Testifying, Silencing, Monumentalizing, Swallowing: Coming to Terms with *In Memory’s Kitchen*

Rona Kaufman

In her article in *Newsweek*, Laura Shapiro tells us that Mina “Pachter’s chocolate cake is cooling on [her] kitchen counter as [she] write[s]” (73). The article is called “Hope from Recipes of Resistance,” and it is about a collection of recipes written by Jewish women in Terezin, a Czech concentration camp/ghetto during World War II. Pachter is the woman who organized the collection, and she is the mother of the woman, Anny Stern, for whom the collection, now published as *In Memory’s Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin*, was intended. Shapiro wants to call attention to the bittersweetness of the project before her. It’s “dense and chocolatey, but it’s not sweet,” she writes. “[Y]ou can taste the tang of the lemon” (73). And while she says that about the cake, she clearly speaks of the book, too. What we always know about these recipes is that they are the recipes of ghosts—women who are no longer alive, barely alive when they wrote, but who speak to us through the language of food. Shapiro acknowledges their deaths, but what she wants to insist on is that we honor the recipe writers’ lives, these women “who saw beyond indescribable horror and sent the food of their hearts to nourish ours” (73).

It is a complicated nourishment. I have to admit that when I read that Shapiro was going to eat the cake that came from one of the recipes, I felt a little sick to my stomach. I imagined that she was eating not Pachter’s torte but Pachter’s body. The recipes in this cookbook are never straightforwardly recipes. Even as Shapiro writes of honoring the woman by making her torte, she admits that she needs an intermediary to do so: she needs to ask the book’s translator, Bianca Steiner Brown, to translate...
further, to translate beyond the page, to translate privately, for Pachter Torte, "[I] like most of the recipes . . . is written in such abbreviated fashion that few Americans today could cook from it" (73). Brown must give her more advice to make the recipe "usable" (73). I suppose it is this insistence on use that strikes me, that sickens me. I tend to see these recipes not as useful, practical guides but as testimony. I'm tempted to call these recipes sacred text—therefore untouchable, unusable. I want these recipes to be as sacred as other texts in Judaism—the Torah in the ark, prayer scrolls in mezuzahs—texts that are meant to guide the everyday certainly but are always encased behind protective and ornamental shields. Read and honor—but do not touch. Even still, I worry that, as I ask for protection from others' hands, my own hands will nevertheless mold the object into my vision of what I want it to be.

Historians have a difficult time knowing exactly what to call Terezin (in German, Theresienstadt): some see it as a ghetto, others as a concentration camp, others as a transit camp. The Nazis marketed it as a model ghetto—the Paradise Ghetto; for a long time, Terezin served as a holding place for artists, musicians, intellectuals—people whose absence, according to Cara De Silva, the editor of In Memory's Kitchen, would be too noteworthy to go without remark. In bleak conditions, these people could continue to paint and perform and lecture. Perhaps Terezin is most famous for being the place that the Nazis brought the Red Cross into, at the Danish government's request, in order to show them that they were being good to their Jews. They showed them a place where people where unhappy but living; they showed them a place with art and scholarship and children. And food. Part of the Nazi's ruse was the appearance of consumable products, so that merchandise was displayed in store windows, so that a cafe and a dining hall appeared ready to serve. Of course, none of the products were actually available for consumption. The visit was so deceptively successful that the Nazis made a propaganda film about the Paradise Ghetto. They called it, "The Fuhrer Gives the Jews a Town."

But this place was, of course, closer to Hell than to Paradise. Jews died there and from there. According to Michael Berenbaum, the director of the U.S. Holocaust Research Institute and the man who wrote the forward to In Memory's Kitchen, out of the 144,000 Jews deported to Terezin, 33,000 died there and 88,000 were then deported to Auschwitz (x). The situation for children was especially bleak: out of 15,000 sent to the camp, 100 survived. Berenbaum notes that that marks the survival rate for children at one-half of one percent (x). Living conditions were
crowded: 54,000 Jews lived in a space that had housed, just a year before, 7,000 Czechs. Food was scarce. Jewish leaders decided that food would not be rationed equally, that laborers and children would get the most and that the elderly would get the least. Many old people suffered from hunger edema. Many old people starved. A crematorium had to be built to handle the large number of dead bodies; it was designed to handle 190 corpses a day.

Mina Pachter entered the camp in 1942 when she was 70 years old. She died of malnutrition on Yom Kippur, the day of fasting, in 1944. Her daughter, Anny Stern, as well as her son-in-law and her grandson, had managed to get visas to Palestine. Pachter was reluctant to try to get out with them, asking what could happen to an old woman. She collected the recipes while she was in Terezin and, when she knew she was going to die, asked a friend, if he were to survive, to get the manuscript to her daughter in Palestine. The man did survive but could not find the daughter; before he died, he asked another friend to take over his job as deliverer. In 1969 in Manhattan, a stranger telephoned Anny Stern and said, “I have a package for you from your mother” (De Silva xxv). Stern said she could not examine the contents of the package for many years: “It was something holy,” she said. “After all those years, it was like her hand was reaching out to me from long ago” (xxvii). When Stern decided to try to publish the book, it was shopped around to 35 different publishers before Jason Aronson decided to take it on. De Silva said, “No one seemed to ‘get it.’ And no one knew how to sell it... They seemed to think of it as ‘The Holocaust Cookbook,’ and were horrified by the concept of linking food and the Holocaust” (Publishers Weekly 18).

Of all the denotations used to conceptualize the cookbook—something holy, something to get, something to sell—its function as link between food and the Holocaust seems easiest to understand. Jews living in camps and ghettos, starving, were obsessed with food. Hunger was a perpetual state of being, so much so that Primo Levi can use it as a metaphor for (mis)communication in the camps. He writes in The Drowned and the Saved about the multiple languages around him in Auschwitz:

> These foreign voices became engraved on our memories as on a blank tape; in the same manner, a famished stomach rapidly assimilates even indigestible food... They also were the mental equivalent of our bodily need for nourishment, which drove us to search for potato peelings around the kitchens: little more than nothing, better than nothing. Also the undernourished brain suffers from a specific hunger of its own. (94–95)
Ruth Schwertfeger writes in *Women of Theresienstadt, Voices from a Concentration Camp*, “Food, memories of it, missing it, craving it, dreaming of it, in short, the obsession with food colours all the Theresienstadt memoirs” (38). She quotes one survivor as saying, “[W]e had the wildest imagination about what we would cook. I don’t think I ever became so good a cook as I was with my mouth” (38). The obsession with food led to the production of cookbooks. De Silva notes that *In Memory’s Kitchen* is not the only cookbook of its kind. At least four other “Holocaust Cookbooks” have been discovered, one a “fantasy” cookbook by children. She speculates that once Yad Vashem in Israel finishes electronically cataloging its holdings and adds “food” to its index list, more such artifacts will be found. Sabina Margulies tells De Silva, “If we had had paper at Auschwitz, we would have written recipes down there, too. And if we had been able to write them down we would have had a cookbook of thousands of pages” (xxix). Thoughts of food, fantasies of food, recollections of food speak to the trauma of starvation.

It’s hard not to think about the recipes symbolically. It’s hard to think of them literally. For one thing, the recipes themselves resist such readings. They almost always reflect the position of the writer at the time of the writing; they are almost always impossible to follow. Ingredients are left out. Steps are skipped or listed out of order. Grammar is messy. The recipes don’t necessarily speak to Jewishness: some are not Kosher. They reflect war rations—eggs are almost always optional, sometimes completely omitted. Pachter writes of her *Gefüllte Eier*: “let fantasy run free” (52). And fantasy, really, was all they had. De Silva writes, “Though written in recipes, the collective memoir that Mina and her friends left behind is in some ways as revealing as prose. It may not impart biographical details, but if we didn’t already know the condition its authors were in and the circumstances under which their cookbook had been created we could still discern their distress from the recipes. They, too, bear witness” (xl–xli). She explains her editorial theory: “To alter the recipes would be to violate history and to misrepresent the experiences of the women who produced them. Translations, therefore, have been kept as literal as possible, grammatical errors have been retained, and although recipes have been clarified where necessary (clarifications always appear in brackets), they have not been corrected” (xlii).

Laura Shapiro clearly wants to resist this kind of reading of the cookbook. She wants use. She acknowledges that the book “is being published as a Holocaust document, of course, not as a guide to making strudels and tortes. Yet surely a guide was just what these women wanted
to produce” (73). Even Shapiro, however, cannot keep her reading on a literal level. She argues that for the women to write the recipes “down was to insist on a real-world future, to insist that their daughters would receive their inheritance. The manuscript labeled simply Kochbuch was a powerful symbol of their resistance to annihilation” (73). Lore Dickenstein, in the New York Times Book Review, says directly, “While there are 70 recipes, this is not a cookbook. It is a Holocaust document. . . . Writing down these recipes was an act of defiance and resistance, a means of identification in a dehumanized world. It was a life force in the face of death” (7).

The cookbook as inheritance. As memoir. As resistance. As life force. As testimony.

Berenbaum writes that “this work—unlike conventional cookbooks—is not to be savored for its culinary offerings but for the insight it gives us in understanding the extraordinary capacity of the human spirit to transcend its surroundings, to defy dehumanization, and to dream of the past and of the future” (xvi). The cookbook always pulls in both directions: to be a celebration and to be a monument. But I think it’s important—vital, essential, ethical—to think about how dehumanization couldn’t always be defied, to think about how dreams of the past and of the future weren’t always enough. I want to learn the lesson of Anne Frank.

When The Diary of Anne Frank was first turned into a play, Bruno Bettelheim, himself a concentration camp survivor, wrote an article about the diary and the play’s reception. In this article, called “The Ignored Lesson of Anne Frank,” Bettelheim argues many points, some of which he says he does not want to. Most compelling is his condemnation of the final line in the play, a voice-over by Anne uttering a line she wrote early in her diary’s life: “I still believe that people are good at heart.” Bettelheim writes, “This improbable sentiment is supposedly from a girl who had been starved to death, had watched her sister meet the same fate before she did, knew that her mother had been murdered, and had watched untold thousands of adults and children being killed. This statement is not justified by anything Anne actually told her diary” (653). The play, for all intents and purposes, gives Anne the last word, something that history decidedly did not. Never mind that it’s a hopeful, optimistic last word. “And if all men are good,” Bettelheim writes, “then indeed we can all go on with living our lives as we have been accustomed to in times of undisturbed safety and can afford to forget about Auschwitz” (653). The play lets us forget the horror; the play lets us lie.
The Broadway revival of "The Diary of Anne Frank" in 1997 occasions Cynthia Ozick's New Yorker article, "Who Owns Anne Frank?" Ozick picks up where Bettelheim leaves off (though she never discusses, as Bettelheim does, the choices the Franks made in hiding) and examines the commodification of Anne Frank. It's no longer the last line that angers: it's the editing, the packaging, the marketing. It's the falsified, fairytale-ized legacy of Anne Frank, which insists on her story as "a song to life." "Its reputation for uplift is, to say it plainly, nonsensical," Ozick writes. "Anne Frank's written narrative, moreover, is not the story of Anne Frank, and never has been" (78). Ozick argues that "[a] deeply truth-telling work has been turned into an instrument of partial truth, surrogate truth, or anti-truth" (78). So many people have spoken for Anne, so many have stolen and twisted the words from her hand, that Ozick wonders if it would have been better if the diary had died with her: "It may be shocking to think this (I am shocked as I think it), but one can imagine a still more salvational outcome: Anne Frank's diary burned, vanished, lost—saved from a world that made of it all things, some of them true, while floating lightly over the heavier truth of named and inhabited evil" (87).

I want to heed these lessons. What both Bettelheim and Ozick do is question the frame of the story, question how the story is told and heard, how the story is consumed, who forces the consumption. One obvious thing that the recipes and the diary have in common is that they've been commodified—and that they "got out" when their authors didn't, so that the authors can be easily spoken for. I'm completely aware of the cookbook's commodification because I bought it. I'm aware that it's been edited, that it's been translated. I'm aware of what part of the bookstore I would go to buy it (Judaica, not cooking), and I'm aware that it's something that gets publicized and marketed. Still, it's a shock to read in Publishers Weekly about the cookbook's commercial success, or commercial possibilities. The article wants to take as its focus the "mitzvah" angle of the cookbook—the idea that so many people who worked on the book did so out of a sense of doing G-d's will—but it nevertheless comes down to numbers. So that a vice-president at Dell, who publishes the trade paperback version of the book, can time the publication in the fall and say, "I believe there is a huge universe for this book, for gift-giving during the Jewish holidays" (18; emphasis added). And so that the publisher of the hardcover can worry about distinguishing between media attention and buyer demand. One person's sacred text, I suppose, is another person's paycheck—and maybe being aware of the commodification of the "holy" lets us bring the text back to earth. Anyone who thinks Anne Frank's text
was sacred knows nothing about its publishing history, and anyone who thinks Mina Pachter's recipes don't have a use to some people beyond cooking is fooling herself. (I am fooling myself.)

But the cookbook and the diary differ in at least two significant ways. The first is one of genre: Anne Frank's diary is a memoir, a linear telling. It is symbolic: it means. One reason that Bettelheim and Ozick can get so angry at the production and emendation of the diary is that the representation goes contrary to what Anne herself has said. And Anne always writes to be read: she imagines a future for her diary, and she edits throughout. The cookbook, on the other hand, when taken as a cookbook, is functional. It means, but its meaning never goes beyond the boundaries of its accumulated ingredients. When seen as a memoir, though, the way De Silva sees it, or as resistance or celebration or triumph, the way many others see it, the recipes lie in the realm of semiotics. They rely on a different system of meaning, a different way of knowing. Alone, they cannot and do not tell. The second important difference is that the diary is not, according to Ozick, a Holocaust document, and the cookbook is. For Ozick, the material point is where the text was written:

The diary is taken to be a Holocaust document; that is overriding what it is not. . . . The diary is incomplete, truncated, broken off—or, rather, it is completed by Westerbork (the hellish transit camp in Holland from which Dutch Jews were deported), and by Auschwitz, and by the fatal winds of Bergen-Belsen. It is here, and not in the “secret annex,” that the crimes we have come to call the Holocaust were enacted. (78)

The cookbook, though, was written from the inside, from the scene of the crime. Perhaps the points that the recipes (as something else) are not written linearly and that they are written from the site of the Holocaust work together. One premise forces the other.

Shoshana Felman would argue so, I think. In an amazing study of Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah, Felman talks about the complicated issue of testimony. She says that to testify is to take responsibility for the truth: “to take responsibility—in speech—for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences” (204). She is interested mostly in the gaps—the omissions of what is not (or cannot be) seen; she is interested in what is not (or cannot be) told. So much of testimony is made up of silence. The difficulty is that it is often impossible to testify from within the trauma. Testimony from the inside speaks to
"the impossibility of telling" (224). The inside cannot testify on its own because it cannot speak its trauma in a language the outside can hear or understand, because as the witness has been deemed other, all sounds are heard as "mere noise" (231). Felman writes, "It is impossible to testify from the inside because the inside has no voice" (231). The outside, however, cannot testify either because it cannot know the truth of the trauma. But the two can work together—must work together—to articulate the horror. The inside and the outside need to be set "in motion and in dialogue with one another" (232). Shoah works as testimony, Felman argues, because it is "neither simply inside nor simply outside, but paradoxically, both inside and outside: [it] create[s] a connection that did not exist during the war and does not exist today . . . " (232). Silence speaks in the oscillation between outside and inside, between the outsider and the insider. Testimony from within needs a framework to be heard as testimony.

I hear the recipes. I spent a lot of time at the beginning of this paper quoting from the pages that come between the cover and the recipes, looking at how the reader is guided into a particular way of seeing. Berenbaum and De Silva want the cookbook to be seen as a Holocaust document. They oscillate between what to do with that document—celebrate the human spirit, condemn an evil empire—but they offer a translation for the recipes, for "mere noise." Without that frame, without the preface and the introduction, the recipes testify to nothing. They never name their trauma. They never say, "This is what has happened." They come out of trauma—their recording comes out of trauma—but without the book's frame it is impossible to recognize it as such. We need a story to point, to show, to explain. And what we get is an outsider, an editor, as our guide. As De Silva reminds us, "[I]f we didn't already know the condition its authors were in and the circumstances under which their cookbook had been created, we could still discern their distress from the recipes. They, too, bear witness" (xl–xli). But she makes sure that we know about the conditions and the circumstances. We need to—for without them, we would not be able to read "hastily written" and "distressfully written." We need to go back and forth, back and forth, between the outsider, the editor, and the insider, the women. We have many acts of translation. We have many readings of silence.

But then we have The Diary of Anne Frank. Then we have Felman's Paul de Man chapter. We can see the dangers of filling silence. We can see the danger of the outsider—the danger of the outsider distorting the insider's testimony.
Because in the same book that houses her beautiful and smart article on the importance and complications of bearing witness, Felman bears false witness. She positions herself as resurrector of Paul de Man. After his death, after his anti-Semitic articles written in Belgium for a Nazi-run newspaper during World War II are exposed, after his lifelong silence about them is questioned, Felman uses her theory of testimony emanating out of silence as a way not only to excuse de Man but to defend and valorize him. What is at issue is de Man’s silence on his anti-Semitic writings. She argues that de Man’s direct silence on the Holocaust doesn’t matter because his indirect writing said all that could be said. She writes, “Indeed, in his afterlife as Ishmael, in his later writings and his teaching, de Man, I would suggest, does nothing other than testify to the complexity and ambiguity of history as Holocaust” (137). Nevertheless, Felman continues to rationalize de Man’s silence, and she moves from seeing silence as complexity and ambiguity to seeing silence as suffering. And she does this largely by filling the gaps of his silence with the worlds of Primo Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz. In the chapter on Shoah, Felman writes about three kinds of witnesses: victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. She notes the inherent incommensurability of their experiences, locations, and testimonies: “What is at stake in this division is not simply a diversity of points of view or of degree of implication and emotional involvement, but the incommensurability of different topographical and cognitive positions, between which the discrepancy cannot breached” (207–08). Yet, she finds a way to break the discrepancy between Levi and de Man—Levi who said, “Once a soul is tortured, it can never be at rest” and killed himself, and de Man who died a natural death. Felman misappropriates Levi’s writing about silence to de Man’s actual silence; Felman ignores that Levi himself insists on incommensurability, saying that as someone who survived the Holocaust, he cannot speak for those who did not. Levi writes,

We, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. This is an uncomfortable notion of which I have become conscious little by little, reading the memoirs of others and reading mine at a distance of years. We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the “Muslims,” the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception. (83–84)
Levi will not speak for them, these complete witnesses. Felman, though, will let (force?) him speak for de Man. Felman quotes that same paragraph from Levi, with a good deal of elision, but she does so not to talk about incommensurability but to make de Man a complete witness. She writes, "Incorporating the silence of the witness who has returned mute into his very writing, de Man's entire work and his later theories bear implicit witness to the Holocaust, not as its (impossible and failed) narrator (a narrator-journalist whom the war had dispossessed of his own voice) but as a witness to the very blindness of his own, and others', witness, a firsthand witness to the Holocaust's historical disintegration of the witness" (139). Everyone is a victim.

What scares me about silence is that anyone can own it. Many scholars speak to the value, power, and necessity of silence. Silence can be a powerful site of resistance—a place from which to exercise one's right not to speak, not to participate, not to disclose, a site that can be unnerving for those who wait to hear. Silence can be an act of incubation and an act of loyalty. Anne Ruggles Gere draws distinctions between aesthetic silence, ethical silence, and political silence. She writes, "Instead of seeing silence as speech's opposite, we can conceive of it as a part of speech, located on a continuum that ones one in dialogue with the other" (206). Pat Belanoff understands silence as occupying an important dimension of literacy: "Silence (inhabited by meditation, reflection, contemplation, metacognition, and thoughtfulness) provides one lens through which to see the interface of literacy: action (response, conversation) provides another lens, but both lenses are pointed at exactly the same object, which continuously turns on itself with no discernible beginning or ending" (422). Both Gere and Belanoff call for us to attend to the silence in our classrooms. Belanoff argues that education requires silence in that it requires reflection and meditation. And Gere writes specifically for writing teachers, "The challenge for composition teachers is to recognize and respect students' need for silence, to resist a voice like Freud's that argues 'I shall have to hear it' when another says 'I prefer not to tell you' (The Interpretation of Dreams 189). Incorporating positive models of silence into our pedagogy can help students develop silence for their own purposes" (208).

I'm drawn in by these arguments, but I know that silence isn't necessarily a sign of power, that silence doesn't necessarily come from a position of power. I know that silence isn't always about loyalty and purposeful withholding. I know that silence isn't always intentional. Belanoff writes, "It is not always true that one is not saying what one does
not say. Silence communicates” (420). But we can’t always be sure what the silence communications. My questions are, I suppose, not just who controls the silence? but who controls the meaning? Wolfgang Iser argues that what we do in the act of reading is weigh and balance the new idea of the text with what we already know and believe. We bring forestructures into the text that are or can be challenged. We negotiate the new with the already accepted until we can decide what to do with the new information. Iser calls this wandering viewpoint, and says that reading is performed by the reader but on terms set by the text. One of my fears—a fear I did not know I had until I read Felman’s chapter on de Man—is that in reading silence all we may do is shore up our forestructures. We can read into that silence what we already believe and hold as true. We have nothing to weigh and balance, nothing to brush up against. And we can fool ourselves into thinking that the reading has been negotiated, when it hasn’t. I recognize that this can happen—this happens—to some extent in all reading, but what makes me nervous about silence is that it can be so easily appropriated. There are no safeguards—so that Anne Frank can be turned into a symbol of hope and happiness, so that Paul de Man can be transformed into a victim of the Holocaust. It’s not until we see another voice that speaks for silence, one that goes contrary to our own understanding, that we question it.

Until now, I’ve had a very clear idea of how I want to read In Memory’s Kitchen. I was to read it as testimony—testimony to a trauma. Not as celebration. Testimony. That’s the forestructure that I bring into my reading of silence. Cara De Silva, in the introduction, puts a spin on it that I don’t quite want. She writes that “certainly the creation of such a cookbook was an act of psychological resistance, forceful testimony to the power of food to sustain us, not just physically but spiritually” (xxvi). But we are eating the food that Pachter could not. There’s a world of difference between the wish and the reality. But because Pachter does not frame the recipes herself, we can never know for sure which intention was hers. And so while I want to call the recipes testimony, ultimately, sadly, I cannot. To call them testimony would be to speak for them, and though I trust my ethics and motives (they’re my ethics and motives, after all), I cannot speak for them. I need to look at the recipes not as a gap but as a physical presence; I need to see them on their own terms, without a frame.

Because, ultimately, recipes are about their own terms. They’re about direction. They’re about creation. They’re about assemblage and alchemy, about physicality and presence. They lead from the text to the
textured (a distinction Henri Lefebvre makes between textual and architectural space). Recipes are about the coming into space.

Lefebvre theorizes monuments as a particular kind of constructed space in a way that may help shed light on the recipes. He says that monumental space moves from the personal to the collective: it shows "each member of society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage. It thus constituted a collective mirror more faithful than any personal one" (220). Still, monuments call attention to the limits of the individual body and the environment that surrounds it:

The use of the cathedral's monumental space necessarily entails its supplying answers to all the questions that assail anyone who crosses the threshold. For visitors are bound to become aware of their own footsteps, and listen to the noises, the singing; they must breathe the incense-laden air, and plunge into a particular world, that of sin and redemption; they will partake of an ideology; they will contemplate and decipher the symbols around them; and they will thus, on the basis of their own bodies, experience a total being in a total space. (220–21)

What motivates monumentality, Lefebvre argues, is the death instinct, because "monumentality transcends death": it "transmutes the fear of the passage of time, and anxiety about death, into splendour" (221). The space of the monument becomes "a living space ... an extension of the body" (221).

In many ways, recipes play out as monuments. They clearly show membership in a particularly female form. Marion Kaplan writes in an article about Jewish Women in Nazi Germany before the war that the League of Jewish Women encouraged women to produce cookbooks as a way to maintain a semblance of normal life: "The league knew that people whose social and economic conditions had declined so rapidly needed psychological and material support. One creative way to resist demoralization was to publish a cookbook" (600). Kaplan also points out that Jewish women at this time tended to see their situation in terms of "affiliations and relationships," whereas men thought in terms of rights (594). Susan Leonardi calls recipe-sharing an "almost prototypical feminine activity" (343). Cara De Silva notes that "cooking, both doing it and talking about it, was central to the societies from which many of the women of Terezin, and most European women of the period, came. It was also among the chief activities that defined them as wives and mothers" (xxxi). The recipes also show a particular kind of Jewish membership. De Silva explains that readers familiar with eastern European languages will
be able to hear one language in the literal writing of another, so that the German might be "bumpy" but the phrasings would be perfect in Czech (xlii). She also notes that the recipes that aren’t Kosher most likely show that their authors were from Bohemia or Moravia, whose Jews were among the most assimilated in Europe. The recipes, then, help place the writers in a gendered, religious, and nationalist life.

The recipes show, too, the presence of death. As with monuments, the recipes come out of desire triggered by the death instinct—desire for normalcy in the face of trauma, desire to record a (family) culture before dying, desire to have a figurative life beyond a literal death, desire to nourish their children away from starvation. Recipes as nourishment insist on life because they insist on space and presence; they pull against death as emptiness. A recipe "transmutes the passage of time, and anxiety about death, into splendour." It, as Lefebvre argues, "replaces a brutal reality with a materially realized appearance; reality is changed into appearance" (221).

But in other key ways, the recipes work as an anti-monument because, by their very nature, they're meant to be deconstructed. The monument is meant to be brought down, crumbled, consumed. It is meant to be brought into space, but it is then meant to be taken out of space; it is meant to be brought into the body. The recipe, as text, is always an incomplete document; it is always unfinished. Someone needs to be on the other side of the page. Recipes ask for a constant re- and de-construction. Recipes demand both production and consumption. What, in the recipe, is the moment of fulfillment? assembling? completing? eating? When is the recipe in action? when its monumentality is realized? or when its monumentality is disassembled? The recipe must be in action: it is a failure if it continues to stand (or, in my parents’ terms, if it just sits).

And although recipes, in their desire to preserve, are arguably not everyday or ordinary documents, they speak to the everyday. They are gendered, repetitious, associated with home and habit (Felski 81). Recipes are meant to be, beyond all else, useful texts. Though they try to record and preserve, they are often used up in the process: one can often tell (at least in my house) which recipes are the “best” or most popular by which ones are the dirtiest, greasiest, oil splattered and egg caked. We read these texts differently—and read their value differently—than we do other texts in our homes (or in our offices, libraries, special collections). Jennifer Sinor insists that we must ask different questions of ordinary writing than we do of literary writing, writing that is linear, storied, and more easily read (7). Sinor writes, “Ordinary writing asks us to pause and
consider the matter of stories simply by refusing to give us story matter” (13). At the same time, Rita Felski cautions, we must be careful not to exoticize the everyday: “everyday life often has the lure of an exotic anthropological object. Cultural critics treat it with reverential respect and endow it with the rich complexity and ambiguity previously attributed to the modern work of art. In some version of cultural students, daily life constantly seethes with subversive energies. Yet everyday life is not just of the other but of the self, not just the realm of transgression but also the realm of familiarity, boredom, and habit” (92). Felski reminds us, too, that the “everyday is not necessarily more real, more authentic, or more immediate than the non-everyday, but it has a certain pragmatic priority simply because, as Blanchot notes, it is ‘what we are, first of all, and most often’” (93).

We have to pay attention, therefore, to the particularities of these recipes. They can never be completely disassociated from the bodies of the women who assembled them. Anne Goldman argues that recipe-writing gives women space to theorize the social and political economy: “Descriptions of food and its preparation resonate with nostalgia for an Edenic past; as with Proust’s concisely symbolic madeleines, evocations of flavors and cooking methods work efficiently to recall the manner of an entire way of life” (178). But there’s nothing Edenic about the recipes in In Memory’s Kitchen. The women were starving as they wrote. They are writing precisely about what they cannot have. As their bodies take on a textual presence, the food becomes tainted with death. What’s more, these particular recipes work against their construction. They deconstruct.

Take the recipe for Milk-Cream Strudel:

Filling: 1/4 liter cream, 2 egg yokes, 6 decagrams blanched, ground almonds, sugar to taste, 1 roll soaked in milk, 4 decagrams butter, all beaten. 2 whites snow [stiffly beaten egg whites]. Sprinkle with raisins, bake lightly. Pour over sugared milk. Let it evaporate. Bake in a casserole [baking dish]. (59)

If a baker were to follow this recipe—this recipe with ingredients and measurements and directions—she would have failure, because this strudel doesn’t have a leg to stand on: this strudel doesn’t have dough.

Or consider these recipes:

**Linzer Torte**

20 spoons flour, 8 spoons sugar, 4 spoons vinegar, 2 eggs, 10 decagrams margarine, 1 [packet] baking powder, some milk. Fill to your liking. (5)
Cheap Real Jewish Bobe [Coffee Cake]
Make a plain loose yeast dough. When it is risen, place dough on a noodle board. Roll it out. Grate several potatoes onto dough, sprinkle with a lot of sugar and cinnamon, about 2–3 large spoons cold goose fat. Fold and roll dough exactly 3 times. Put [half] in [cake] pan. Top it half with prune butter and half with a good poppy seed filling. Top tightly with dough cover. Spread it with fat and bake it in a medium hot oven. (19)

Breast of Goose, Pommern Style
From a heavy goose, take [remove] the beilik [breast]. Cut the meat from both sides, rub it with mashed garlic, some salt, ½ half sugar cube, a little ginger. Pound it [the mixture] in well with [your] bare hand and let it stand. Now take the nice skin, place the [seasoned] beilik on the skin and tightly sew the goose skin around. Put it into a glazed earthenware pot, sprinkle it with a little salt, potassium and saltpeter. Cover the breast with a plate & weights and let it lay in the bring for 4 weeks, turning it daily. Give it to the selcher [pork butcher/sausage maker] for 2 days [to put in] the smoker. One can also bring the goose breast to the pork meat butcher and let him cure and smoke it until it is nicely brown. (29)

[Recipe for use of Agar]
Agar for jelly to be used for [coating] everything. Agar is left overnight in sugar water to soften. Next day it is soft cooked until it is soft cooked. To be used for cakes, small pastries, and fish. Apple desserts [cakes] are sprinkled with sugar before pouring on [dissolved and cooked] agar. (34)

War Dessert
7 boiled grated potatoes, 5–6 spoons sugar, 2 spoons flour, 1 spoon cocoa, 2 spoons dry milk, 1 spoon [illegible], 1 knife point [pinch] [illegible]. Bake slowly. (53)

Although a collective of authors, writing under the broad title of Cookbook, these writers make very different assumptions not only about what kind of life it is that they are marking but also about who the bakers and cooks who will use the recipes are and what they know. The author(s) of “Linzer Torte” and “Cheap Real Jewish Bobe” assume a foundation of knowledge on the part of the bakers who will follow, bakers who will already have a sense of taste for the torte and who will know how to “make a plain loose yeast dough.” The entry on agar, however, seems more concerned with what its future readers won’t know. More a definition than a recipe, the author seems to want to set down a culture, to let her readers know about this rich way of being in the world. The author of “Breast of Goose, Pommern Style” assumes that neither money nor time
nor access will be an issue for the cook; the author marks a time of luxury and/or hopes for its return. This recipe, with its unabashed anti-Kosherness, sending the cook off to the pork butcher and sausage maker, sits in sharp contrast to “Cheap Real Jewish Bobe,” which makes distinct, and authentic, religious and cultural claims. The recipe for “War Dessert” points decidedly at the present, with instructions that seem to trail off with, perhaps, the life of its author.

Lefebvre writes, “To the degree that there are traces of violence and death, negativity and aggressiveness in social practice, the monumental work erases them and replaces them with a tranquil power and certitude which can encompass violence and terror” (222). Certainly, these recipes encompass violence and terror, but they never fully rise to “tranquil power and certitude,” not even the illusion of it. As an act of transgression or act of familiar recall or both or something else, these recipe-writers of Terezin chose, in extraordinary circumstances, to write of a past ordinariness: the ordinariness of making food. They chose not to tell the story of their deaths but to inscribe the work (or some of the work) of their lives—lives that were nonetheless tinged with their deaths.

Mina Pachter’s collection of recipes plays out in fascinating ways with Abraham and Torok’s distinction between introjection and incorporation. Like the recipes, it all rests on swallowing. Introjection is about assimilation—about chewing over, about bringing in, about coming to terms. Incorporation, on the other hand, is about refusal and unreachability. According to Abraham and Torok, a traumatized person wants to hold onto trauma and keep it separate from self, because to deal with trauma would mean to reorganize the self, which is painful. The goal is not just to swallow but to digest. They write, “When the process of introjection is complete, the object can descend from the imagined pedestal where the ego’s need for nourishment has placed it” (116). A different kind of nourishment will take place for a differently formed self.

As I think about this idea in terms of the cookbook, I wonder if the women, in their prescient wisdom, force us to swallow their bodies—and have ensured that we can only ever swallow, never digest, never introject, that we always preserve the exquisite corpse. I can see it still in terms of space. Lefebvre writes, “A spatial action overcomes conflicts, at least momentarily, even though it does not resolve them; it opens a way from everyday concerns to collective joy” (222). I think this may be what the recipes want to do but can’t quite do. The recipes never allow us to overcome conflict. What would this kind of reading get the recipe writers? What would this kind of reading get me? Certainly, it would keep
us from a happy ending, which, I admit, is important to me. While I think
that it’s important to know about the Holocaust, I don’t know that it’s
something we should ever be able to explain, except to recognize “a
heavier truth of named and inhabited evil” (to recall Ozick’s phrasing).
So the trauma, the recipe, sits in the pit of our stomachs. It’s alive: it won’t
decay. And we know it’s there. We remember.

And if we insist on digesting, the way Laura Shapiro does, we have
to seek more and more translation. The trauma is still alive, growing. And
the dense chocolate cake with the tang of lemon that cools on her counter
may or may not rightly bear the name of “Pachter’s Torte.”

Pacific Lutheran University
Tacoma, Washington

Notes

1. Ozick wonders why Anne’s “truly good at heart” utterance becomes the
one chosen to represent her entire story: “Why should this sentence be taken as
emblematic, and for, for example, another? ‘There’s a destructive urge in people,
the urge to rage, murder, and kill,’ Anne wrote on May 3, 1944, pondering the
spread of guilt. These are words that do not soften, ameliorate, or give the lie
to the pervasive horror of her time. Nor do they pull the wool over the eyes
of history” (81).

2. I’m going to get in trouble here. I know that many people who cook would
disagree. But I’m a baker, not a cook, and in the world of baking (at least, in my
world of baking), measurements must be precise; recipes must be followed.

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