry by a journalist for Combat who stated "Oser parler de style à propos de d'Auschwitz!", Delbo retorts by saying "Je n'ai pas trouvé d'autre moyen de m'exprimer, de dire ce que j'avais à dire. Il m'a semblé que pour être entendue il fallait le dire comme cela" (43).

In a second interview, with François Bott in 1975, Delbo again explains why she uses a poetic language: "Je n'aime pas la littérature gratuite ou formelle. Je n'écris pas pour écrire. Je me sers de la littérature comme d'une arme, car la menace m'apparait trop grande. [...] Quand je suis rentrée du camp, j'ai voulu témoigner. Il fallait que quelqu'un rapporte les paroles, les gestes, les agonies d'Auschwitz. Chacun témoigne avec ses armes...Je considère le langage de la poésie comme le plus efficace- car il remue le lecteur au secret de lui-même et le plus dangereux pour les ennemis qu'il combat. [...] Chez moi, c'est le sujet qui impose la forme" (Bott 1975). Bott even asks Delbo towards the end of the the interview "Pourriez-vous définir votre manière d'écrire?" to which Delbo replies "Non...Pourquoi, soudain, ce que j'écris revêt la forme d'un poème?...Pourquoi, soudain, je vois un personnage se dessiner et se mouvoir? Je ne sais pas. Quand j'écris, mes personnages se déplacent et agissent devant moi, sur une scène imaginaire...J'entends leurs paroles; j'écris à haute voix" (Bott 1975). Delbo clearly sees herself as a poet and her writing as poetry; she writes what she hears and sees. It is difficult for artists to explain their own creative process but Delbo gives us some insight in this last interview when she says that she is really not sure how the whole process unfolds, but she is certain that her

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66 Prévost, Claude. "Entretien avec Charlotte Delbo" in La Déportation dans la littérature et l'art. La Nouvelle Critique (juin 1965), 167: 41-44.
subject imposes the form. Although this statement may seem rather vague initially, it becomes fundamental in unfolding and understanding Delbo's doubling of the literary form.

Delbo clearly labels her work poetic, and I suspect that she is using the descriptions of poet and poetry in a broader sense which refers to fictional writing aimed at capturing or conveying a specific mood or experience. In this sense, all her work is defined as poetry, however there are clearly segments of her writing that we can label as prose due to their form. If we look briefly at the definitions of prose and poetry we find the following: prose- "straightforward; a literary medium distinguished from poetry especially by its greater irregularity and variety of rhythm and its closer correspondence to patterns of everyday speech" 67 and for poetry- "writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm" 68. Poetry, therefore by this definition, is a style of writing whereby language is manipulated for its aesthetic and artistic qualities in a way that brings about an emotional response that is not present in the linear narrative structure associated with prose. Perhaps beginning with Aristotle's definition and classification of poetry in *Poetics*, it appears that these strict definitions of prose and poetry have changed over time and only apply to an increasingly small body of literature; we find today many blended forms of both genres such as prose-poetry, poetic prose, and prosaic poetry that would not fit the classic definition. As we just saw with several analysts on Delbo's writing style, these analysts adopt these simplistic definitions, which do not accurately capture the broader project that Delbo has achieved by interlacing and building prose and poetry upon each other in what has become a doubling of form, a union of what has traditionally been considered separate genres.

Michael Meyer reminds us, however, that "a definition can be too limiting" (2) 69. He notes that "stories, poems, and plays are fictional. They are made up- imagined- even when based on actual historical events. [...] its purpose is not primarily to transmit facts or ideas. Imaginative literature is a source more of pleasure than of information" (2). Delbo reiterates this idea in her interview with Prévost when asked why she never includes concrete details. She

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69 See Michael Meyer's *Poetry an introduction*. 67
explains that "les chiffres and les mesures ne rendent pas compte de tout" (43). She gives an example of an interview she had with one of the women from *Le convoi de 24 janvier*. When asked to fill out a questionnaire, one woman wrote honestly "On nous envoyait travailler dans les marais, à 7 ou 10 kilomètres de marche" but Delbo verified the distance and found that "le marais le plus éloigné était à trois kilomètres 500 [...] Et si vous écrivez dans un livre: elles allaient travailler à trois kilomètres du camp... le lecteur pensera: trois kilomètres, ce n'est rien. Mais si vous montrez comment nous y allions, comment nous nous y trainions, les lecteurs, sans savoir à combien de kilomètres c'était, se rendent compte que c'était une épreuve terrible" (44). Thus for Delbo, it is the imaginative language and details that bring the camps to life and invoke very powerful emotions in the readers, perhaps more so than facts and figures that readers cannot relate to or reconstruct in their imaginations. For the purposes of our discussion, although Delbo defines her writing as poetry, I am making a distinction between her prose and verse and any mixed forms of prose-poetry, because the themes that I am looking at next are treated slightly different depending on the form.

**Delbo's blended literary form**

Using multiple forms is not a style unique to Delbo, but how and when Delbo employs these switches is unique because we find that these alternating forms accentuate the main themes of this text. George Perec's novel *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance* is a brilliant example of an author using multiple forms to shed light on themes associated with the Holocaust. More specifically in his text we find two intertwined prose texts: a fictionalized story that runs parallel to his 'real' story, which Perec uses to expose not only the grieving process of losing both parents in World War II, but he equally exposes the writing process and the realization that what seems to be 'real' or 'non-fiction' is not as accurate as it is supposed to be, and what is labeled 'fiction' ends up strangely resembling a Nazi concentration camp. Elizabeth Scheiber explains that "the tendency to treat Holocaust texts as "proof" of events stems from the intentions of the writers themselves. The impetus to write stems from their participation in these exceptional events, and their main purpose in writing is to "inform" the world about the horrors they experienced" (4)⁷⁰. Perec, like Delbo, knew that a creative writing style would resonate more loudly and reach a wider audience.

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than a typical Holocaust memoir that runs through tragic event after tragic event in chronological order. This is not to say that straightforward accounts of camp life are not effective because we have successful works by Robert Antelme, *L'espèce humaine* (1947), David Rousset, *L'univers concentrationnaire* (1946), and Primo Levi, *Survival at Auschwitz*\(^\text{71}\) (1996), to name a few. Whereas most survivors who did choose to write about their experiences use the form of non-fiction memoirs and typically wrote one book, there are others like Delbo and Père who successfully wrote fictionalized accounts of the Holocaust such as Elie Wiesel, Jorge Semprun, Tadeusz Borowski, Marguerite Duras, Simone de Beauvoir, and Paul Celan. What stands out between these two lists of writers is that many of these writers of fiction continued to write about their past experiences over the years, not only as a means of informing the public but writing became part of who they were.

Scheiber points out that "in Holocaust studies, fictionalization is generally met with mistrust. In part, the subject matter itself [...] may raise questions about the ethics of "inventing" horror even if the purpose is to educate the public on life in Auschwitz" and we find that many of these writers were indeed criticized for their fictionalized accounts of concentration camps (7). Inga Clendinnen,\(^\text{72}\) however, finds something powerful in the "relationship between I-was-there history and the fiction which comes out of that experience" (169). She goes on to say that "I am persuaded that the authority of a Tadeusz Borowski or an Issac Babel or those other writers who present us with 'fiction' made out of experience owes a great deal both to the fact and to our knowledge that they have 'been there'; that they are reporting (and selecting, shaping, and inventing) out of direct observation and participation. I cannot effectively separate their texts from the greatest texts of that other genre, 'survivor testimony', where subjective experience can be represented, with high art, by such consummate artist-witnesses as Primo Levi or Charlotte Delbo" (169)\(^\text{73}\). Delbo would have been pleased to hear herself referred to as "artist" because she struggled somewhat with publishing her first text, having kept it hidden away for nearly twenty years, and admitted to her friend and translator Rosette Lamont "I never showed it to anyone, never thought of myself as 'a writer'" (485). However, after publishing the trilogy she exclaimed "It should have gotten the Nobel!" (486). Although fictionalized accounts of the Holocaust have

\(^{71}\) The Italian version, *Se questo è un uomo*, was first published in 1947.

\(^{72}\) See Inga Clendinnen's *Reading the Holocaust*.

\(^{73}\) For a specialized reading of Holocaust historiography and philosophy of history, see Dan Stone's book *Constructing the Holocaust*. 

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been questioned for authenticity and accuracy, these texts and writers are slowly gaining popularity thanks to critics like Inga Clendinnen and Lawrence Langer who are looking beyond the tragic stories themselves to the artistic framework that tells of the artists' personal struggles to express these painful memories. For Delbo, we find this personalization in her repeating themes: motherhood and truth. These themes take on slightly different meanings, emotions, and tone depending on the literary form that Delbo uses, yet it is the combination of multiple forms which fully captures the pain and anguish that Delbo has lived with over the past four decades. We first begin by looking at the theme of motherhood, which recurs throughout nearly every story and poem in this text.

**Motherhood**

The theme of motherhood dominates Delbo's final text which can be perplexing considering that Delbo never remarried after World War II and never had children. Perhaps, however, it is this very lack of family that drives Delbo to write and to allow literature to fill this missing element in her life. Although we can speculate as to the effect of being childless, Delbo never wrote directly about this aspect of her life. As we have seen thus far, Delbo's concentration camp experiences have been the impetus and motivation behind her career as a writer. Most of these experiences are told by women about women in a women's camp, although on a few rare occasions she lends her narrative voice to a male survivor. It seems appropriate to say that her gender, if we believe it is mainly influenced by cultural factors, plays an important role in her writing. I agree with Nicole Thatcher that "the segregation imposed in the camps accentuated the gender factor" (57). Many of Delbo's texts touch on the subject of motherhood because she was keenly aware of her surroundings and the minute, daily activities of those around her in the camps: mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and daughters. Delbo tells us in one of her first books the importance of maintaining a close physical contact with the women around her. In the introduction to *Le convoi du 24 janvier* she explains this importance: "Si notre convoi

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74 For an in-depth look at studies on motherhood, see Ann Phoenix, Anne Woollett, and Eva Lloyd's *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*. In particular chapter two, "Having children: Accounts of childless women and women with reproductive problems" Anne Woollett addresses issues of childlessness and feelings of non-conformity and negative identity. Symbolically, motherhood has been associated throughout cultures as achieving a "full adult identity" (47).

75 See Nicole Thatcher's *A Literary Analysis of Charlotte Delbo's concentration camp re-presentation*. 

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a eu un si grand nombre de survivantes-- oui, pour Birkenau, en 1943, cinquante-sept sur deux cent trente après six mois, c'est exceptionnel, unique dans l'histoire du camp- c'est que nous nous connaissons déjà, que nous formions, à l'intérieur d'un grand groupe compact, de petits groupes étroitement liés [...] Chacune des revenantes sait que, sans les autres, elle ne serait pas revenue" (17). These close relationships were a reality formed through necessity for the women around her. For those women who did not know anyone, nor spoke a second language, "elle ne rencontraient ni amitié ni entr'aide," which Delbo sees as leading to a higher number of deaths (17). Delbo also explains in an interview with Rosette Lamont that "there was my family76, my mother, whose image has sustained me in camp" (485). Delbo was very close to her mother, but she only makes references to her directly on a few occasions, which we will see later. Because so many of the women in Delbo's convoy died, over 75%, she explains that she "wanted to honor the dead who had entrusted me with a sacred task, 'to carry the word' [...] I wanted above all to honor my comrades, those who did not survive, and those who, having returned, were trying to build a life" (486). Delbo must rebuild her own life as well and finds herself immediately turning to writing upon her return to France. She remarks that "when I started writing, the text poured out of me, out of the depths in me in which it must have been stored. There were almost no revisions to be made. It seemed strangely easy, almost too easy. So I decided to put it away for a while. [...] I had no idea it would stay there for close to twenty years" (485). Delbo is referring here to volume one of her Auschwitz trilogy. After publishing this text in 1965, she writes and publishes almost a dozen more texts over the following two decades until her death in 1985, always staying true to her initial intentions of honoring her comrades.

Referring to this idea that Delbo will carry the word, Lamont sees Delbo's task as a writer as "bear[ing] it and giv[ing] it life, as though it were the offspring she never had a chance to have" (495). I certainly believe that Delbo's creative writing process and eventual publications can be seen as a symbolic birth in which she presents for the first time the personal stories of the women in camps that would have otherwise gone untold. I also believe that the role of the mother and the theme of motherhood in her final book are metaphors for experiences unique only to women in the camps, the transformations that took place in their personal lives due to being a woman, and how their gender and sex affected their deportation and survival in the

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76 Delbo tells us in Le convoi du 24 janvier that she is the oldest of four siblings and that her youngest brother, only 18 years old, was killed as his army unit crossed the Rhine April 9, 1945 (162).
camps as well as their lives after the war had ended. What has been mainly observation of
women throughout her writing career, with the exception of volume three of her Auschwitz
trilogy, Delbo now turns to more personal accounts and feelings in her final text, La mémoire
et les jours. In each story of this text, we find situations unique to women: there are those who
became mothers during and after their camp experiences, women who took on motherly roles,
and those who lost their mothers. The theme of motherhood definitely resonates throughout this
final book, but the importance of what these women have to say is oftentimes lost because their
roles or reactions seem natural, or what we would expect from them because they are women.
This is when Delbo's doubling of the form becomes integral in highlighting these women and
their experiences; personal stories of loss and survival found in the prose sections become
universal struggles in Delbo's free verse. Although not every prose text is followed by a poem,
we find an emerging trend between these two literary forms that unites them nonetheless. We
will see in the following section that Delbo introduces personal stories of loss and suffering
within her prose sections as different survivors look back on their past experiences. Delbo
intersperses poems among these prose texts in which the reader is taken back to a specific
moment in time to witness these experiences; the narrator, however, remains anonymous during
these moments and the context remains somewhat vague which opens up the text on a universal
level as readers are able to relate to or interpret the poems on a personal level.

Delbo again lends her narrative voice to women who have survived atrocities and this
time we hear from women across Europe affected by war or corrupt political regimes in their
home countries. For example, we find a young German nurse, caring for quadriplegics, who is
arrested and deported for writing and mailing a letter to the mother of one of these dying German
soldiers. We never know whether this woman has children of her own, but she cares for these
soldiers as if they were hers. We hear from a second German woman, Hannelore, who is
ashamed of being German after World War II. She states from the beginning "Je ne pourrai plus
être allemande. Je ne peux pas. Je ne veux pas" (127). Delbo shares similar feelings as the
narrator of honte, mépris, and lâcheté when she thinks about "la torture en Algérie. [...] Des
villages brulés au napalm en Indochine [...] Octobre 1961, des Algériens dont on a repêché les

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77 In volume three, Mesure de nos jours, Delbo lends her narrative voice to the women in her convoy who survived so that they can directly tell their stories. There is one story told by a male survivor.
"corps dans la Seine" (133). Delbo realizes that each country has a tragic past, but Hannelore takes the German situation personally since her father chose to remain in the German army while she was deported and her mother was forced to hide with friends. Hannelore had hoped to move to the United States with her mother, but there is a sense of betrayal in her voice as she explains that her mother returned to her father. She decides to go alone because "Entre les champs de bataille, les camps, les bombardements, les prisonnières, rares sont les familles qui se retrouvent au complet" (132). Her broken family life is directly related to and caused by what she feels are the repugnant acts of German citizens, and Hannelore cannot see past either situation, not in her family and not in her country. Having lost her mother during the roundups, Hannelore cannot find forgiveness when she loses her a second time to her Nazi father. Delbo also lends her narrative voice to the women of Buenos Aires who assemble each year at "la place de mai" in memory of their children who were abducted, tortured and killed by the Argentine government between 1976 and 1983 (95-102). We also hear the tragic story of the village of Kalavrita, Greece where Nazi soldiers rounded up and killed every male, 1,300 were killed, while the women were locked in the schoolhouse. The Nazis burned the entire village as they proceeded to the next town (103-125). Most of the stories in this book address the concentration camp experiences at Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, but Delbo also captures other important events that were occurring during this decade or the decades immediately leading up to and following WWII. Not limiting her texts to specific events during WWII allows Delbo to reach a larger audience, which I argue enhances her doubling of the narrative form because it is the personal experiences in her prose texts which capture the reader's attention and the universal experiences in her poetry which allow the reader to find a personal connection. The reader begins to be drawn into each text that follows, and perhaps becomes truly aware and empathetic to the atrocities in the world, because of Delbo's unique combination of prose and poetry. In order to better understand the process of how Delbo intertwines these two literary forms, we focus on the stories of three young women, a French woman, a Spanish woman, and a Gypsy woman, whose

78 Delbo places her thoughts in italics which sets them apart from the narrative by Hannelore, a German woman deported to Ravensbrück because her mother was Jewish. Her father, a colonel in the German army, was forced to either leave his post or divorce and he chose to divorce. After the war, the mother returns and the couple remarries.


very different lives become tragically similar as they find themselves deported to Ravensbrück. Delbo introduces these women's lives through prose and dialogue, which are each followed or preceded by a poem that develops their situation on a larger, more universal scale.

Neige

We begin with a narrative by Neige, a young Spanish woman who is pregnant, who wakes up surrounded by Spanish men. She explains that she used to be a school teacher but once the civil war broke out in 1937 they decided to evacuate all the children from Bilbao to Leningrad. She eventually married a Russian engineer, but when Hitler invaded Russia her husband was sent to fight on the front lines and died. She quickly learns that the Spanish men who had found her are from "la Division Azul. Nous venons délivrer le monde des bolcheviks" (44). Pregnant, she was trying to make it to Moscow to stay with her in-laws. The soldiers help the woman to get to Moscow where she is taken to see their Kommandantur. He, unfortunately, does not believe her situation and turns her over to the Gestapo. She explains that she was "enfermée à la prison de Riga. C'est là que j'ai accouché. L'enfant est mort à la naissance" (45). She miraculously survives camp life and evacuates to France where she eventually marries "Avec un Espagnol, un Andalou. Nous avons deux enfants. Grands, maintenant. Il ne connaissent pas l'Espagne" (46). They decided to "ne pas mettre les pieds en Espagne tant que Franco régnerait. L'avons-nous attendue, espérée, voulue, la mort de ce chacal" (46). However, by the time Franco dies, they find themselves too old, their family and friends in Spain are also dead, and their children have been raised French. Sadly they have lived their lives feeling "exilés de partout, partout des étrangers" (47).

The narrator of this story, Neige, plays down the miraculous feats she has overcome in her life. There is almost no elaboration of her time in prison, the loss of her first child, nor her time in Ravensbrück, all which were undoubtedly very difficult physically and emotionally for this young, widowed woman. She does what Delbo explains all women were expected to do after the war: "reprendre des forces, de s'orienter, de se remettre dans la vie, dans celle d'avant or dans une nouvelle vie: se marier, avoir des enfants, travailler [...]" (136). Despite following these cultural expectations, Neige still feels exiled from Spain, her motherland and her roots, which she has not passed on to her children. She even continues to search for information about her "petits élèves de Bilbao" as if like their mother, she was the source and cause of the events
that later shaped their lives (46). This individual's story has many elements that resonate with other women whether it be the loss of a child, the death or murder of their spouse, or the task of starting a new life and a new family after the war. In the poem which follows Neige's story, Delbo delves more into the universal hatred and feelings that revolved around Franco and ultimately Hitler. Delbo's unique doubling of the literary form in which she takes an individual account by Neige, removes much of the personal information, and makes it resonate with a widespread audience is evident in the poem which follows.

The women of Buenos Aires

Following Neige's narrative, there is a lengthy poem entitled "Tombeau du dictateur" (49). Having just read about the situation in Spain, we immediately think of Franco, whom Neige has just mentioned. Delbo, however, leaves this dictator nameless which allows the reader to imagine this situation anywhere at any time, but as we will see there is an association with both Franco and Hitler. There is a constant battle going on in this poem between life and death. As Franco, or perhaps Hitler, fights to survive, he must feed the

pourvoyeur de la mort

[...]
la gorgeant de vies par lui désignées/

[...]
rassasiant l'insatiable
qu'en même temps il allèche
lui jetant pâture toujours plus fraîche (49).

Believing that if he can keep death satiated, his own life might be spared. Death, la mort, takes on an interesting character in this poem as an insatiable female animal with "griffes" who laughs as she devours the dead, the "jeunesse au sacrifice" (49, 50). She is also described as "la maîtresse," "la veuve," and "la vieille," but most often as "elle" (49-55). Although this negative image of death is associated with a woman, the anonymity of the character allows the reader to make associations between this female character and others in this book like Neige and Delbo, who are also veuves due to Franco's and Hitler's regimes and who "attendue, espérée, voulue, la mort" of these dictators (46).
It is interesting to note that the references to *la vieille* and *elle* reoccur in one of the final poems of this book when we meet an old woman whose "trois fils" and maybe her husband were murdered "un jour d'été quand Hitler conquérait le monde" (91). Although this second, untitled poem is dedicated to the experiences of "la vieille Crétoise," the pronoun *elle* captures the experiences of all the mothers who lost their children and spouses and who wished that death would cruelly take this dictator's life (90)\(^8\). Thus the image of death as being an insatiable female takes on a different meaning when we hear these women's stories of loss, and their hopes that the dictator

> qu'il souffre mille morts  
> mille et mille encore  
> autant qu'il en a fait souffir  
> A peine cela nous consolera-t-il d'y être pour rien  
> d'avoir aiguisé nos couteaux sans l'atteindre  
> [...]  
> de n'avoir pas vengé nos morts (53).

Sadly these women feel hopeless in their situations. Although they want to fight for justice, nothing they can do will bring back their families so we find a high degree of disappointment in their voices; the *vieille Crétoise* describes this loss as "tout ce que le cœur d'une femme peut supporter" (90). Eventually the dictator does die and death drags out his death making him "attendre avec cette agonie interminable" as the citizens "attend[ent] la fin de l'agonie/pour faire éclater sa joie et ses cris" (54, 55). There is great satisfaction in watching his death not only by the citizens but by death herself who make sure he suffers the pain that these women feel. We hear their voices finish this verse saying "Grotesque macabre/ digne de lui/ cette fin" (55). As we saw with Neige in her personal narrative above, she continues to live and rebuild her life despite the loss of her first child and husband. In the next two stories, however, we meet two women whose lives stop the moment their loved ones are taken from them.

Let us now return to the opening story of *La Mémoire et les Jours*. It begins with the narrative voice of Charlotte Delbo who explains that still to this day she "cherche une réponse,

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\(^8\) There is also a similar echo in the following poem "Les folles de mai," which also deals with women who lost their children and grandchild due to a cruel dictatorship in Buenos Aires. See note 78 above for their current website.
sans la trouver" as to how she began her life over "pour vivre aujourd'hui" (12). As we move through the numerous narrative voices that speak throughout this book, we find the same questions and answers from other women as well. Following her own short introductory narrative, Delbo creatively links the following three texts of her book by using the theme of motherhood. The second and fourth texts, both written in prose about two very different women and their situations, fall before and after a very short poem, which Delbo uses to subtly join these two tragic tales. The doubling of the narrative form, combining prose and poetry, allows Delbo to universalize what are originally very personal, tragic events. Linking these doubled forms to yet another text again reinforces the difficult nature of being a mother in the camps and what it means to lose a child. Even if we, the readers, are not mothers and have not lost a child, we all have mothers and we can empathize, on some level, with the pain of losing a family member.

Gilberte

The first of the two prose texts opens with the following lines from an anonymous voice: "Elle dit «On ne meurt pas de chagrin.» [...] «On ne meurt pas de chagrin.» [...] «On vit.» Oui, on vit. C'est pire." (15). These initial lines indicate the extreme difficulty it has been for this woman to live with the loss of a child; dying seems to be easier than continually living with this loss, and the narrative voice agrees with this as well. She even feels like she is a "double d'elle-même inaltérable" in which one of her "vit dans son chagrin" and the other "porte son chagrin depuis qu'elle a porté sa sœur, morte dans la nuit" (15). The narrator explains that the young woman "a tenu sa sœur mourante dans ses bras, l'a serrée contre elle pour la retenir, l'empêcher de glisser hors de la vie. [...] elle a porté sa sœur dans la neige pour que la corvée de cadavres la ramasse de la nuit [...] elle a portée hors de la baraque et posée sur la neige, délicatement, maternellement" (15-16). This adjective maternellement takes on a deeper meaning than the idea of her actions being gentle or tender; it begins to mean 'like a mother' when we know more about the relationship between these two sisters. Within Delbo's convoy of 230 women, there were several pairs of sisters as well as mothers and daughters. If we make our way through 211 entries in Le convoi du 24 janvier, Delbo's socio-historical account of each woman in her convoy, we come across Gilberte TAMISE et sa soeur Andrée. The second sentence of their entry reads: "Gilberte, née le 3 février 1912, avait a peine plus de dix ans lorsque sa mère est morte, laissant un bébé de sept mois: Andrée. Gilberte a été la grande sœur et la petite mère"
(275, my emphasis). This is the only direct reference to their dual relationship and why Gilberte considers Andrée like her own child. In a short paragraph about Andrée which follows their biography, Delbo notes that "Au bras de Gilberte, elle se trainait vers les marais, vers les briques, vers le sable. [...] Andrée est morte dans la nuit, près de sa sœur qui, le matin- [...] en sortant pour l'appel, a porté Andrée dehors, l'a déposée le long du mur du block, dans la boue. Tendrement. Et Gilberte est allée à l'appel" (276). The idea that Gilberte holds Andrée au bras as they make it through their daily chores reinforces two distinct images: one being two sisters leaning against each other for support and the second being a mother carrying her child. What is so tragic about this situation and what takes us back to the opening lines of her narrative in La mémoire et les jours, is that Gilberte returns immediately to roll call after leaving her sister's body on the ground because she knows her own life is in danger and that, as she stated earlier, on vit, on ne meurt pas de chagrin, because there is no time in the camps to mourn and reflect on loss. We learn even more about Gilberte's life in volume three of the Auschwitz trilogy, Mesure de nos jours. Again Delbo opens this volume with a personal narrative and the second prose text is dedicated entirely to Gilberte. Within these twenty pages, Gilberte describes feeling "perdue" at least fifteen times. Her comrades have returned to their homes, her mother and sister are both dead, and she eventually finds her father, very sick, who dies four years after her return. She wonders if she should get married but explains that "C'aurait été pour avoir un enfant. [...] il n'y faillait pas songer vraiment. Après, j'étais trop vieille pour avoir un enfant" (40). The idea that getting married would solely be for the purpose of having children can give us an indication of cultural and gender expectations of women in France in the 1940s and 50s. Gilberte is 33 years old when she returns to France and after giving her father four years of "soins constants," she is dissuaded from starting a family in her late 30s, perhaps due to cultural reasons or physical ones. She does note, however, that her friend "Mado...Elle s'est mariée. Elle a eu un fils. Elle est utile à son mari, à son fils. Elle a une raison de vivre" (41). Gilberte lives her life without reason, without purpose since she has not been able to have a family and be a mother. This is why Delbo, in La mémoire et les jours, believes that Gilberte "est rentrée chez elle, elle n'est pas rentrée dans la vie" (16).

It is not clear why Delbo tells Gilberte's story in such detail in Mesure de nos jours and in La mémoire et les jours, or why she places Gilberte's narrative immediately following her own
introductory narratives in both books. Delbo, only one year younger than Gilberte, writes several stories that capture her own feelings of never (re)marrying in her mid to late thirties. We do not know much about their relationship with one another in the camps, but we can speculate from the placement and frequency of writings about Gilberte that she greatly influenced Delbo. Another woman, a mother, grabs Delbo's attention in this second prose text, which follows the poem joining them together. There are very similar elements in these two women's stories, but the individual and the situation are strikingly different.

Gypsy mother

This second individual's story begins in a very loose prose-poetry format as Delbo explains the daily morning roll call, which takes place in the pitch dark. Giant projectors shine down on the women in order to see "les fuyards et tirent/ comme si on pouvait fuir" (18). Blinded by the darkness and the extreme brightness of the search lights, the women can hardly see where to go and there is "parfois la panique. Où es-tu? Je suis là./ Tiens-toi à moi" (19). We hear a slight echo back to the previous story with the verb tenir as we imagine Gilberte holding Andrée for support. As Delbo and the women in her group line up, they are directly facing "les rangs des Tsiganes/ comme nous, toutes bleues de froid" (20). Delbo explains that you can distinguish the Gypsies from other groups because they are "couverte de loques" like the Jews who "ont des vêtements grotesques" (21). Among this group of Gypsies, there is one woman in particular that stands out because she has "serré contre elle, un paquet de chiffons" (21). Delbo describes how the woman is holding the pile of rags "comme on tient un bébé, la tête du bébé sur le sein de sa mère" (21). In fact, she is holding her baby which is "violacée, presque noire" (21). How long has this baby been dead Delbo wonders; "Des heures, des jours peut-être" (22). Day after day Delbo sees this woman holding her baby against her like Gilberte holding her sister au bras. Day after day the other Gypsies attempt to help hide this mother and her baby, but finally one day, however, "elle n'est plus venue à l'appel./ Quelqu'un a vu, sur le tas d'ordures, près des cuisines, le paquet de chiffons, le bébé mort./ La Tsigane a été tuée à coups de bâton par une policière qui voulait lui arracher son enfant mort" (23). Unlike Gilberte who goes on with her day returning immediately to l'appel, this mother fights to defend her dead child with "la force

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82 In both texts, Mesure de nos jours and in La mémoire et les jours, there are short poems separating the two prose texts of Delbo and Gilberte.
d'un félín" (23). Like the corvée de cadavres where Andrée was placed, the same one "a ramassé la mère. Le bébé, dans ses chiffons, est resté sur les ordures, confondu avec" (23). Delbo ends this story telling us that "Tous les Tsiganes ont disparu très vite. Tous gazés. Des milliers. Le camp de familles vidé, cela a fait de la place pour d'autres arrivants" (23). This final commentary shows how little life was appreciated by the Nazi guards in Auschwitz as large masses of people were killed simply to make room for more prisoners. What is striking between these two women's stories is the constant tenderness and care that they give their babies, or in Gilberte's situation her baby sister, which contrasts so starkly to their immediate environment of death and destruction. We see their instinctual nature to protect their loved ones at all costs and even risking their own lives to do so.

Tucked in between these two prose texts, we find a very short poem with no title, which becomes a link not only between Gilberte and the Gypsy woman, but also a larger connection to the uncertainty and desperation that many women felt during their time in the camps. The opening line begins with "Que tient-elle dans ses bras/ serré contre elle" (17)83. With regards to Gilberte, we imagine her sister dans ses bras. Delbo continues the verse with "celle-là/au premier rang/ là, dans les rangs d'en face [...] les Tsiganes" (17). The reference to the Tsigane mother is not yet apparent, however, since her personal story follows this poem. It is only afterwards that we are able to make a direct reference to her and what she is holding. The verse continues with "A quoi reconnaît-on une Tsigane quand il n'y a plus que le squelette?" (17). What is hidden behind this question is the reality that hardly anybody was distinguishable from one another in the camps, because all the women had their heads shaved, were dressed in rags, and had eaten so little that they all resembled skeletons. Again, it is not until we continue into the prose text which follows that Delbo informs us the Gypsies and the Jews wear different clothing than the others. Delbo and her group, which are political prisoners, wear "rayés" whereas the Gypsies wear "loques, ce qui reste de leurs grandes jupes et de leurs fichus" and the Jews wear "manteaux trop longs ou trop étroits, souillés, déchirés, avec une grande croix rouge peinte dans le dos" (21). When a prisoner dies, however, their clothes are typically removed for others to wear, so Delbo's initial question becomes more meaningful once we have read and contemplated both the poem and the prose text together. The reference to Tsigane in this

83 This image in general reminds me immediately of Delbo carrying around her copy of Le Misanthrope that she kept hidden beneath her top through volume two of her Auschwitz trilogy.
question could also be easily replaced with any group, any nationality, like Gilberthe who is French for example, and whose life after the camps has completely withered away her spirit and her dreams, so that all is left is her physical body, *le squelette*.

This brief poem concludes with *l'appel*, which is where we find both Gilberthe and the Tsigane. Delbo highlights and brings these two women's stories together as she states: "Depuis le milieu de la nuit, elles sont debout/plantées dans la neige que le piétinement de milliers de pas a durcie en plaques glissantes./ Depuis le milieu de la nuit/ nous sommes là debout dans la neige/ debout dans la nuit/ la nuit divisée par les projecteurs de barbelés/ à intervalles" (17). There is a shift from "elles" to "nous" as Delbo repeats the verse making these women's experiences ours. The two personal narratives of Gilberthe and the Tsigane are brought together in this poem and universalized. I believe Delbo makes the change from "elles" to "nous" not only to show that she and her group are equally affected as those considered inferior races or groups, the Gypsies and the Jews, but also to bring the reader into the experience and become temporarily part of the *milliers* of women standing under the glaring lights of an impending death. It is Delbo's doubling of the narrative form, bringing together and complementing elements in the prose and verse, which captures both the individual difficulties of surviving and living with Auschwitz and the larger group experience of how these women rely on one another for physical and moral support. Read separately, we learn a great deal about Delbo, Gilberthe, and the Tsigane, but it is only when we read them together, finding differences and commonalities in their experiences, that the reader is able to learn and appreciate the very diverse, yet very similar ways that women cope and behave in the camps in order to survive.

As Delbo mentions in *Le convoi* and demonstrates throughout her texts, it is the constant support of the women in her group that keeps them going and believing in their future. Unfortunately, returning home for many, Gilberthe and Delbo included, does not turn out to be as they had dreamed it would be in the camps. In *Mesure de nos jours*, Gilberthe mentions that "Toutes, vous disiez: «Il faut rentrer»," and she talks about their "détermination commune: rentrer," but after returning home the question tragically becomes "Pourquoi? Seule dans cette chambre, abandonnée, perdue, je ne savais plus pourquoi il avait fallu à tout prix rentrer" (29). Even another twenty years later in *La mémoire et les jours*, Delbo finds that for Gilberthe, "la vie a glissé sur elle comme l'eau du ruisseau sur les cailloux qu'elle polir [...] Son regard s'est terni, sa voix s'est décolorée, ses cheveux sont devenus gris" (16). Gilberthe even admits in *Mesure de
*nos jours* that she has had to constantly remind herself that she has been out of the camps for twenty years, "sinon, je ne le croirais pas. Je le sais comme on sait que la terre tourne, parce qu'on l'a appris. Il faut y penser pour le savoir" (41). It is as if this tragic past and the loss of her family have become distant facts as Gilberte's life becomes more and more passive since she has not been able to fulfill her role as a wife or mother. We hear similar sentiments from Delbo who had once believed that "Nous rentrions. Nous dirions l'histoire" but she sadly realizes over time that "l'histoire n'avait plus besoin de nous" (136). I believe Delbo recognizes the importance of writing and recording their past-*l'histoire*, but by the time she writes her final text, she knows many of her accounts are simply seen as distant stories- *des histoires*. Delbo accepts this reality, just as the women in this text have accepted their tragic realities. However, Delbo does not give up her promise of telling these stories even if they are not believed or even read; they are simply available to whomever will listen. To those who do pick up her final book, Delbo challenges the reader through her use of doubling to remain aware of details that repeat and circulate throughout the various texts; this is a skill that becomes an art, which Delbo learned from her work with Louis Jouvet and which she brings to *La mémoire et les jours*. Delbo captures the nature and ambiance of camp life, while challenging the reader to find and follow the ever-changing narrative forms and unified underlying themes.

Whereas the theme of motherhood runs consistently throughout this entire book and is mentioned and dealt with by almost every narrative voice, the next theme, truth, dominates as the central driving force behind Delbo's work. We find that the word itself, *vérité*, is mentioned significantly less than *mère* or *maternelle*, yet we are aware of its underlying energy as each narrator struggles to find it and define it in his or her own words.

**Truth**

In the following section we look closely at what it means to Delbo and other Holocaust writers to write the truth. We find the difficulties of facing and revealing the truths behind daily camp life as well as the efforts of maintaining this truth over time. This section concludes with how Delbo challenges the reader to accept the truth that, in 1985, oppressive regimes and concentration camps still continue to destroy the lives of innocent people. What we find is a
mixed collage of what knowing the truth can really mean. For some, the truth is liberating but for others it worsens the pain and the scars of wounds that never fully healed. For Delbo, knowing the truth means taking on responsibility and acting, yet she reveals that even for herself this is extremely difficult. There is an overall tone of culpability that settles upon the reader and the different voices of this text as we find out that lies continue to cover this tragic past and that accepting these lies, which were once themselves considered truths, is sometimes easier than seeking the truth. How Delbo addresses truth varies depending on her form. In her prose, truth is addressed straightforwardly as the words "vérité" and "vrai" are continuously used. In her verse, however, truth is dealt with through the content itself as Delbo raises more questions than finds answers. Together, we find that this doubling of literary forms reveals a larger picture of how Delbo challenges the notion of truth and how her search for answers is unending. Before we look directly as the textual examples of truth and doubling, we have to first address the difficult nature of not only knowing and telling the truth, but the near impossibility of conveying this reality to the general public.

Delbo sums up what has been her goal as a writer in the opening line of *La mémoire et les jours*: "Expliquer l'inexplicable" (11). Words no longer carry the same meaning after Auschwitz so Delbo has had to go beyond simple descriptions in order to bring the reader closer to her experiences. Delbo has constantly been aware of this immense gap between words and their 'true' meanings throughout her writing career. Even in her initial works about Auschwitz we find a constant disconnect between what is said and what is understood. In volume two of her Auschwitz trilogy, written fourteen years prior to *La memoire et les jours*, Delbo explains that "Les mots n'ont pas le même sens. Tu les entends dire: « J'ai failli tomber. J'ai eu peur. » Savent-ils ce que c'est, la peur? Ou bien: « J'ai faim. Je dois avoir une tablette de chocolat dans mon sac.» Ils disent: j'ai peur, j'ai faim, j'ai froid, j'ai soif, j'ai sommeil, j'ai mal, comme si ces mots-là n'avaient pas le moindre poids. [...] Tous leurs mots sont légers. Tous leurs mots sont faux" (*Mesure de nos jours* 60-61). It is as if the 'true' meaning of a word is only known in its most extreme condition. These quotations come from a short story entitled "Mado," which is followed by three poems that reiterate the frustration of trying to communicate with the general public. The difficulty she explains is that "nous ne savons pas répondre avec vos mots à vous/ et nos mots à nous" and therefore "vous croyez que nous ne savons pas/ répondre" (77). When

84 Although this chapter is entitled "Mado," we hear the voice and sentiments of Delbo as well.
Delbo tries to put into words what camp life was like she is met with mistrust and doubt as she notes: "Vous ne croyez pas ce que nous disons/parce que/ si c'était vrai/ ce que nous disons/ nous ne serions pas là pour le dire./ Il faut expliquer/ l'inexplicable" (78). These final words echo through time as she opens her final book, word for word, with her continued frustration of trying to convey a past experience that escapes comprehension.

**Telling the truth**

What is most interesting about this disbelief and suspicion from the public is that Delbo and her comrades begin to doubt their own experiences as well because they seem equally unbelievable to themselves. Robert Antelme reiterates this point in his Avant-propos saying "ce que nous avions à dire commençait alors à nous paraître inimaginable" (9). There is clearly a suggested breakdown in communication between those who survived camp life and those who remained home, and we find a common trend in survivors' writings of wanting to tell the truth as unbelievable as it may seem. Tadeusz Borowski, throughout his text *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, makes comments such as "If I had said to you [...] listen, take a million people, or two million, or three, kill them in such a way that no one knows about it, not even they themselves, enslave several hundred thousand more [...] surely you would have thought me mad. Except that I would probably not have said these things to you" or "I like to think that one day we shall have the courage to tell the world the whole truth and call it by its proper name" and "to tell the truth about mankind to those who do not know it" (112,122,175). What we find in common in these three writers is their conviction to tell about a reality, a set of lived experiences, that did take place despite any appearance that might suggest otherwise. Telling the truth is difficult for several reasons. First, it entails giving up a certain degree of hope in the goodness of mankind, a belief that the Nazi's attempted and succeeded in destroying for a certain period of time. Borowski observes that "we continue to long for a world in which there is love between men, peace, and serene deliverance from our baser instincts. This, I suppose, is the nature of youth" (122). Borowski describes our desire to live in a peaceful world as a characteristic of our youth, which implies innocence, immaturity, or even naivety. Auschwitz, which exposed the most extreme and horrific examples of human cruelty, stretches the meaning of words beyond their originally perceived boundaries and thus it seems difficult for survivors to articulate this reality and truth to others because it lies beyond the imagination of those who were not there.
Alain Parru remarks that "la parole des survivants porte en elle l'exigence d'une attention dont le monde normal est incapable" and he goes on to say that "Les mots, à Auschwitz, ont définitivement perdu leur innocence: leur intimité avec la mort les a délivrés du vide dont se nourrit la communication des vivants" (100).

Delbo articulates this distance in meaning by saying that her words are "vrai" and the words of those who did not experience the camps as "faux". By "faux," I believe Delbo is saying that those not in the camps have an inexact idea of reality that is based upon limited secondhand experiences, and not that they are using words falsely or erroneously. Telling the truth is difficult for a second reason because it involves sharing horrific experiences that perhaps many are ashamed to retell or they simply do not want to relive. To give one example, Borowski tells of running into an old friend in the camp who also works in the medical barracks. Borowski asks "what's new with you?" to which his friend replies "Not much. Just gassed up a Czech transport.[...] we've figured out a new way to burn people. Want to hear about it? [...] Well then, you take four little kids with plenty of hair on their heads, then stick their heads together and light the hair. The rest burns itself and in no time at all the whole business is gemacht" (142). His friend bursts out laughing explaining that "here in Auschwitz we must entertain ourselves in every way we can. Otherwise, who could stand it?" (142). Reading this conversation, we ask ourselves who could live with doing the things they did and above all, as a form of entertainment. If this is the truth that has to be told about Auschwitz, we can understand why it was and continues to be met with apprehension and distrust. No one wants to believe that one human can be this cruel to another, especially to children, although these writers all show us explicitly otherwise.

As the numbers of those killed at Nazi concentration camps reaches several millions, the extent of how cruel we can be is so overwhelming that it seems easier for some to choose not to believe it. Delbo tells in one newspaper article of receiving a letter from a university professor who asked the following questions: "Les chambres à gaz hitlériennes vous semblent-elles avoir été un mythe ou une réalité? (...) Votre opinion sur la possibilité d'existence de ces chambres a-t-elle varié depuis 1945 ou bien reste-t-elle aujourd'hui ce qu'elle était il y a vingt-neuf ans? Je n'ai pu, jusqu'à présent, découvrir de photographies de chambres à gaz qui paraissent présenter quelque garantie d'authenticité. [...] Auriez-vous connaissance de photographies [...]? " (Le Monde 1974). Answering back in a very sarcastic voice Delbo questions this need of physical

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evidence and authenticity by saying "Nierez-vous la Saint-Barthélemy, la prise de la Bastille et la bataille de Waterloo parce que le reporter de Paris-Match n'y était pas?" (Le Monde 1974).

Delbo questions how the thousands of bodies that were burned could have ever been photographed or even how to capture the odor that hung daily over the camp. She retorts saying "L'odeur n'est pas retenue par la photographie. [...] Excusez-moi monsieur, à Birkenau j'étais privée de tout, même d'un appareil photo" (Le Monde 1974)\(^5\). The truth at these camps could only be observed and brought back with the survivors. Telling the truth is difficult for yet another reason because lying, especially in the camps, appeases people for a period of time. The Nazis used this technique effectively in rounding up thousands of people per day by telling them they were simply relocating to a new place to live in the East\(^6\). In her 1965 text *Le convoi du 24 janvier*, Delbo even provides stories of families receiving multiple death certificates for the loved ones, and she includes a fac-simile of one of these notices stating that one woman died of stomach and intestinal complications and that the body was buried in a German cemetery (301).

Delbo explains the extremely insensitive process and the lies behind the death certificates: "un formulaire imprimé qu'il suffisait de remplir- où elles [les détenues] indiquaient comme date, celle du jour où elles transcrivaient, comme heure, n'importe laquelle, comme cause du décès l'une des quatre ou cinq maladies admises (maladies non contagieuses ou bénignes). Il leur arrivait, pour s'éviter réflexion, de donner la même maladie à tous les morts de tel jour, la maladie suivante le lendemain" (65). Although this process seems effective, Delbo explains that out of the 78 women in her convoy who died at Auschwitz, only 30 death certificates were ever sent to families (65).

So we find that prisoners lived in an environment of lies, were forced to lie on a regular basis, and then found themselves maintaining these lies back home about the camps. These embedded lies that continue to circulate are exactly why Holocaust writers so diligently state that

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\(^5\) To give the reader an idea of the odor Delbo is describing, the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau killed and burned "as many as 8,000 people in twenty-four hours. Sometimes, though, even this was not enough. [...] crematoria and pits together could burn 20,000 dead bodies in a single day" (Saari & Saari 362).

\(^6\) Christopher R. Browning in his book *Ordinary Men* focuses on Reserve Police Battalion 101, which was "one of the initial battalions [...] sent to Poland" in September 1939 once Germany had invaded (38). As the Third Reich annexed much of western Poland, this battalion was called upon to carry out "resettlement actions" which was "a demographic scheme of Hitler and Himmler's to "germanize" these newly annexed regions, that is, to populate them with "racially pure" Germans. This ultimately meant that "all Poles and other so-called undesirables- Jews and Gypsies- were to be expelled from the incorporated territories into central Poland" (39). However, "the 'racial purification' of the incorporated territories [...] was never achieved" because almost everyone was immediately shot by these Einsatzgruppen, which were also known as "resettlement commissions" (39-40).
their texts are based on true stories. They did not come home with photographs, only memories. Delbo, like many survivor-writers, realizes the difficult nature of not only telling but believing these stories, and thus she feels she must state that she is telling the truth. This is why she opens volume one of her Auschwitz trilogy with the following statement: "Aujourd'hui, je ne suis pas sûre que ce que j'ai écrit soit vrai. Je suis sure que c'est véridique" (Aucun de nous ne reviendra, 7). Fourteen years later, this same statement is echoed in La mémoire et les jours as she explains once again: "C'est pourquoi je dis aujourd'hui que, tout en sachant très bien que c'est véridique, je ne sais plus si c'est vrai" (14). Delbo explains this quotation in her 1975 interview with Francois Bott. She says that "Est véridique ce qui est conforme à la réalité. Le vrai enveloppe une part de subjectif, il me semble. [...] c'est tellement extraordinaire, imaginaire, que même moi je me demande si c'est vrai. Et quand nous étions là-bas, nous avions l'impression d'être dans un état second [...] et cependant il nous était impossible d'échapper une seconde, oui une seconde à la réalité [...] Le réel-irréel. [...] Auschwitz, ce n'est pas imaginaire" (44). It is almost as if Delbo is warning the reader of the extreme nature of the content, especially the graphic detail given throughout the Auschwitz trilogy. What is striking about these two quotations is that the reality of the camps, forty years after the fact, is still impossible to believe for Delbo. She even light-heartedly jokes that "ils ont bien fait de me tatouer un numéro sur le bras, sinon je ne serais pas sûre d'avoir été à Auschwitz. [...] Comme si j'avais oublié. Comme si on pouvait oublier. Seulement c'est tellement extraordinaire, imaginaire, que même moi je me demande si c'est vrai" (44). Even as readers we find ourselves questioning the veracity of these stories because most seem too horrific to believe. These statements, however, by Delbo and by other writers about their own difficulty in easily accepting these horrors, show us the complexity and struggle that must be overcome as a writer to tell the truth and do so in a way that continually captures the attention of the reader. Delbo's most effective technique is doubling of her literary forms. We move now to literary examples of how Delbo addresses and questions this shifting notion of truth. Whereas most literary critics say that Delbo's poetry gives us greater insight into the emotional realm, we find ultimately that the prose and poetry complement each other by each taking on a slightly different perspective than one another. Delbo works with the prose in this section to introduce and set up the general scene from a current day perspective, and then we delve into the past to witness the scene for ourselves in Delbo's verse.
Questioning Truth in Prose and Poetry

In *La mémoire et les jours*, Delbo uses the words "vérité" and "vrai" at least 17 times in 8 of the 21 texts. Whereas the word "mère" shows up in nearly all the stories, it is evident from not only the use of the words "vrai" and "vérité" but from the content itself that truth is a central theme of this text. Delbo reveals to us many untold truths about war, conflict, and prisoners of war that she has not revealed in as much detail before such as the situations in Spain with the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, the ghetto in Warsaw, the French involvement in Algeria and in Indochina, the Greek town of Kalavrita in which all the men and boys were assassinated by Nazi soldiers who subsequently burned down the town upon leaving, and the work camps that still existed in the USSR and in Siberia when Delbo was writing this text in 1985. The obstacles of maintaining truth begin to take on a slightly different meaning in this final text by Delbo than it originally had in her Auschwitz trilogy. In her initial texts, Delbo writes in great detail to reveal the daily realities and struggles of camp life that forces the reader to face the ugly and truth that remained silent for many years. This final text captures and reveals the same hidden truths about concentration camps and oppressive regimes, but we find a hint of exasperation as Delbo seems to be saying "Haven't you been listening to me?". Delbo reiterates her point that we, herself and her colleagues included, have been blind over the decades to the innocent victims and prisoners of war. Perhaps realizing that her own battle with brain cancer is coming to an end, keeping in mind that this final text was published months after her death, Delbo talks frankly about the effects of war on innocent people and the lack of involvement that the public has taken in helping these people. What is particularly interesting about the multiple uses of the words "vrai" and "vérité" in this text is that they all are found in the prose sections; neither word appears in the verse segments.

One of the initial short stories in *La mémoire et les jours* is told by a female survivor who has been led to believe for decades that her mother, deported six months prior to her, was gassed immediately upon entering Auschwitz-Birkenau. She explains: "récemment, j'ai appris que pour le convoi où était ma mère- son nom est bien dans la liste- il n'y a pas eu de sélection à l'arrivée

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87 For more information on the ethnic groups targeted for these work camps, specifically Soviet Germans, see Eric J. Schmalz's article "Reform, "rebirth" and regret: The rise and decline of the ethnic-German nationalist wiedergeburt movement in the USSR and CIS, 1987-1993". Also see historian J. Otto Pohl's article "The Deportation and Destruction of the German Minority in the USSR" that focuses on the same group which he calls Volga Germans as well as many other minority groups that were deported and killed until the fall of the USSR in 1991.
88 When I met with Charlotte Delbo's close friend and beneficiary, she informed me that Charlotte died of brain cancer. In Rosette Lamont's preface to *Days and Memory*, however, she notes that Charlotte died of lung cancer (ix).
[...] Cas exceptionnel" (31). When she first entered Auschwitz she describes endlessly searching for her mother: "Ce n'est que deux semaines au moins après l'arrivée que j'ai entendu parler des chambres à gaz. Bien sûr, je n'y ai pas cru. [...] Puis il m'a fallu admettre la vérité" (29). Having lived through the horrors of Auschwitz herself, she is overcome with grief that her mother had to endure the same ordeal. Until the present moment, she has been soulagée by the idea that her mother was gassed immediately and did not witness and live through the daily horrors of Auschwitz. After decades believing one reality, she now searches for "la vérité" (32). She repeats several times "maintenant, la vérité," "maintenant je me demande comment elle est morte," and "maintenant, je ne saurai jamais" (32-33). The narrator realizes that she is not the only one who has lived believing a lie. She explains that "Sans se donner le mot, tous les survivants ont dit la même chose: il, ou elle, sont morts du typhus. Dans le coma, sans souffrir. Pour ne pas faire de peine, enfin pour ne pas aggraver la peine" (33). Trying to calm down the narrator, the listener- who we assume is Delbo, says "cesses de te tourmenter. Qu'importe, aujourd'hui. Le temps a refermé les blessures" (33). The narrator, however, is offended by this trite expression saying "C'est toi qui dis cela? Toi? [...] aujourd'hui la blessure se rouvre et cela fait d'autant plus mal que la cicatrice avait durci" (33).

Hearing this recent news of her mother, which seems to be a missing piece to a complex puzzle, only leads the narrator to ask more questions. This piece of information reveals only a partial truth to this hidden past. Using an anonymous voice for the narrator, Delbo multiplies this situation to any number of survivors, herself included, who find themselves asking what happened to loved ones in the camps. At one point in the text, the "je" of the narrator becomes the voice of Charlotte Delbo as she thinks back momentarily to all the young men murdered in prisons and camps before they were even thirty years old saying "Mon mari a été fusillé" (31)89. Truth is spelled out plainly in this text with the notion that la vérité could be discovered, but this present-day search only raises more questions as to what really happened in the concentration camps since records were falsified or destroyed by the camp administration and families received erroneous information.

In a poem which closely follows this prose text, the word truth is never mentioned yet Delbo gives us a glimpse of the true realities of camp life. Standing in roll call for hours, she

89 Delbo explains in the Le convoi du 24 janvier that Georges was only 28 when he was shot at the Mont-Valérien prison May 23, 1943 (102).
recalls looking up at the stars which she observes to be "meurtrières comme tout ici" and which "transpercer jusqu'au cœur" (39). In the following verse, Delbo compares the stars to the situation of the women around her:

Toutes
des milliers
dehors dans la nuit
debout dans le froid de la nuit
bleues de froid
la poitrine serrée à faire mal
insensibles à force d'avoir mal
insensibles à la mort [...] (40).

The number of prisoners standing all morning and all night at roll call seems to be as numerous as the number of stars in the freezing night sky. The women themselves seem to transform into stars, frozen masses of gas, bleues de froid and insensibles à la mort. However, we know that death was very close for most of these women as they stand there thinking "encore tout un jour à venir/ à vivre jusqu'au soir" (40). For many prisoners, morning and evening roll call was just as treacherous as the daily work because if fatigue and boredom did not get them, the winter snow and summer heat further weakened their already fragile physical and mental states.

As Delbo closes this poem, she mentions a verse that has stuck in her mind by Blaise Cendrars. She remarks:

Sous le regard consterné des étoiles
un vers remontait à ma mémoire
[...]
Pourtant le vers me plaisait

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90 In volume one of Delbo's trilogy alone, Aucun de nous ne reviendra, she has three short stories named "L'appel" and one entitled "Le matin" which is just a small, yet powerful example of how difficult this daily task was.
et je le répétai
comme pour implo rer les étoiles
les supplier d'adoucir leur regard.

A mon retour j'ai relu les poèmes de Blaise Cendrars
je n'ai pas retrouvé le vers qui avait affleuré
transformé
à ma mémoire
de là-bas (40).

What is interesting about this reference to the poet Blaise Cendrars is that he fought in
World War I and lost an arm. A contemporary of Guillaume Apollinaire,91 another favorite poet
of Delbo's who wrote about war-time situations, Cendrars defines himself as a "bourlingueur,"92
which is a term that eventually spread to encompass one of the artistic movements of his day.
After World War I and suffering injuries, we find that Cendrars "sera de tous les combats
artistiques" (Darclos 375)93. An avid traveler most of his life, Cendrars adopts this naval term
bourlingueur (globetrotter), because it not only represents his worldly pursuits, but his quest to
successfully write poetry during the difficult period of time between the two world wars.
Cendrars is nowadays considered "le poète du monde moderne" (Doucy et al. 326)94. This term
bourlingueur also aptly applies to Charlotte Delbo as well who ends up traveling against the
forces of nature to not only survive Auschwitz but to successfully become a writer. Her writing,
like Cendrars', is strongly influenced by her travels to foreign lands, and it is their individual
literary styles which capture the reader and sets them apart from their contemporaries.

This poem, quite different from the prose texts it follows, initially seems to stand out not
only due to its form, but the time frame and content change as well, as we move from a present-
day situation in the prose text to a direct memory inside Auschwitz forty years earlier in the
poem. Delbo purposefully breaks the rhythm from one text to another as we witness her

91 Apollinaire is mentioned several times in Une Connaissance Inutile, volume two of her Aushwitz trilogy. Delbo
equally pays homage to Paul Claudel and Pierre Reverdy in epigraphs to volume two and three of her Aushwitz
trilogy. Both are poets and contemporaries of Cendrars and Apollinaire.
92 Le Petit Robert defines this term as "avancer péniblement contre le vent et la mer. Naviguer beaucoup".
93 See Xavier Darclos' Histoire de la Litterature Francaise.
94 See Doucy, Lesot, Sabbah, and Weil's Litterature: textes et methodes.
revisiting different moments and episodes in her past, near and far, which are, as she explains in her opening pages, "gravé dans ma mémoire" (13). This prose text and the poem which follows, however, work together as Delbo first sets up the scene with the prose and then takes us directly to a camp scene with her free verse. This doubling of the literary form provides the reader with multiple perspectives and multiple voices as these survivors share their experiences about their search for truth and the psychological toll it has taken on them over the years.

There is another unique aspect to these two texts, because we find that Delbo complements both of them with parallel texts told by different voices. The complementary prose text is told the second time by a male survivor who, completely opposite to the female survivor's experiences, is actually happy that he was deported to Auschwitz. He opens his story with the following lines: "Moi, je ne regrette pas d'y être allé. J'en suis même plutôt heureux. Cela te paraît bizarre? Tu vas comprendre. [...] Tu sais que j'ai été arrêté une première fois en même temps que ma mère" (35). Initially rounded up in 1942 at "le Vel d'hiv," the young boy's mother encourages him to hide his star and slowly escape, which he does. Two years later, however, he is arrested and deported to Auschwitz. After witnessing that at "Auschwitz, le système était rodé. Les chambres à gaz chaufaient à tout va," he knows that "Elle était surement déjà morte" (37, 38). He explains in his final paragraph why today he is happy he was deported: "Pour moi, ma mère n'a pas disparu dans un trou noir, elle n'a pas été happée par le néant, un endroit inimaginable qu'on peut fabriquer à partir des récits des déportés. Moi, je sais ce que ma mère a vécu, ce qu'elle a vu, ce qu'elle a souffert, et j'ai l'impression d'avoir partagé avec elle" (38). Expressing completely opposite feelings than the previous woman survivor, this male survivor finds comfort that he experienced what his mother went through. There is no wondering, no imagining what camp life was like, which is what families face who lost loved ones and who were never deported themselves; he knows the truth because he experienced it himself. In a sense both he and the woman above are the physical embodiment of what Delbo wants to capture in her writing: to provide a sense of having shared the experience of the deportees, whether or not this brings comfort or pain.

There is, as well, a complementary poem about the stars this time told by Delbo's mother, or perhaps it could be any mother who lost her child during the war. This poem is entitled "Ma mère, les étoiles" and it actually precedes the poem above. The reference to stars in the title is also a reference to the thousands of stars sewn on the Jewish prisoners' clothes. The poem
begins with the voice of Delbo's anguished mother: "Pendant tout le temps où tu étais là-bas/ que je ne savais pas où tu étais/ je n'ai pas fermé les volets de ma chambre [...] Je pensais/ Charlotte elle aussi regarde le ciel" (25). Her mother explains that she watched the same star every night imagining that Charlotte was watching the same one. She comes to depend upon this star because "Elle me disait que tu étais vivante" and the nights when she cannot see the star she expains "je te perdis de vue" (26). The voice of Delbo's mother ends saying "Maintenant que tu es rentrée/ je fermerai mes volets," but these are not the final lines of the poem (26). The verse ends with "Ma mère ne m'a plus jamais parlé du camp, ne m'a jamais/ rien demandé sur Auschwitz" (26). There is no direct reference as to who is speaking this final line but we can imagine that it is Charlotte since she is mentioned previously in the poem. There is a unique union that is created in this ending as Charlotte returns home and her voice follows that of her mother's as she finishes the poem and gives proof to her mother that her hopes and search for truth in the night sky were answered. Thus, we find initially a doubling of the literary form in the initial prose and poem which work in a complementary fashion shedding light on the realities of camp. Upon further investigation, we find an additional doubling with these second, parallel texts in which the prose and verse subsequently compliment the previous texts. In the prose texts, truth is spelled out plainly but its effect on the survivors forty years later reveals very opposing realities. In the two poems, there is a type of call and response between the two voices whereby the reader is given a direct glimpse into the daily struggles of a mother and daughter who each faces the unknown. Both women look to the stars for answers hoping that these shared objects communicate to them a truth that cannot be obtained any other way.

Whereas the theme of motherhood seems to be mentioned and dealt with by almost every narrative voice throughout this book, we find here that the theme of truth is actually the driving force behind Delbo's work. Whether or not the search for truth is ever fully complete, Delbo's writing is an attempt to reveal and maintain certain lived experiences despite the extremely difficult nature of revisiting very tragic and painful memories. As we just witnessed, Delbo exposes truth differently in her prose than in her verse. It is therefore her unique doubling of form and the interconnectivity of the prose and poetry that reveals certain truths about concentration camp life and other war-time experiences that might otherwise remain untold.
Conclusion

Delbo's final text, *La mémoire et les jours*, is a continual switch between prose and poetry with a few blended texts of prose-poetry and dialogue interspersed throughout. Using multiple forms is not a style unique to Delbo, but how and when Delbo employs these switches is unique because we find that these alternating forms accentuate the main themes of this text. This doubling of the literary form has become her signature style of writing because it allows Delbo the freedom and flexibility that she needs as an artist to create a fuller reality of what camp life was like and how it continues today to affect survivors and their families. Although most critics believe that Delbo switches from prose into poetry when she needs to express deeper emotions or capture a certain sentiment, I find that these analyses are somewhat limiting to what is really occurring in these literary forms. Delbo does not limit certain information to one literary form or the other; she uses them together to not only broaden a situation, giving the reader a different perspective, but she equally employs multiple forms to break up the monotony and difficulty of following a single form written in chronological order. In order for her to capture the realities of Auschwitz in a way that grabs and maintains the reader's attention, Delbo knows that she must create a work of art that pushes the boundary of typical survivor writing styles.

*La mémoire et les jours*, as we have seen in this chapter, is a compilation of multiple narrative forms. Mainly focusing on prose and poetry, we have followed Delbo's project to *donner à voir*. We find that Delbo uses prose and verse in a complementary, alternating manner as a means of accentuating the themes of motherhood and truth. Delbo, like some survivors, quickly realized how liberating writing could be as they returned home expected to fall back into the everyday routine. For some of the women in this text, they were able to start over, remarry, have children, etc., but for others, Delbo included, a major part of their life would end at Auschwitz alongside the hundreds of thousands who were murdered there. Delbo explains that "celle qui était au camp, ce n'est pas moi [...] Non, c'est trop incroyable. Et tout ce qui est arrivé à cette autre, celle d'Auschwitz, ne me touche pas [...] Je vis dans un être double" (*La mémoire et les jours* 13). This feeling of being split between two places and two times carries over directly into what has become Delbo's signature style of writing as she switches between prose and poetry in most of her texts. Over time, Delbo also realized how powerful literature could be when people listen. Gaining and maintaining an audience is the most difficult part of telling a
story. For Delbo, writing came easily as she stated in her interview with Lamont; she was a
natural writer, an artist, yet not many people wanted to hear about or even relive the
concentration camp experience. In her final words of this text, Delbo's tone of hope seems to
fade into exasperation, because she feels, to some degree, like she has been speaking to deaf ears
over the last four decades. She ends her writing career with these words: "Camarades, ô mes
camarades, nous qui avons juré de ne pas oublier nos morts, que pouvons-nous pour ces oubliés-
là? Il y en a qui sont encore vivants. Il y en a qui espèrent encore" (138). Having promised her
comrades that she would tell their story no matter what, Delbo used her artistic talent to tell her
story despite the complacency around her, but she did so in a creative style that not only captures
the reader's attention but pulls us into the experience itself. Focusing primarily on the daily
lived aspects of camp life, Delbo strayed away from the common narrative style found in much
of la literature concentrationnaire, which tends to focus on individual experiences in
chronological order, and found her voice as a writer by lending it to others in a style that allowed
the subject matter to dictate the literary form. Delbo has gone beyond the simple act of writing
about her camp experiences to create art which captures her individual, organic style of
switching between literary forms. This aesthetic style of writing, written in what many would
consider a style soutenu, captures Delbo's intentions of carrying the word for those who died in
her convoy, as well as her struggle to rebuild a life and find meaning in it despite the Nazi's
extreme efforts to dehumanize and bestialize her and her comrades.

Delbo's final book, La mémoire et les jours, published posthumously, is written in a very
similar manner and style to her Auschwitz trilogy, which she immediately began writing upon
her return to France. Where this book stands apart from others is its dominant themes of
motherhood and truth. Woven throughout each text, we find the struggle of women who have
lived and survived experiences beyond the imagination and who continue to question this
terrifying past on a daily basis. Delbo realizes each person's story is different and thus she allows
many of these women to speak to the reader directly, which leads not only to a mixture of
experiences, some very similar and some very unique, but to a mixture of narrative forms. I

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95 Delbo is making a reference to the prisoners still working in the gold mines in Kolyma in the 1980s. These mines
are found in the far eastern region of Russia known as Siberia (137-138).
96 It is worth mentioning that Delbo uses an elevated style of writing, style soutenu, not only in her phrasing but also
in her choice of vocabulary. She rarely uses colloquial expressions like many of her contemporaries who wrote
about camp life, most notably Robert Antelme who famously opens his text L'espèce humaine, with "Je suis allé
pisser" (15).
argue that Delbo uses these multiple narrative forms in conjunction with one another as a blended, doubling of forms, in order to capture both a personal narrative and a broader, universal description that resonates with the reader. To maintain the reader's attention as Charlotte and her comrades recount horror after horror, it is necessary for Delbo to creatively intertwine not only her narrative forms but her themes of motherhood and truth. To achieve this interconnectivity, Delbo often pairs together a prose text and a poem. We have also seen, however, poems tied together, prose texts which stand alone, and vice versa. With the two themes of motherhood and truth, these two narrative forms take on slightly different roles, but ultimately the forms complement each other. Whereas most critics argue that Delbo's verse is used to "express personal emotions or thoughts and communicate them more forcibly to her reader,"97 I find that her poetry actually captures a more universal experience as Delbo takes us directly into a situation as if we were standing there observing these realities next to her. Her prose, on the other hand, is typically narrated by individuals who have their own personal, unique experiences, which might directly oppose the following narrative or even the experiences of the readers. Although both narrative forms can stand alone, Delbo brings the forms together to first capture and honor the personal narrative and then she universalizes this unique experience so that it reaches a larger audience. I argue that both narrative forms capture equally well the emotions and thoughts of the given situation, while accentuating the two main themes of the book.

97 See Nicole Thatcher's *A Literary Analysis of Charlotte Delbo's Concentration Camp Re-presentation.*
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

As we have seen in the previous three chapters, Delbo uses a multitude of literary genres, voices, and time frames, which I have labeled "doubling," to create a unique narrative strategy which not only captures her concentration camp experiences and those of her comrades, but it equally captures her struggle as a writer to portray these experiences aesthetically so that they will resonate with readers for generations to come. I find that we, the readers, learn more from these survivors' experiences if they offer us multiple perspectives, conflicting viewpoints, as well as individual struggles within a language that grabs hold of and maintains our attention because of the beauty of its style and execution. I agree with Brett Kaplan who argues that it is precisely the aesthetic dimension or what she labels "unwanted beauty" of survivors' works that "provokes us to engage with them in order to deepen the search for Holocaust understanding" (20). The long-term unease of recognizing and labeling Holocaust writing as aesthetically pleasing has been largely influenced by the famous maxim in 1949 by Theodor Adorno that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." Whereas most people would agree that there is something morally and ethically wrong with finding pleasure in other people's suffering, Kaplan argues that finding beauty in survivors' writings comes from "the complexity of artistic representations that invite us to think critically of the Nazi genocide. Thus, whereas Adorno feared crass exploitation of the Holocaust by a callous culture industry, I celebrate the tenacity of survivors and others who write movingly, and indeed beautifully, about the worst experiences" (21). Therefore we are not finding beauty in the suffering itself, but rather in the creative and artistic style that arises in articulating these horrific experiences. I would even argue that the more unique the artistic form,
the more involved readers become in the text as we are drawn both into the intricate scene being described and into the artistic process of capturing this almost indescribable moment. This absorption into an intense scene both on an emotional and aesthetic level encourages the reader to form new memories that go beyond their typical notions of concentration camp experiences.  

In chapter two of this dissertation, we took a close look at how Delbo creates and uses multiple narrative voices in what I call "doubling of the subject," in an effort to highlight the difficulty of readjusting to life after the concentration camps. Focusing mainly on Delbo's trilogy _Auschwitz et après_, we found that Delbo shares her first person narrative voice with mainly women and a few men who survived the atrocities of World War II and Nazi concentration camps. Delbo could have easily limited her narratives to her personal experiences, which is a common practice in many Holocaust narratives. Yet, she chooses to share her narrative voice with others, both as an effort to tell their story and to creatively capture the emotional aspects of camp life. These first-person accounts of events gave us direct insight into the extreme situations of the camps, which would have otherwise seemed unbelievable. Sharing her first-person voice with other survivors not only allows us to witness these events, but it also gives us access to the prisoners' personal thoughts and emotions so that the experience becomes complete as we see and feel the extreme nature of the camps. Doubling of the subject allows Delbo to incorporate a multitude of narrative voices and a wide range of experiences that would have otherwise gone untold.

In chapter three, we looked at how Delbo introduced characters that were already pre-established from Classical French literature and theater in what I call "doubling of the literary setting." Focusing mainly on Delbo's 1977 text _Spectres, mes compagnons_, we witnessed the characters Alceste, Électre, and Ondine enter a completely new literary setting alongside Delbo's own literary persona Charlotte. Having brought with them their historical and social backgrounds as well as their personality and mannerisms, Delbo skillfully rewrote these characters into her modern-day text as guides and mentors because at some point in their fictional lives they experienced similar tragedies as Charlotte, in particular the loss of a lover or loved one. Delbo brought these characters into this epistolary-style text to make sure that her story of mourning and loss did not become another Holocaust statistic, but rather a literary text that would stand out and be remembered.

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100 For a broader discussion of poetry and its aesthetic appeal, see Susan Gubar's 2003 text _Poetry after Auschwitz_.

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In chapter four, we looked at how and when Delbo switches between prose and poetry and in what I call "doubling of the literary forms." Focusing mainly on Delbo's final text *La Mémoire et les jours*, published posthumously in 1985, we found that Delbo allows the stories and themes of her text to dictate her literary form. The two themes that dominated this text were motherhood and truth. Delbo's writing style is best known and characterized by her frequent changes in literary form, yet switching between prose and poetry is not a style unique to Delbo. How and when Delbo uses these switches is unique. Woven throughout each text, we saw the struggle of women who have lived and survived experiences beyond the imagination and who continued, even after their return home, to question this terrifying past on a daily basis. Delbo recognized the uniqueness behind each person's story and thus she allowed many of these women to speak directly to the reader. We followed not only a mixture of similar and contradictory experiences, but to a mixture of narrative forms. I argued in this chapter that Delbo used these multiple narrative forms in conjunction with one another, although they could stand alone, in order to capture both a personal narrative and a broader, universal description that resonates with the reader. In closely studying the context of her poems and prose, I found that Delbo's prose, which was narrated by various individuals and their own personal, unique experiences, captured a very personal, individualized experience. Delbo's poetry, on the other hand, was often narrated by Delbo who took us directly back to events that were witnessed and experienced by groups of women, sometimes named and sometimes left anonymous, which I argued captured a universal experience. Whereas most critics argue that Delbo must supplement her prose, because her verse *expresses personal emotions*, it was important to show that both narrative forms captured equally well the emotions and thoughts of a given situation. What we found ultimately is that Delbo creatively intertwined these two narrative forms to capture both an individual and a universal message and to accentuate the themes of motherhood and truth.

**A form of women's writing**

Focusing now on Delbo's narrative style, several questions emerge: How do we make sense of Delbo's narrative style? How can we better understand these tragic experiences through doubling? In searching for these answers, I have wondered to what extent Delbo's writing can be
considered a form of women's writing or écriture féminine. Would Delbo's definition of women's writing revolve around her unique use of doubling? Written by a woman about women, Delbo's writing, I argue, can be considered a form of women's writing more so than its general classification as littérature concentrationnaire. It is beyond the scope of this text to delve into the multiple definitions and writers who continue to debate the idea of écriture féminine. I choose to define écriture féminine as women's writing to avoid the debate on whether féminine when translated into English implies either or both of its equivalents in French: female in a biological sense or feminine in a social or cultural sense. This debate asks many more questions than I can address in terms of what feminine actually means and who has access to it. Using a more generalized term, Elizabeth Fallaize suggests, "does not imply a specific language available to women which would not be available to men" (10)\textsuperscript{101}. Stepping aside from arguments that revolve around the meanings of feminine, I simply propose that Delbo has chosen to write specifically about women's experiences and only on very rare occasions does she lend her narrative voice to male survivors. It could be argued that Delbo's environment in the concentration camps limited her knowledge of men's experiences, but this is not the case. Delbo mentions "les hommes" on several occasions in her texts and their camp experiences that she witnessed on a daily basis, and since she wrote most of her texts decades after the liberation of these camps, she undoubtedly met and spoke with male survivors at some time during her writing career, which is evident in the few moments they narrate their experiences. Thus it is by choice that Delbo only briefly touches on the male camp experience. Additionally, Delbo better understood the social and personal situation of women in the camp and it is for this reason as well that she highlights almost only women and their experiences in her works\textsuperscript{102}.

Nicole Thatcher explains that "Par tradition, la mémoire de guerre est avant tout masculine: elle est formée par les représentations des hommes qui ont participé aux combats" (92)\textsuperscript{103}. Women, on the other hand, and "leurs représentations de la guerre ne jouent qu'un rôle

\textsuperscript{101} See Elizabeth Fallaize's French Women's Writing: Recent fiction.
\textsuperscript{102} For a larger study on the role of gender in Holocaust writings see Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman's book Women in the Holocaust. For a selection of women's writing see Carol Rittner and John K. Roth's book Women and the Holocaust: Different Voices.
\textsuperscript{103} See Nicole Thatcher's article "La Mémoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale". For an in-depth look at women's roles during the war and in combat see Évelyne Morin-Routureau's book Combat des femmes: 1939-1945. Her arguments echo those of Thatcher's that women tended to down-play their roles and thus gained little compensation or recognition after the war.
secondaire dans la formation de la mémoire culturelle" (92). Delbo, a highly educated woman in both literature and in theater, knew she had to be the voice of the women in her convoy. However, the fact that "les récits de la guerre [...] ont été avant tout écrits par des hommes," leads Thatcher to believe that this social trend might explain the twenty year delay between the time that Delbo began writing about her experiences in 1946 and when she eventually published volume one of her Auschwitz trilogy in 1965. Despite this long delay, Delbo knew she, in particular, could most accurately capture the everyday life of the women in her convoy, because she was there suffering with them and she lived what she wrote. Delbo's writing, for this reason, is two-fold. Not only do we gain a glimpse into the social and personal situations of women in the camps with whom Delbo lived, but we follow Delbo's own situation as well, as she returns home to deal with her own personal losses.

In her 1999 book Women's Holocaust Writing, S. Lillian Kremer defines what she believes are gender-specific themes that separate male Holocaust writing from female Holocaust writing. She begins with an argument, similar to that of Thatcher's above, that many female literary critics agree upon which is that "Holocaust historiography and literary criticism, like virtually every aspect of Western civilization, has typically been male-centered" (1). She adds that the male experience is what is seen as "normative" and thus placing women's experiences in "the margins" (1). Kremer lists a range of gender-specific themes that are addressed in women's writing such as "maternity, fertility, sexual assault, amenorrhea, fear of sterilization, and "crimes" of pregnancy and childbirth" (5). Some of these topics that are specific to women's gendered experiences are mentioned in Delbo's texts but they are not the main focus. This exclusion could be due to the fact that Delbo and her convoy were "les seules qui y fussent sous l'étiquette « politique». Les autres y étaient sous l'étiquette «juif». [...] Pour la Gestapo, c'était un juif, jamais un politique. Les juifs n'avaient plus de nationalité. [...] La différence était grande, dès l'arrivée" (Le convoi 16). Not only did the Jews have to go through the initial selection process of being admitted to a camp or being sent to the gas chamber, but Delbo explains that their blocks were "plus surpeuplés que les autres" and that they had "plus souvent que nous des punitions générales" (16). Although Delbo and her colleagues suffered greatly and most died, it appears that their experiences were slightly different from the Jews around them. Delbo does capture, nonetheless, a female gendered experience in her writing, in particular the aspects of motherhood that resonate in all her texts and particularly dominate La mémoire et les jours.
Delbo also addresses in many of her texts what Kremer describes as "the cooperative networks women prisoners developed, and the manner in which female cooperation and interdependence contributed to survival" (4). I am hesitant to suggest that male survivors did not rely on cooperation and interdependence for survival as much as women did, but male writers are perhaps more reluctant to focus on these aspects of their camp experiences. Kremer argues that "Although there is testimonial evidence and fictional representation of cooperative association among male inmates, the emphasis women survivors and writers place on bonding and reciprocal support is unparalleled in male writing. [...] In male Holocaust writing interdependence is exceptional rather than commonplace" (18). I generally agree with Kremer's arguments that male and female writers focus on different gendered experiences, but I find that what separates writers is ultimately their style. Delbo's unique style of doubling captures what are predominantly women's camp experiences.

Although male writers seem to be criticized for "ignor[ing] the gender-specific experience of female prisoners," I think this criticism is unjust in assuming that male writers should focus on or even mention female experiences (Kremer 4). Holocaust writers, both men and women, draw upon their personal, lived experiences and thus highlight their own gender-specific themes in their narratives. Kremer argues that in male narratives "women appear as minor figures and often as helpless victims" (5). We can easily argue that in female narratives males appear the same way as we see in Delbo's texts. I do agree with Kremer, however, that most literary critics are male and that most of the well-known Holocaust writers that come to mind are men. This attention is slowly shifting and more and more women writers are being discussed and validated. A great example of this shift is Charlotte Delbo herself, who recently had a library in the heart of Paris renamed after her, La Bibliothèque Charlotte Delbo104. This physical monument alongside her own literary texts, which are growing in popularity among readers and critics, is a good indication that something within Delbo's artistic style is grabbing onto and maintaining the public's attention.

Lawrence Langer in his introduction to the English translation of Auschwitz et après, recalls a story that Charlotte Delbo told him. It seems fitting to conclude with this situation because it captures on the one hand the desire of our modern-day society to move on and bury

104 Formally known as the Bibliothèque Vivienne, the library was renamed after Charlotte and reopened February 5, 2008 and is dedicated to fiction. Information can be found at Paris' municipal library website: http://www.paris.fr/portal/loisirs/Portal.lut?page_id=7973
the horrific memories of Auschwitz and on the other hand the gifted writers like Charlotte Delbo, whose writings, like works of art, have withstood the pressure to silence the atrocities of the Holocaust. It also captures one final time the peculiar nature of feeling like un être double: "Charlotte Delbo told me that several years after the war the government held a commemorative ceremony for some of the French men and women who died in the Nazi camps. While sitting in the audience, she was stunned to hear from the podium her own name being read. It seemed a bizarre perversion of her discovery that one could die in Auschwitz and still be alive. Her paralysis lasted only an instant; then she modestly raised her hand and murmured, "Non, Monsieur: présente" (Langer, xviii).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Virginia Osborn graduated from Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas in 1999 with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a minor in Biology. From June 1999 to July 2001, she taught English as a Second Language with the Peace Corps in Wlodawa, Poland. During this time, she began to learn first-hand about the impact of World War II in this country. She was able to visit several concentration and extermination camps located in Eastern Poland. It was also during this time that she became friends with two French teachers and decided to pursue her studies in French upon returning home to the United States. In 2006, Virginia received her Master's degree in French with a specialization in Second Language Acquisition under the direction of Dr. Gretchen Sunderman. In 2011, she received her Doctor of Philosophy in French with a concentration in twentieth century literature under the direction of Dr. William Cloonan. Her research interests include second language acquisition, pedagogy, twentieth-century French literature, twentieth-century French women writers, Holocaust literature, and women's writing.