
Many Voices, Many Traumas: An Analysis of Memoirs of Homosexual Holocaust Survivors

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Abstract

The canon of Holocaust literature is believed to predominantly represent the stories of the millions of Jews who were systemically executed by the Nazi regime. Among these popular narratives, the voices of smaller groups who were also the victims of Nazi atrocities are often forgotten. One such collection of narratives of the Holocaust is found in the memoirs of homosexual survivors. This paper analyses the memoirs of three such homosexual men terrorized by the Nazi state and attempts to understand the lasting effects of their prolonged

trauma on their identity. The selected memoirs are Heinz Heger's *The Men with The Pink Triangle*; Pierre Seel's *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*; and Gad Beck's *An Underground Life*. In addition to the trauma of surviving the Holocaust, their continued persecution under the Democratic German state silenced their voices even further. Through the insights provided by the domain of trauma studies and the means of a psychoanalytic approach, we aim to explore this prolonged trauma and the resulting fragmentation of identity.

The paper thus explores how the act of writing these memoirs provides a means for the survivors to witness their trauma while aiding their survival.

Keywords. *homosexual, holocaust survivors, holocaust narratives, Nazi, memoirs, trauma studies*

Introduction

Holocaust literature is a genre that is difficult to define and has been under review by scholars, critics and literary figures, for decades following the liberation of the concentration camps. Keeping in mind its evolution, a definition that attempts to encompass all aspects of it was proposed by Roskies and Diamant as, "All forms of writing, both documentary and discursive, and in any language, that have shaped the public memory of the Holocaust and been shaped by it". Holocaust literature has thus shaped popular opinions and discourse in its various forms 1 .

The stories of the survivors surfaced in public discourse and helped construct narratives of strength and defiance. Some of the earlier works that fall within this category are authored by victims of the Nazi regime, during the war itself and are mainly in the form of diaries, journals and letters. Post-WWII, literature about the Holocaust was dominated by the writings of survivors who wrote testimonies, memoirs, autobiographies, even poetry and prose 2 .

There is continued deliberation about the exact boundaries of what constitutes Holocaust literature, many even questioning the historicity of its existence and whether such a genre in literature is morally acceptable given the calibre of distress the victims had to endure 3 .

Wyschogrod firmly opposes the notion of Holocaust literature, stating that, “Art takes the sting out of suffering” and it is, therefore “inappropriate” and “demeaning” as a response to an event with the magnitude and the consequences of the Holocaust 4 .

Weisel, one of the most prominent voices in Holocaust studies, who contributed greatly to Holocaust literature, also spoke of its utter impossibility:

“The very expression is a contradiction in terms. Auschwitz negates any form of literature, as it defies all systems, all doctrines ... A novel about Auschwitz is not a novel, or else it is not about Auschwitz. The very attempt to write such a novel is blasphemy ...” 5 .

The representations of Holocaust experiences are filled with physical and psychological trauma. These traumas impact the cohesive and complete articulation of their memories; fracturing their narratives in myriad ways.

The gruesome and incomprehensible nature of the Holocaust, is perhaps the very thing that commands a literary response to it. Rosenfeld posited, “it is far more blasphemous to stay silent in the wake of such injustice than it is to attempt to write about it” 7 . Through efforts to immortalize and honour these experiences, and the lives that were lost in the concentration camps, Holocaust literature has become a symbol of endurance of the human spirit. The canon of Holocaust literature started taking shape at the end of the 20th century Diaries, like that of Anne Frank and Victor Klemperer, offered a unique perspective on the circumstances of the Holocaust as they documented personal experiences of the individual, in the present tense 9 . The retroactive production of holocaust experiences, took the shape of memoirs, after the liberation of the concentration camps. They are a collection of the author’s memories rather than the author’s self-development and life 10.

Endurance, survival and perseverance are important themes in Holocaust literature. Among such works, the senseless killings of Jews have often taken centre stage, highlighting the genocide that occurred during the Third Reich and attempting to convey the gravity of the torture of the concentration camps. However, amidst the works that have come to represent the genre of ‘Holocaust literature’, there is an indisputable lack of documentation on, and representation of the homosexual victims of the Holocaust. Reinhart writes,

“While entire libraries are dedicated to chronicles of the Second World War, Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, and the concentration camps, books on what happened to homosexuals caught up in those events would fill only a couple of inches of shelf space.” 11 It is widely agreed upon that between ten and fifteen thousand men wore the Pink Triangle in concentration camps symbolising prisoners convicted for the “crime” of homosexuality 12 .

Despite historical research and ongoing scholarly attempts to piece together the facts, there is an evident lack of public knowledge on the plight of homosexuals. According to a 1994 survey, mentioned in the introduction of Heger's memoir, only about half of the adults in Britain, and a quarter of the United States were aware of the gay victims of the Nazi Holocaust 13 .

The individual narratives of victims are what keeps them alive in our collective memories. Their stories, whether represented in forms of literature or media largely influence our understanding of history, enabling us to recognize them, and bear witness to their suffering. In the case of homosexual Holocaust victims, there is an utter absence of these stories 14 .

The sociocultural and political climate in which Holocaust literature was flourishing also saw homosexuals being actively targeted and persecuted again, first by the Allied German Government, and then the new German authorities 15 . While homosexuals were no longer subject to concentration camps or brutal torture, both the communist and capitalist worlds largely ignored the suffering homosexuals experienced. When the Allied forces occupied Germany and liberated the victims of the camps, it also came down to them to "denazify" the laws of Germany, to "eliminate unjust and discriminatory laws passed by the Nazi judicial system." 16 They amended several laws except Paragraph 175 – which essentially, criminalized homosexuality. An early version was retained in the new East and West German governments established in 1949 17 . According to this law, homosexuals were still to be considered "criminals". 18

Fuelled by an environment of social change, the German Gay Rights movement began to take shape in the late 1960s. However, according to Newsome, German lawmakers still considered homosexuality as a "deviant act". One of the earliest works of Homosexual Holocaust literature, authored by a homosexual survivor and was Heinz Heger's *The Men with The Pink Triangle: The True, Life and Death Story of Homosexual Men in the Nazi Death Camps* 1 , published in 1972. It became a catalyst for more voices. Forty years after the liberation from the concentration camps, a wife and three children later, Pierre Seel finally came out of the closet and published his memoir *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror* 2 . 19

Gad Beck published his memoir *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin* 3 in 1999, a compelling tale of adversity and hope.

However, these are three of the few personal accounts of the homosexual holocaust experience. As historian Klaus Müller stated in the documentary film *Paragraph 175*, by the time their stories were sought by the public, it was too late. Very few were still alive, and many didn't wish to speak out anymore, after a lifetime of being silenced. 20

1 The title of Heinz Heger's *The Men with The Pink Triangle: The True, Life and Death Story of Homosexual Men in the Nazi Death Camps*, will henceforth be referred to as *The Men with The Pink Triangle*.

2 The title of Pierre Seel's *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror* will henceforth be referred to as *I, Pierre Seel*.

3 The title of Gad Beck's *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin* will henceforth be referred to as *An Underground Life*.

While discussions and memoirs about the subject remain scarce, there is a growing critical interest in this field. As new research continues to emerge, the primary sources one can consider when researching the homosexual Holocaust are few. A large portion of these works lament the absence of first-hand accounts and sources, the lack of which makes further research difficult. With growing interest in LGBTQIA+ history and struggles, research continues to try giving these individuals a place in history that was denied to them for years.

Literature Review

In the Third Reich, the idea of 'Aryan superiority' demanded the creation of an 'ideal state' resulting in the persecution of those considered undesirable or 'inferior' to the German state. In addition to the persecution of Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Slavs, Romanis, Russians and Poles, this also required the disposal of identities considered "unfit" and a burden on society. This included the mentally and physically challenged, "asocials" 21 and "deviant" 22 that were prostitutes and homosexuals, respectively. Among these, the homosexuals were the largest target resulting in the targeted marginalization of an already outcast minority.

During the era after the 1945 liberation of the concentration camps, Holocaust literature flourished in leaps and bounds. One of the first significant accounts emerging from the concentration camps was Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them* (1950) which describes the status of homosexuals as the lowest in these camps. 23

Post Kogon's book, there remained a silence in the field for over three decades. The first personal account about the experience in the concentration camps came from Heinz Heger's memoir of an anonymous gay man, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, highlighting the horrible treatment of the men who wore the Pink Triangle in the Nazi death camps. Heger gives a terrifying yet empathetic account of the concentration camps and the discrimination of homosexuals 24 . Heger's memoir was followed by Richard Plant's book *The Pink Triangle* (1986), regarded as one of the first English publications about the subject examined the climate and conditions that gave rise to the vicious campaign against homosexuals led by Himmler and the Schutzstaffel (SS). 25

In addition to these works, Lautmann's pioneering study, published in the early 1980s in the *Journal of Homosexuality* used data about the arrests, imprisonments and deaths of homosexual men in death camps 26 . Further studies of the homosexual Holocaust acknowledge their debt to these three works for helping the scholarship overcome the lack of reliable data.

Pierre Seel's memoir I, Pierre Seel describes his life as a French national who was captured and sent to Schirmeck concentration camp. He wrote about his time in the camps and the gruesome

4 Heinz Heger was discovered to be a pseudonym for Austrian Holocaust survivor, Josef Kohout. He is referred to as Heger henceforth.

experiments and tasks that were imposed on them. 27 Gad Beck, in his memoir *An Underground Life*, describes the Nazi's rise to power and how it affected him, a young boy who was both Jewish and openly homosexual. 28

Kai Hammermeister, in his 1997 paper, tries to define Gay Holocaust literature and ponders on its necessity 29 . According to him, the absence of literature was a result of continued discrimination and persecution of homosexuals under Paragraph 175. He cites *Bent* – the first fictional play based on the gay holocaust experience, published and performed in 1997 – as a good example of this emerging fictional literature 30 . It is the most highly acclaimed and revered pieces of performance art in gay Holocaust literature 31 . The documentary, *Paragraph 175*, released in 2000, interviews ten survivors – including Beck and Seel – who were for the 'crime' of homosexuality. It serves to highlight a gap in Holocaust history and brings forth the untold stories of the forgotten homosexual victims 32 . These remain two of the most cited visual sources on the topic.

All the aforementioned works attempt to encompass the trauma experienced by homosexuals in the Third Reich. They call attention to the lack of documentation in literature and awareness about the same. The more dominant perceptions of Holocaust literature document the Jews. The lack of documentation about these lesser-known victims led us to explore their stories.

Methodology

Our paper, through the method of literary analysis, attempts to foreground the representation of the trauma in these texts, and highlight the drive to survive despite the crushing oppression of the Nazi regime described here. This paper, therefore, views the memoirs - Pierre Seel's *I, Pierre Seel*, Gad Beck's *An Underground Life* and Heinz Heger's *The Men with The Pink Triangle* – as important texts that represent the homosexual Holocaust experience. The memoirs are a powerful instrument of expression. Told in the first-person narrative voice, They lend a unique insight into the psyche of the survivors and help us to understand their physical, mental and spiritual struggle. It questions the prolonged effects on trauma, and the possibility to overcome it, if any at all. The insights provided by the domain of Trauma Studies, especially the works of Cathy Caruth, have helped us to explore these questions. Insights from the psychoanalytic perspective helped us understand the effect of trauma explained in the memoirs chosen for analysis, and enabled us to establish a connection between speech and survival, within trauma narratives.

Analysis

1. The Trauma of The Holocaust

“Trauma studies explore the impact of trauma in literature and society by analysing its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance,” explains Mambrol. 33 In addition to studying the impact of trauma on the authors who have faced it, and represented it in literary works, it also brings to focus the role of memory in representing trauma. Laub posits, however, that one does not truly witness the event, until after the event has passed, thus retroactively witnessing the entirety of their trauma. 34 This experience fractures the identity of the victims to such an extent, that it becomes difficult to represent it through language and in consciousness. Yet, attempts to give it a voice have always been made by witnesses trying to document historically traumatic events.

The domain of trauma studies was prompted by the psychological trauma of war veterans, post-World War I, and later extended to survivors of genocide and other traumatic events.

“The shock of war and the aftershocks stay with those who were there as witnesses and continue to shape our psyches and worlds” 35

The representation of this Holocaust, in trauma literature, focuses on the psychological, emotional and physical effects of war on the survivors and their identities. The testimonies of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust have been beneficial in the study of collective traumatic events and their impact on an individual’s psyche. However, the experiences of the homosexuals have a different perspective to offer to the discourse of trauma literature.

Since homosexual victims of the Holocaust experienced multiple layers of trauma, the memoirs written by the homosexual survivors’ years after the ordeal present an interplay of the trauma of experiencing war, the Holocaust and the realization of their sexual identity. They were doubly traumatized, not just as concentration camp inmates, but as homosexuals who were specifically targeted by the Reich.

Both Heger and Seel’s memoirs focus on their experiences in concentration camps as men who were imprisoned for being homosexual. Heger weaves impassioned arguments against the hypocrisy of the camp authorities and the unfair abuse he endured. He grapples with the disapproval of his sexuality, the toils of war and torture and the uncertainty around the safety of his family and himself.

Seel writes about instances of inmates being sodomised, brutalized and harassed in the camps. Apart from the SS guards inflicting pain on the inmates, they also coerced other inmates to do the same. Seel recollects the Schirmeck concentration camp replete with food deprivation and undignified living arrangements. Seel was released on the basis of good behaviour but was forcibly drafted to the German army and fought alongside his perpetrators with a deep sense of shame embedded in his being. 36

Beck experienced the Holocaust in a significantly different way from Heger and Seel. Despite being both Jewish and a homosexual in Nazi Germany, he managed to evade concentration camps and lived an underground life, aiding several others in the process. Within Beck’s memoir, it is apparent that he believed his race to be a larger threat to him, than his sexuality. His trauma, albeit less

pronounced, was very real. Experiencing the onset of anti-Semitism as a child, an array of losses including that of loved ones and, living in fear of being discovered took a toll on his emotional and physical well-being. 37 While these memoirs put forth an account of determination and survival, the lasting effects of the trauma remain visible. 2.

Memoirs and Trauma

As a non-fiction genre, memoirs encompass a range of emotions derived from real-life experiences and depict the reality of an individual's life in its most authentic form. Couser describes memoirs as one that "presents itself, and is therefore read, as a non-fictional record or representation of actual humans' experiences. Fiction does not; it creates its own lifelike reality ..." 38 The form of a memoir is specific and detailed, building up a narration to a particular goal. Due to their focus on the formative events in a subject's life told in a first person narrative voice, memoirs often offer a unique and "truthful" insight into the silences of history.

Apart from the fact that all three authors were homosexual, they also shared a collective trauma by Nazi oppression. That being said, their individual experiences, and the way they viewed and expressed their homosexuality is evidently different. The employment of one form used by these survivors does not mean that they are all the same in their tone and focus. Their experiences of persecution affected their identities in different ways. In this aspect, they seem to contest the homogenous categorisation of all homosexual men and their experiences. Heger's memoir provides factual knowledge that had been expunged by the Nazis, and employs stark tonal shifts between descriptions of torture and emotionally moving instances. Inspired by Heger, Seel published his memoir. However, Seel's memoir has a melancholic and sombre tone that best describes his experiences in life. He dedicates the memoir to his lover Jo, whose terrible brutalization and murder at the hands of the Nazi guards was witnessed by Seel. The memoir makes use of the detailed nature of this literary style by intentionally portraying Seel's narrative in the most heart wrenching manner.

Beck employs a different approach. Although he cannot spare the horrifying details of the war, he sets a more light-hearted tone, emphasizing the smaller, more hopeful moments he experienced amidst the despair. Thus, there is a significant difference in the tone of all three memoirs – Heger's memoir is factual and grim, but there are certain tales that are more heart-warming and inspiring. Seel highlights his adversity and the cruel reality in which he was trapped, in a melancholic tone. In stark contrast, Beck's writing is witty, often humorous and immensely compelling.

Another aspect in which they differ is their focus. The memoirs, set against the same historical background, provide authentic documentation of events while highlighting the subjectivity of their experiences. Although their histories are objective, their memories are highly subjective, as reflected by the variance of the manner in which they choose to tell their story. Horowitz states that "memoirs about the Holocaust occupy a space between imaginative literature and history" thus, giving the reader an insight into the survivor experience in both forms: reality and reflection. 39

Seel uses his memories of the concentration camps to convey a clear picture of the horrors he experienced, focusing on the particularly painful moments of his life. Beck's focus is conveyed through Moses Mendelssohn's quatrain in his epigraph.

“Search for truth,
Love beauty,
Wish for good,
Do what is best.”

Throughout the book, he places great emphasis on and truly strives to embody the four elements of the above quote – truth, love, beauty and goodness. With the war serving as a cruel yet prominent backdrop to his story, Beck actively shifts the focus away from pain and towards hope. As Heibert writes in his introduction, “Beck knows how to draw something positive out of every catastrophe.” He focuses on providing intricate details about the lives of his family, friends leaving no loose ends, unperturbed by the timeline of his own story. This enables us to see them as real people who lived full and intricate lives, not just characters in Beck's life or nameless, faceless figures in a Holocaust statistic.

Although Beck never shrinks away from describing the traumatic incidents in his life, he keeps these accounts factual and concise, choosing to move on from them quickly rather than dwell on them. Both Beck and Seel take advantage of the freedom to be selective with their memories, something the form of a memoir affords them. Where Seel selects the more painful memories, Beck chooses to emphasize the smaller, hopeful moments, drawing attention to the altruism of strangers and the fleeting moments of light in an otherwise tumultuous time. This difference in focus and approach can also be attributed to selective memory, or “partial silencing and forgetting” used to survive and cope with trauma on a personal and collective scale. 40

Heger takes a more informative and documentary focus with his memoir. He focuses on exposing flaws of logic in Nazi propaganda against homosexuals, and tries to give the reader an honest perspective on homosexuality, one that was unknown to majority of Germans. Using the concluding pages of his memoir to call attention to the continued discrimination of homosexuals, he not only critiques the Nazi state but also the new democratic government by saying, “Why are we still persecuted and imprisoned by the courts, just as in Hitler's time?” 41

Thus, these memoirs also act as political statements. As personal accounts of the journeys of the authors themselves, memoirs can be seen as closely tied with the political project of a collective and self-rehabilitation. The mere fact that Heger published a memoir about the topic, in a time where he could be punished for doing so adds to the politics of his text. Right from the beginning, he denounces Nazi ideas of Aryan superiority, critiques their erroneous interpretation of homosexuality and demands homosexuals be rehabilitated. In the case of Beck, his very existence was against all Nazi doctrines. Beck was a homosexual Jew who led an underground resistance and

evaded the concentration camps, making his story highly political. In addition, his active involvement in many Jewish organizations and Zionist groups and will to assist other Jews to stay alive speaks for itself.

Apart from serving as a means to tell their story, the form of the memoir propels their politicism and acts as a cry for collective rehabilitation. Heger and Seel both sought reparations for themselves, and in producing their memoirs extended that search to the community. Heger wrote, "My request for compensation for the years of concentration camp was rejected by our democratic authorities, for as a pink-triangled prisoner, a homosexual, I had been condemned for a criminal offence, even if I'd not harmed anyone. No restitution is granted to "criminal concentration-camp victims." 42 Seel visited Schirmeck and found flower-clad villas and a plaque commemorating the Nazi carnage. He writes, "The reality of what had occurred in that place was hypocritically transformed into a symbolic plaque and sculpture, yet we are still haunted by the memory of that closed space." 43 Although he never received any reparations or recognition, he never ceased to fight against the injustice meted to him and several homosexual men.

This was a cry for recognition in a political climate that ignored them. What binds the memoirs is the sexual orientation of the authors, but they experience their trauma differently. Before being captured, Heger had found acceptance with his family, his lover and with himself, yet he continued to hide his homosexuality from the world. Even though he was comfortable with his sexual orientation, he was still aware of the dangers. The Nazis viewed homosexuality as an illness or a disease that one could be "cured" and thus forced the homosexuals into regularly attending the brothels in the camp. Heger was forced to engage in heterosexual intercourse, in an erroneous Nazi effort to make him "normal". Writing of the experience, he states, "My homosexual orientation was only reinforced." 44

Heger was only ever agitated by his oppression and did not victimize himself for his sexuality. On the contrary, even though Seel, at a young age was sure of his sexuality, loathed it due to his devout Catholic upbringing. He turned to his confessor, but the priest not only refused him absolution but also, over a period of months, berated him about his thoughts and activities; Seel recalls, "I was convinced that I was a monster". 45 Rejection from Seel's place of solace and solidarity only resulted in the deepening of this shame and internalized homophobia.

In contrast to Seel, Beck was a man completely at ease in his own skin, and had no trouble understanding his sexuality or his religion. This can be largely attributed to his family; a Jewish-Christian household. As a young boy, he loved to play dress up, teaching his sister how to 'make eyes' and 'cross her legs' and playing with a male doll who he claimed was his 'first love'. 46 He refers to his younger self as a "diva", "star" or "spoiled princess". Although his parents showed signs of mild concern, they never pressured him to change in any way. This never explicitly uttered support and acceptance from his family with regards to his sexual identity is what gave Beck a sense of confidence and strength.

3. Trauma, Speech and Survival

The first of the three memoirs, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, was published more than twenty-five years after the liberation of the camps, followed by *I, Pierre Seel* in 1995, and *An Underground Life* in 1999. This gap period is characteristic of trauma, according to Caruth, who posits that one cannot bear witness to a traumatic event while experiencing it. The event can only be witnessed completely after it has been forgotten and is then recollected, bringing back the absolute effect of the trauma. “The process of remembering inflicts psychological pain but also ascribes value to a previously repressed experience in the unconscious. This traumatic remembering is termed “pathogenic reminiscences” for the pathologic symptoms the memory causes.” 47

Reminiscences are special forms of memory that rise up from the past, confused, vague, distorted, or rendered unrecognizable by unconscious mental activity. Ergo, recollecting these experiences not only causes psychological pain but also attributes value to those memories and reinforces them in the unconscious mind. Therefore, trauma is defined in relation with remembering and processing these memories. This reprocessing of traumatic memories and telling of their stories symbolizes survival.

In the context of Holocaust survivors, endurance doesn't just encompass the concentration camps but also, living with the repetitive flashbacks of those events for a prolonged period of time – quite possibly for the remainder of their lives. While the Holocaust is an incomparable tragedy on its own, sharing stories can be therapeutic. The memoirs can be viewed in the same light, acting as a release.

Traumatic memories tend to be haphazardly organized in the human mind; they're often stored in fragments and the act of sharing them works as a tool to organize these memories, give them a structure and form a clear narrative of the experiences. These individual stories become the story of a people or a group; encouraging a collective rehabilitation of consciences. Something, as aforementioned, the form of the memoir also enables the survivor to do. 48

Holocaust survivors exist in this state of the event without fully manifesting it, until later when they integrate with society and a sense of normalcy. This “inherent latency” or gap between the event and its complete witnessing, is what makes the historical event perceptible. 49 The latency, however, in the case of homosexual Holocaust survivors may not be fully applicable, as even if they tried to speak out about their experiences, that would only result in a prison sentence or social exclusion. Even when Heger published his memoir, he did so under a pseudonym, fearing arrest.

According to Laub, as is the case with Holocaust survivors, the need to tell their story is inhibited by their inability to do so. However, there is still a need to have their story be heard, as, “None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent.” 50 This is evident in the case of Seel, who came out of the closet forty years after being released from the concentration camps, riddled with fear of being persecuted and socially ostracized. He only confided in his mother about the horrors of the camp and his homosexuality; while living a heterosexual life. 51

In his memoir, Seel uses these memories of shame, punishment and pain to highlight his struggle. Even the recollection of happy events seems tainted by an inherent sadness of the constant conflict of acceptance Seel fought with himself.

It is apparent that trauma is central to the memoirs in consideration. The abuse experienced by these men continued to breed fear and trauma years later. Heger relates at least three instances of heterosexual men forcing him to perform sexual acts with them, and still considering themselves as “decent men” in comparison to him. He recounts instances of meaningless labour, physical, verbal and psychological abuse designed to break their spirit. Heger recounted performing sexual favours for the prison guards and justified it to himself as an ‘act of survival.’ Even through this continued degradation, one can say he even gave into the image that the world projected on homosexuals, and aided in his own victimization, and yet, it was justified in the name of survival. His breaking point came when he witnessed a man hung by his arms to a hook, tortured, and sodomized with a broomstick. He watched the SS guards finally smash a chair over the man’s head and put him out of his misery. Witnessing this threw him into “a deep depression.” 52

What Heger witnessed in that bunker was similar to Seel’s experience where he witnessed the death of the love of his life, Jo, by having dogs set on his naked body; whilst the other prisoners were forced to stand and watch. Seel writes, “I sometimes wake up howling in the middle of the night, for fifty years now that scene has kept playing and replaying through my mind. I will never forget the barbaric murder of my love--before my very eyes”⁵³ In the memoir, Seel writes about an instance when the inmates were compelled to torture and brutalize one of their fellows. Although the memory of this particular event is agonizing, he inferred that it served as a personal outlet for them to release their pain and return the violence that was committed on them by the SS guards. 54 Instances like these are observed throughout the memoirs of Seel and Heger, impacting them in various ways and restricting them from being able to lead a life of normalcy even after being released from the camps. Seel recalls feeling like a ghost, after continued hours of toil and cruelty by the SS guards: “A ghost has no fantasies, no sexuality,” 55 reducing them to meagre bodies of flesh and bone with no capacity for intellectual stimulation.

It is important to note that Beck was not one of the homosexual men charged under Paragraph 175 who spent years in concentration camps. He spent two relatively brief periods of time in prison. He had not seen the horrors that Seel and many others had – the experiments, continuous torture and humiliation. However, on closer analysis, Beck speaks of his own share of traumatic experiences. The memoir is detailed with accounts of social discrimination and alienation due to his Jewish heritage and economic hardships. A pivotal moment in Beck’s life was when his lover Manfred Lewin was sent to Auschwitz. In a desperate and dangerous attempt to prevent this, Beck donned a Hitler Youth uniform and requested to see Lewin at the pre-deportation camp where he was being held. The guard grants his wish, and after coming so close to freeing his lover, Lewin tells Beck that he cannot leave his family behind, and they depart without even saying goodbye. This loss was profound, and he states that he never truly got past it. “In those moments, watching him go, I grew up.” 56

The memoirs do not only speak of the breakdown of the individuals, but also of their families. Heger's father succumbing to the torment and discrimination of having a homosexual son, was a formative event in his life. After homecoming, Heger had to process his father's suicide and deal with being mistreated by his neighbours who were ignorant of the torture he had suffered. The ripples of the trauma of the camps and the reminiscent effects of the "re-education" sessions restricted Seel from truly embracing his identity for years after being released. Though aware of his sexuality throughout, Seel was inhibited by the fear of having to experience similar circumstances again. 57

In the camps, Seel survived by obeying the SS and maintaining the bare minimum interaction with the other prisoners. Seel felt it was easier to obey orders and make it through the day than protest and get murdered. Similar to Seel, even in the despair of the concentration camps, Heger found small things that motivated him to survive. His determination to live as well as his acknowledgement of his own will to survive are evident and explicitly mentioned in the memoir.

During the initial years of the war, many *mischlings* like Beck in Germany were given labour work to do in factories instead of being sent to concentration camps. However, as circumstances worsened, even his mother's Christian status could not protect him. 58 He went underground, with the help of other members of the Jewish Resistance Group, 'Chug Chaluzi'. However for Beck, merely his own survival was not enough, he had an innate drive to help others survive. The dangerous nature of his resistance work, the additional trauma of living through a war, and losing friends took a mental and physical toll on Beck, and he had to find ways of coping. Throughout his memoir, Beck had many sexual relationships with different men. In some cases, these were sexual favours in exchange for a better chance at survival. However, most of his sexual experiences were born out of a need for closeness and affection. This can be seen as a way to cope and a distraction from his anxieties. Within his narrative, Beck has used humour to potentially cope with and normalize several instances of trauma and violation.

For all three of them, survival represented the end of their suffering, and the possibility of a new beginning. Thus, everything they endured became a means to an end. However, for many, the survival of a traumatic experience is often the beginning of another one. Caruth explains Freud's "enigmatic" connection between trauma and survival: that it is not only the course of that traumatic event, but the survival through one, which can also be a crisis. 59 It is well documented that survivors of war, genocide and other traumatic events suffer from flashbacks and intense stress from remembering these events. Seen in this light, the testimonies of these survivors, seem paradoxical – they are proof of their victory against Nazi terror that aimed to silence them, and, a realization of the extent to which this trauma victimised them even Reintegrating into society wasn't easy for the homosexual Holocaust survivors. Though the camps had been liberated, Paragraph 175 was still in place and their trauma continued to hinder them. As Pierre Seel said, "Liberation was for others." 60 After his return to his sister's house, at night Heger would still feel like he was in the camps. The trauma of six years was deep-seated in his subconscious, and the knowledge of his father's suicide was fuel to the fire. Focusing on present-day scenarios as opposed

to the memories of the concentration camps, made it difficult for Heger to regain a sense of order. "How immense was my joy when I was finally reunited with my family", writes Seel while articulating his feelings about his homecoming. 61 His family life had completely shifted and despite being aware of his homosexuality and persecution, they decided to stay silent. 62 For homosexuals, the trauma of physical torture passed, but psychologically, they continued to be inured under the new German state.

The recollection of these traumatic events, however, is not only the survivors reliving the experience; rather, it is an attempt to overcome the fact that they faced those circumstances and a trial at fully grasping and comprehending the severity of it. Since, the human conscience cannot bear the agony of witnessing a plausible death, the life and memories of a survivor become a replay of this reality that the psyche fails to process. "In the traumatic encounter with death, life itself attempts to serve as the witness that consciousness cannot provide." 63

As mentioned before, the severity of traumatic events is impossible to put into words, but the process of attempting to do so is also important to survival. Some survivors believe that suppressing the memories of the Holocaust will erase the trauma they endured. While talking about survivors who elect to tell their stories, Enning says, "Their motives may derive from a deeply felt necessity or purely from having been granted the occasion by others. Other's feel they will be able to reach a certain political objective. And just as some people shun away from the attention they would get; others feel supported by the attention they receive when speaking about their history." 64 Thus, this need to share their stories is a negotiation between reliving the trauma and forgetting it.

Kearney posits that the enactment or reproduction of traumatic stories and scenarios prompts empathy from the spectators which paves the way to an outlet for the horror and an event that humans harbour within themselves. More so, the employment of a medium of literature enables the authors to repeat the past while pushing forward their stories. With respect to this, Kearney in his paper (Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis) says, "... this very act of creative repetition allows for a certain kind of pleasure or release. In the play of narrative recreation, we are invited to revisit our lives - through the actions and personas of others - so as to live them otherwise. We discover a way to give a future to the past." 65

Conclusion

Although the trauma they witnessed as homosexual men, fragmented their sense of identity; these men persevered to integrate themselves into society. This struggle with being persecuted for their identity and a lack of acceptance from society is an important part of the lives and histories of homosexual Holocaust survivors. This act of speaking out is a victory in itself; even though, such trauma can never completely or cohesively be expressed in language or words. These texts also act as an expression of their repressed subconscious: an assertion of their individualism and a testament to the overcoming of the Nazi atrocities.

Gad Beck's *An Underground Life*, Pierre Seel's *I*, Pierre Seel and Heinz Heger's *The Men with The Pink Triangle* are all trauma narratives that symbolize a struggle for survival whilst simultaneously questioning the very meaning of such survival. Thus, Holocaust literature acts as an instrument for expressing the identities and stories of those who were martyred in concentration camps. The community it has created has served as a safe haven and become a literary symbol of resistance. Many share their traumatic memories in an effort to understand or accept the Holocaust in the hope that this event is never repeated. The survivors' stories collectively act as a sign of caution, providing mankind with a lens through which we should observe and condemn violence and atrocities being committed against any group or individual.

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