Journal of American Studies of Turkey
11 (2000) : 3-13

Who Do You Think You Are? Storytelling, Performance, and Outrageous Lies in Emily Prager's *Eve's Tattoo*[1]

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> I have never encountered an image of a *human* body. Images of human bodies are images either of men's bodies or women's bodies (Gaitens 82).

Emily Prager's novel *Eve's Tattoo* works within and against a gendered discourse of historical narratives, relying on oral tales and contemporary performance in order to re-vitalize a composite concentration camp victim whose fate is traced through a variety of frames. Ironic and postmodern, it acts as an important American Studies text for its interventions into historical frameworks and its use of cultural studies motifs, its manipulation of subjectivity and identity, and its focus on performance and appropriation. The novel relies on an odd sense of nostalgia for the past—in preference, almost, to a complicated present in the archetypal American city, New York—even as it limns the fate of "unusual" victims under Nazi Germany.

Like a contemporary Sheherazade, the narrator tells a woman's tale as if to keep her alive, yet the life which Eve imagines for her doppelgänger Eva is, at the end of the text, shown to be yet another performance, another "story" of identity which does not conform to the expected closure. Indeed, it is in the very distance between the New York Eve and her imagined German Eva that the novel engages with notions of history and power, including, perhaps obliquely, the power of American influence and (mis)interpretation. Europe and the US are juxtaposed both explicitly and implicitly: Eve's family lives in Europe whilst her lover is himself an immigrant; minor characters are both Eastern and Western European transplants whose influence on the text is undeniable. Despite the fact that most of the novel relates to a (fabricated) war-torn Germany, it retains its American setting throughout, and indeed emphasizes its specific time and location: post-AIDS New York City.

The novel's postmodern playfulness clashes with the backdrop of the Holocaust, and questions of identity and appropriation are succinctly and uncomfortably explored. In common with other historiographic metafictional texts, *Eve's Tattoo* "is not a transcending of history, but a problematized inscribing of subjectivity into history" (Hutcheon 118). It is this interlinkage between subjectivity and history that forms the basis of this essay, as it explores the place of the body as a site of contemporary tension, identity, and performance.

Lidia Curti links the postmodern and nostalgia through narrative devices such as "the juxtaposition of original and copy," "the creation of complex authorial webs," "temporal leaps," and "a vision of the present as a vestige of the past" (41). Each of these factors is evident in*Eve's Tattoo*, as the narrator creates and re-creates a woman named Eva. Eve copies stories that she finds in historical accounts of the Holocaust, weaving around them imagined personal facts that are missing from most general wartime accounts. Her absorbing stories become the present, and a way of displacing a second kind of holocaust which ravages her

New York milieu and indeed affects a member of her "family," Uncle Jim. Yet Eve denies the connections, so firmly focused is she on past events:

> The AIDS rights activists called AIDS a holocaust, but that was inaccurate. The holocaust was the holocaust . AIDS was a cataclysm, a disaster, a virus that was in the right place at the right time and became a superstar. The activists had it wrong: AIDS was not personal. The holocaust was personal (Prager 81-2).

In looking back to *the* Holocaust, Eve perhaps looks back to a holocaust which had a *human* and therefore "definable" source; in seeking to humanize and embody a Nazi victim with whom she has no real connection, she perhaps works through her inability to stop a contemporary catastrophe which does affect those around her.

Curti also argues that for women's fiction, re-writings (for Eve, perhaps we can say re-tellings) result from estrangement (41), and estrangement itself is also a focus of the text. Eve is forty, and a never-married woman in New York in the late 1980s. She is, therefore, the woman more likely to be gunned down by terrorists than married (or so the faux-statistics of that decade alarmed America). In displacing herself through acquiring a tattoo that marks her as "other"—or rather in replacing herself as a central focus whilst remaining embodied in her own skin—Eve both turns attention away from herself, and ultimately ensures that she is central to any performative storytelling that she will invoke. Such a feat indicates the precarious and contingent aspects of identity with which this fictional woman struggles. Robert Brain argues that "[o]ne of the most important impulses behind tattooing seems to be a search for identity in a precarious situation" (160). Thus it is entirely "appropriate"—even in its inappropriateness—that such a woman (childless, successful, beautiful) will consciously assume the mantle of victimhood, and indeed be witness to an exploding manhole cover which appears to mimic, and indeed is mistaken for, a terrorist attack. Moreover, Prager's text critically connects victimhood, women and Nazism, a connection not infrequently made. Indeed, Sylvia Plath earned critical disapproval for her poem "Daddy," in which the speaker compares herself to a Jew at the mercy of a Nazi. There is certainly the question of appropriation at work here. Is it appropriate for Eve, a middle class WASP, to tell stories of the victims of the Holocaust? Is this an act of appropriation—or performance—too far?

Surely the question, "Who do you think you are?????" is a relevant one—in more ways than one. It is a question that her lover Charles implicitly asks in his refusal to make love to Eve when she marks herself as a concentration camp victim; it is one that addresses the issue of performance and impersonation. Is Eve's association with and appropriation of "Eva's" story—going so far, in fact, as to give the at-first unnamed woman a version of her own name—moral, immoral, or outside of those frameworks altogether? Certainly Eve's story-telling is an instance of gross arrogance, as she "selects" the stories that her listeners will hear, and even, in one instance, refuses a tale to women whom she believes are not worthy of Eva. Certainly it begs the question: Who is Eve? She is Donna Reed in the house; a (white) woman who pretends to be a geisha; a closet writer who indeed hides her typewriter in a closet; and the sardonic voice for a men's magazine, who pens articles with titles such as, "How to Tell if Your Girlfriend Is Dying During Rough Sex" (36). This cacophony of identities is exacerbated by her description of herself as a "female supremacist" who "never showed it" (37). Eve is a postmodern character extraordinaire who contains and celebrates her contradictions and split identities, and whose skills as impersonation pale only in comparison to the "real thing"—Jacob Schlaren, a famous Jewish transvestite and concentration camp survivor, who earns a living from female impersonation. In some respects, Eve is both a blank canvas on which to hang stories of various women named Eva, as well as a drag queen herself, performing her gender in stereotypical—and highly public—fashion. Judith Butler argues that the body "is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and

compulsory heterosexuality" (*Gender* 177). She further argues that critics should consider gender as "*a corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (*Gender* 177, italics in original). The body, in *Eve's Tattoo*, is marked, made, and unmade in a series of events that begins with a visit to Big Dan's Tattoo Parlor.

Indeed, upon entering the tattoo parlor, Eve is confronted with the bodies of women superimposed on the bodies of men: "a naked Vietnamese beauty...fingering her long black hair" (6), a "naked blonde with red lips and a rolled hairdo from the 1940s" (7). Eve has entered a male domain, where men *wear* women as well as images of violence (Swastikas, skulls). She, too, wants to wear a woman, in a sense, when she has the number 500123 tattooed on her wrist. However, her tattoo's connection to Nazism and violence is meant to be one of remembrance, not glorification.

Tattooing is a sign of identification—a sign of belonging to a caste or social system, whether voluntarily undertaken, such as by the American bikers she encounters, or involuntarily imposed, such as occurred in Nazi Germany. Eve's tattoo aligns her with a woman in a photograph whom she does not know, and the tattoo itself is meant to look "swiggly, done in a hurry, badly" (8). Historically, the motive for tattooing has generally been considered "sexual, social and magical" (Brain 7). It is ironic, therefore, that Eve's tattoo initially repels her lover Charles, and then is a factor in a second lover's temporary attraction to her. Moreover, the removal of the tattoo—something that her lover insists upon before he will sleep with her again—is effected by others, outside of her control. At the end of the novel, Eve is hit by a car and has her arm badly mangled; it is in this state that Charles, disturbingly, reclaims her body. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Eve's body is deconstructed and reconstructed, nor that surgery is involved in the removal of her tattoo; the pins in her arms act as visible jewelry that she has no choice but to display. Here, she is the gazed upon again, but the performance (victimhood) becomes reality, and not one that she herself has commissioned.

Eve prefers to perform when she is in control; indeed, her story-telling performances are only the most explicit aspects of the performativity that characterizes her responses to life situations. She wears and performs her gender as much as she performs the narrations that are the basis of this novel. As Barbara Brooks notes,

> The term "performance" captures within its meanings the idea of offering up the body/the self to public consumption, and of being assessed on the adequacy of the performance. It also puts a question-mark over the "authenticity" of what is being offered. "Performance" is conventionally something constructed, something with a gap between what we see and what we think might be its invisible origin (113).

Judith Butler's theorized examination of performativity places less emphasis on intention and agency than Brooks does, arguing instead that performativity "is not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (*Bodies* 12). Thus even in acting out the role of the outré woman who writes articles about violent sex, Eve is reacting to a set of conditions that limit gender behavior; transgressing those boundaries thus only ever reinforces their existence.

When Eve tells her first "story" of Eva, she feels nervous, and explicitly calls this action her first performance (24). It is not accurate, however, to suggest that performance is something she only does when she has a crowd to watch her. Indeed, she first has a sort of unacknowledged "stage fright" when she enters the tattoo parlor: "She suddenly felt dizzy and nauseous and as if she could vomit up hundreds and thousands of celebrity names and anecdotes right there on the floor" (7). Moreover, she performs her role as political satirist so

convincingly that although her written voice "made her laugh, it surprised her" (36). At the same time, however, an audience certainly helps; she enjoys their responses, even conditions them to a certain extent. This is particularly true in relation to her lovers. She describes herself as Donna Reed figure or a geisha girl, and behaves in an über-feminine manner at home, relishing the role of 1950s hostess and attending to "her man" as if to counteract her satirical written voice. Shoshana Felman argues that "[i]f a 'woman' is strictly, exactly, 'what resembles a woman'…it becomes apparent that 'femininity' is much less a 'natural' category than a rhetorical one, analogical and metaphorical: a metaphorical category which is explicitly bound…to a socio-sexual stereotype" (146-7). The constructed nature of Eve's femininity—an amalgam of both Oriental and Occidental stereotypes—is thus foregrounded.

To take the argument further, Butler contends that the activity of gendering is not, after all a "willful appropriation" nor is it a "question of taking on a mask"; in Butler's view, gendering "is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition" (*Bodies* 7). In this view, Eve's obvious performing of gender roles is not entirely voluntary, but circumscribed but an unconscious awareness of what roles are "allowed" or "allowable"—of what constitutes a role at all. This knowledge of role-playing is even more overt in relation to Jacob Schlaren, a man who both is and is not gendered female, depending on the time and circumstance under which he performs.

What is crucial to the understanding of performance in this text is the aspect of juxtaposition that is necessary for its full appreciation. Eve wears her tattoo next to a bracelet of diamonds, this being the first of many metaphorical juxtapositions (23). In another example, Eve watches the television news:

> The number of East Germans streaming to the West had reached 100,000. Visuals of young people driving hellbent toward a new life in their funny, Communist-made autos flashed before her. Visuals of weeping mothers left behind in cramped Eastern Bloc apartments followed. Eve made notes for a column (39).

The final sentence strikes the reader as at best incongruous and at worst absurd. Here, political events become nothing more than fodder for a short, pithy column. And as a columnist, Eve writes unconnected texts from week to week, focusing on tangents that are suggested by the news or other media. In some respects, then, her narrative voice and her oral voice intertwine. Orally, she presents a series of stories about Eva, connected to her audience in ways that she herself assesses but which may, to them, seem tangential: "'Look, people will ask me about the tattoo and I'm going to tell them tales, based on facts from my reading, tales specifically chosen for them, so they can identify, so they can learn'" (12). Eve's stories are based on history that she herself constructs from fragments, fleshing out a "story" from a history that was never really told. In true postmodern fashion, the novel enacts a "postmodernism [that] establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices (and bodies) that use memory to try to make sense of the past" (Hutcheon 118). Creating a body double for her unidentified Nazi victim, Eve inserts duplicitous voices into her performances. These tales proceed from a "typical" Jewish victim of the Holocaust to Aryan women who were also captured and destroyed.

Eve's first "Eva" is Eva Klein, a mother in hiding whose very name inscribes her Jewishness and thus her potential victimhood. This story is constructed on the very day that Eve has her own tattoo created. Told to a group of Yuppie parents, the story centers on a woman who, apart from religion, shares many of the social conventions of the audience, divided as they are across continents and time. It is her motherhood that is Eva's undoing, for as her child learns to talk, Eva's "cover" as well as her sanity are at risk. She is eventually spotted by a "catcher," a Jewish spy, and sent to Auschwitz where she dies. The audience is

suitably moved by the tale to enact displays of parental affection, and Eve considers her premiere a success.

The next Eva is Eva Hofler, and with this Eva we begin the movement away from the archetypal concentration camp victim. An anti-Semite and an aspiring Nazi, this Eva is appalled by the revelation of her Jewish parentage, an event that occurs on her birthday, the same day that she discovers that she is pregnant. Her subsequent exclusion from a Lutheran women's group results in personal catastrophe: the Kinder/Kuche/Kirche ideology is fatally disrupted. She is divorced, her child is taken away, and she is taken to Auschwitz where she dies of typhus. The audience for this second tale is Eve's group of Smokers' Anonymous. Eve acts as the linchpin of the group, but on the night of this recitation, she vows not to return to the group. Unlike Eva Hofler, who is ejected from a group on which she had begun to depend, Eve excludes herself from a circle in which she felt comfortable. The others accuse her of denial both of her need, and of her likeness to them. This is a group bound together through hate and edginess; individual members make racist and homophobic remarks or gestures, and their addiction makes them less than tolerant of others. The story of Eva Hofler is meant to challenge their self-circumscription and their allegiance to cigarettes above their allegiance to humanity. This lofty (if unstated) aim is perhaps laudable, though subsequent tellings of the Eva stories indicate that Eve's commitment to a unified humanity is, itself, somewhat suspect.

Indeed, if Eve's first two audiences are reluctant but essentially captive audiences for her, her third audience is entirely different. Her tattoo is accidentally revealed to a group of women in the "development" end of the book business at a party to launch a nearly-famous author's second book. Eve will only tell the women the name of her third Eva, but refuses them a story. Urged to write about Eva Berg, Eve declines to engage in conversation further. The question, why not them? is important. Clearly, the development women are false and vacuous, but these factors have not been a barrier before, and indeed, when Eve does finally tell the story of Eva Berg, she does so to false and vacuous men who view her "in her childless, fortyish state on a continuum from tragedy to temptation depending on the evening" (59). Thus, the issue runs deeper than mere shallowness, as it were. For the development women, "there was something just a little bit offensive...about people who had experiences and didn't make book on them" (57). It is clear that they would, in some shape or form, *develop* Eva, and therefore take Eve's power away from her. They want to have a lasting, fixed story of Eva, one that doesn't change in the telling. Eve's power—ironically reinforced by a "starlet" who wishes she had thought of Eve's attention-seeking ploy—is only potent if she herself remains at the center of the story and is entirely in control of it—if she continues to *embody* it. Eve's earlier allegiance to humanity is thus placed in relief next to allegiance to her own games of power, and it is here that questions about appropriation begin to become uncomfortably present.

Eva Berg is Eve's first non-Jewish victim. She is an Aryan doctor who helps women to have abortions because the official policy of rewarding women for excessive motherhood is damaging to their physical and mental health (the other side of Kinder/Kuche/Kirche paradigm is thus alluded to even more firmly than before). This Eva is, to deconstruct official stories further, the first to die in a gas chamber; indeed, one of Eve's points is that the gas chamber was invented initially not for Jews, but for "defective" Aryans. The story of this Eva's attempts to stem excessive fertility is told to adulterous male editors who feel comfortable with talk of gynecologists: "They all knew obstetricians and had worked with them in delivery room" (63). Ironically, then, these men, whose experiences of childbirth are confined to observation and only partial participation, become the audience that Eve selects. Despite her intentions, though, the development women do end up as a side audience, and so it is suggested that control of her story is precarious at best. If the stories themselves progressively deconstruct an archetypal Nazi victim, it is revealing that their telling appears as

well to suggest a sort of pattern as Eve moves from total control over her Jewish victims to partial control over her Aryan ones. However, it is a measure of Eve's own inability to see this that she continues to narrate her tales even after she should have learned some "lessons" from them herself.

The story of Eva Marks, a German Red Cross nurse who is accidentally pushed into a overfilled train because she is attempting to give aid to its Jewish "cargo," is told to Eve's suicidal and dying Uncle Jim. Eva Marks is gassed "by mistake," much, it seems, as Jim is dying of AIDS "by mistake." The story does not save him. Eva Beck is a misfit who tries to save dogs from the Nazis; the story is told at a veterinary clinic to other misfits, who prefer not to hear. Eva Hartz is a Catholic woman who wanted to be a nun. The longest and last "story," it is told to nuns in the hospital where Eve herself is being treated after her accident; its purpose is to get the doctors—and nurses—to treat their patients (Eve included) as human beings.

There are two other stories, however, that cannot be analyzed neatly in this chronology, in part because of the effects they have on Eve. One incorporates her, the other sidelines her. The story of Eva Flick is a story Eve tells "about" herself, to a young man she meets at a club. It is her first night out clubbing with Eva in tow: "Their relationship had progressed from remembrance to cohabitation, from the past to the present" (93). Thus Eve moves from *wearing* to nearly *being* Eva, and this embodiment affects the tale. Eve has planned the night out as a "night off" and thus she had "planned no tales" (93), which is perhaps why the tale that emerges is one that mingles Eve and Eva more firmly than ever. Her audience is a young, unnamed bass player. He naively believes her when she says that she was a concentration camp victim herself, sent to both Dachau and Auschwitz because of a "criminal" record. As a young everyman, he portrays the depths of ignorance of young Americans, and is a good candidate for the education that Eve claims is her goal. However, the story acts primarily as foreplay. Thus, if she is, as she professes, telling people stories to help her audiences learn, then she is failing here in the education of the "young."

Eva Flick is Eve's only survivor—necessarily so since she conflates herself with this Eva. In *The Desirable Body*, Jon Stratton explores the power and structure of fetishization, examining, among other things, the streetwalker, the striptease artist and the dead female as a spectacle. Whilst Eve is strictly none of the above, she does incorporate aspects of each. If the streetwalker makes "access to her body a commodity" and attempts "to increase her sexual desirability by showing her body off" (Stratton 90), so too does Eve. Indeed, it is because of her very commodification of Eva that Eve is uncomfortable with the audience of development women above—women who might act as pimps for her. Additionally, given the fact that Eve is both performing a part, as well as engaging in foreplay through the revelation of the Eva Flick text, Eve invokes the model of a striptease artist, revealing a little at a time until she has her audience where she wants it. Finally, as Stratton argues, "the spectacle of the dead woman" is historically "a libidinally powerful site of the male gaze" (160). Whilst this Eva is not and cannot be "dead" (even as the Eva of 500123 must be), it is Eve's proximity to death that acts here as an aphrodisiac.

Of all of the stories in the novel, however, it is the one that Eve herself *is told* rather than tells which provides the greatest synthesis of the novel's many facets. Identity, subjectivity, performance and history become combined in the story of Jacob Schlaren, the famous Yiddish transvestite who is the only person who can tell Eve anything about Eva at all: "'you came to the kemp in forty-four when Primo Levi came. Late in de war. Perhaps that's how you survived.... You came from Germany. Late, though, very late. Unusual'" (144). Ironically, Eve only meets Jacob through the failure of her own body. Meeting Charles

and his new lover at a film premiere, she faints in response to the encounter. Thus her body, the site of her performance, becomes as unstable as the performances she enacts.

It is Eve's guilt in her middle class WASP upbringing of unending privilege that induces her to wear the tattoo like an MIA bracelet; it is her fear of her own ingrained and largely unacknowledged anti-Semitism that prompts her to unburden herself to a man who has had the real rather than manufactured experience of a concentration camp. Ashamed to meet an actual survivor, Eve admits, "'I hate myself so much. Who am I? What am I doing?'" (146). It is only when she begins to question her role that she is able to listen to the story of others.

The story Jacob Schlaren tells is a compelling one. He spent his childhood disguised as an Aryan girl, learning to perform another religion as well as another gender, learning to "pass." He was initially reluctant to give up his identity as a boy, and it was only through his mother assuring him that they'd be like spies—the idea of adventure intriguing his young boy's heart—that he was convinced. Soon, however, the clothes themselves "charmed" him. Despite his wish to run and jump like the boys, he learned to feign contentment at playing with dolls. He both studied and practiced at being a girl, until he considered himself so much an expert that he had to stop thinking of himself as a boy altogether to avoid the kind of schizophrenia that such pretense involved. Indeed, after a certain point it was clear to him that he wished to remain a girl forever, but on the way to Auschwitz, his mother forcibly stripped him and turned him back into a boy.

While being a girl was his only chance of survival as a young child, turning back into a boy was his only chance of survival as a teenager: "'My best performance of all was as a strapping youth, capable of work, on the selection ramp'" (155). Thus Jacob Schlaren survived the war. When he meets up with Eve, he declares that his experience with the Nazis constructed him: "'I wouldn't be what I am without it'" (145). There is no end to performances for Jacob, as his "real" gender feels manufactured, and as he returns, again and again, to the masquerade of femininity. Butler argues that drag is "a site of certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes" (*Bodies* 125). While his audience sees a performance on stage, the text hints that Jacob's real performance takes place off stage: negotiating gender in "real life" and against the history of Nazi power that first induced it. Sadly, though, Eve's awareness of Jacob's performativity is only partial, perhaps because the character is unwilling to give up—or even fully recognize—performativity in herself.

Eve displaces her own self-questioning and doubt onto Eva, and in this way continues to be almost a caricature of postmodern anxiety. Lidia Curti argues that "[a]s the concept of a unified identity is put in question, writing is more often tied to the impossibility, or even undesirability, of such a goal and becomes the mirror of a split erratic subjectivity" (108). Certainly, if Eva becomes more diffuse as the text progresses, so does the character of Eve; her imagined control slips from her, and her body, used as a sign of remembrance, becomes weak, fallible, and eventually broken. The link between the destruction of her body and the fragmentation of her subjectivity is evident. It is not accidental that her historical, and supposedly permanent, remembrance becomes erased, removed, stitched over; her fear of history's reincorporation of the Holocaust becomes recapitulated in the figure of her own flesh.

The story of the "real" Eva is constantly deferred in the text, reinvented, reappropriated, as Eva becomes Eva Klein, Eva Beck, Eva Hartz (but never Eva Braun) until we realize that the "real" Eva—that is, the wearer of that particular concentration camp number—is not "Eva" at all, but Leni: a woman who is neither a Jew, nor implicated in heroic crimes against

the state. She is a loyal Nazi woman mis-identified, marked, and contained. Leni is, like the other Evas, betrayed by her femininity; marked by motherhood; discarded; but this is not enough to connect these Nazi victims unproblematically. After all, Leni is also a woman of power—nominal power, perhaps, considering that she is only "working class"—but power nonetheless, and her power is power of "racial purity," aesthetically juxtaposed with her ruined and crumbling dwelling. (Her decimated neighborhood becomes an objective correlative for her moral state and the moral state of Germany under Nazism.) Eve's narratives have always been, implicitly, about power, but it is the figure of Leni that draws them all together.

If Eve's tattoo is, as she claims, "an emblem of a different perspective, the perspective of women, all kinds of women" (13), then we begin to see that her seemingly naive stance towards women is actually more complex. Gender itself is crucial to Eve's construction of these stories, and indeed of her own larger narrative. But gender is also itself subject to scrutiny in its own right. Eve's whole narrative is clearly gendered, and her references to men are, in many ways, quite insulting. She calls a number of them "boys" in the way that women have been reduced to "girls" by those who seek to deny them power. She repeats "commonsense" knowledge about the ways that men and women communicate, arguing, for example, that women remember whereas men forget: even at the casual level of a dinner party, this dividing line is established and reinforced. Furthermore, it is the women who first realize the artifice of Eve's narratives; the men don't seem to notice. Her friend Babe comments early on, "She made that up. I can feel it" (20). When questioned about the role of men in her constructed tales, Eve answers, "'Well, of course, men, too. But the tattoo's not about men. It's about the hearts and souls of women'" (51). There is, in this line, a sense of naiveté which is eventually—at least partially—dispelled. After all, it is her exploration of women's "hearts and souls" that dismantles any simple compassion for Aryan women or any naive assumption of female solidarity.

Moreover, while Eve's focus on women could seem to be as sexist as a history which is about men alone, it is clear that she focuses on women and sidelines the men for two important reasons. First, there is the law: "'Unmarried Aryan women were not citizens of the Reich after 1935....Now, understand, these were laws, not attitudes, not beliefs, laws—'" (52). Eve's focus on the women thus becomes a reclamation of the suddenly disenfranchised. Here, it appears, power is invoked again. However, Eve's second reason for her exclusive focus on the female is more compelling and more complex: "Hitler couldn't have made it without the women" (40). This historical factor, indicative of a power which is largely unacknowledged, is key. The innocence of women is hereby undercut, and their complicity and indeed both tacit and overt approval of Hitler become Eve's larger story.

In the process of negotiating her own responses to the Holocaust, Eve appropriates the body of Leni and the trauma of a succession of Evas. In creating a gendered discourse of history, through compiling from fragments the sidelined stories of women, she overtly acknowledges the *construction* of such a narrative. The text itself mimics its own processes, as it, too, remains fragmented with gaps both of time and consequence. Little is narrated between Eve's stories, though much of consequence occurs, including the apparently irreparable damage her tattoo does to her relationship with her lover. At the end of the novel, it becomes clear that Eve's motives in wearing the tattoo are far more personal than she initially admits even to herself, and this is crucial. Reconciled with her lover, Eve finally narrates the story of Leni and acknowledges her own motivations behind the tattoo: she had inadvertently discovered her lover's Jewish identity when she found a hidden Star of David armband. Charles, too, has been passing—as a Catholic. He does this not so much for privileges, though they accrue, as to remove himself from guilt and taint: he is the son of "catcher" Jews. Yet his assumption of a Catholic identity cannot, of course, fully absolve him,

as Catholics and the Catholic Church were themselves implicated in the capture of Jews in Nazi Germany as elsewhere. Both Eve and Charles thus confront their own guilt in the face of the historical Holocaust, and their own ambivalent responses. As Eve reports, "'I knew you must be Jewish. And if you were Jewish and we were living in Nazi Germany, I'd be barred by law from loving you'" (194). In keeping with the sense of the narrative, the armband isn't even his; it is a war memento belonging to a filmmaker friend. Thus once again, imagination constructs a story that "reality" goes on to deconstruct.

Engaged with these larger questions, then, the narrative also remains a personal quest, and at the heart of all of Eve's stories is her own personal, partial, and wavering performance of a shifting, postmodern identity. But in addition to its being a personal ploy for attention and reward, Eve's incorporation of Eva is also a political statement aimed at remembrance. In this very paradox lies the novel's central idea. In the edited reviews that preface the Vintage paperback edition, the *Sunday Times* suggests that the novel "raises queasy questions about entitlement; whether smart, clever, youngish novelists are overstepping some moral boundary in taking the Holocaust as a 'theme' and giving it a bit of a topspin." Indeed, the question of appropriate appropriation does not go away. However, while Eve herself is superficial, surfacy, and selfish, her narrative obtains a complexity that acknowledges the complexity of history and both the obligation and the difficulties of its retelling, especially in a chronologically and geographically distant America which appropriates the term "holocaust" for a destructive disease rather than a horrific extermination program. For these reasons, if no others, it deserves its place as a key American Studies text of the late twentieth century. Through the body and its performance—drag, gender construction, and ultimate failure—Eve attempts both to make a difference, and to receive absolution. Whether she accomplishes either is a matter of continued debate.

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[1] I am grateful to my students at the University of Central Lancashire, England, for their uncompromising—if indeed at times quite hostile—reactions to *Eve's Tattoo*. Their questions and insights have helped me refine some of the points I have discussed throughout. My thanks go as well to my colleague Will Kaufman for his patient and careful reading and commenting on this article.