This essay is concerned with a unique pattern of autobiographical discourse within contemporary Jewish writing that has emerged in France over the course of the last twenty-five years. To understand this intriguing form of écriture de soi, the reader must first be acquainted with the historical, cultural, and demographic contexts in which the authors of the générations d’après (that is writers who were born either during or after the Shoah) had started to write. The main part of the essay then will focus on what I propose calling «autojudeoography», referring not to a literary genre, but to the dynamics of contemporary Jewish writing about the self.

1.

Unlike their predecessors, the younger generations of French Jewish writers have not been preoccupied with the Shoah and the problem of its representation, but are engaged in elaborating strategies for the narration of Jewish life in the aftermath of both the Vichy experience and the Jewish exodus from the Maghreb. Regardless of whether the present generations of writers come from families clad in the disguise of assimilated life, from homes shattered by the Nazi genocide, or from orthodox families who had to leave the Jewish quarters of their North African homelands, they must all work out their own attitude towards the history, the present, and the future of the Jewish people. This means a negotiation with the missions and responsibilities imposed on them by the legacy of the victims of the Shoah, by the resistance to Nazi occupation and French collaboration, and by the emigration from the Maghreb during decolonization. These writers map in often autobiographically informed narratives the paths that led many of them from the political orthodoxies of the student rebellion to an appreciation of their cultural and ethnic heritage, from the study of Maoism to the study of Yiddish or Judeo-Spanish, from the exegesis of Marx’ Capital to the reading of Kafka’s Process.

Contemporary Jewish writing responded historically, culturally, politically, and aesthetically to developments in the French society out of which it emerged: historically, to the dismantling of the Vichy syndrome and to...
the aftermath of decolonization; culturally, to French society’s turn away from Jacobin uniformism; politically, to the demise of the ideological imperatives of the student movement; and aesthetically, to the exhaustion of the poetological paradigms of littérature engagée or the nouveau roman. The rich agenda of jeune littérature juive, whose beginnings date back to the late 1970s and which gained immense momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, also takes the form of a reassessment of changes and movements within modern Jewish life. It participates critically in the discourses both of France’s Jewish communities as they have been shaped by complex demographic, religious, and cultural shifts and of the Grande Nation at large. Scrutinizing the assimilationist course that French Jewry took after the French Revolution until it reached the dead end of Vichy, these writers narrate the biographies of Jews in France and in its colonies and protecto rates while at the same time supplementing the collective memory of gentile France and pointing the way towards the future of Jewish culture in the New Europe.

Engaged in a dialogue with Alain Finkielkraut’s influential critique *Le Juif imaginaire* – a work that in 1980 challenged the post-Shoah generations to redefine Jewish identity in postwar France – these authors come face to face with the major events and forces in recent Jewish and French history (Shoah, decolonization, revisionism) as well as with the dynamics of contemporary Judaism (*réjudaisation* as well as *déjudaisation*, diasporic existence, and new militancy). What emerges, whether from the very absence of a Jewish past, from a legacy of Jewish resistance, or from the context of cultural and national displacement, is a writing that relates Jewish places of the past (the *shtetl* of Eastern Europe, the *mellah* and *hara* of the Maghreb, the *lieux de combats* of the Maquis) to present-day France, gauging the historical, cultural, and generational distances between them. The traditions of Jewish literature prove only partially helpful in the project of creating a discourse that reflects, on the one hand, the desire for an autonomous beginning and, on the other, the attachment to the realm of the family and to the past of the Jewish people. Their writings tend to document a paradox: the authors’ readiness to accept a canon while at the same time acknowledging the impossibility of conforming to it.

Yet this complex relationship towards the tradition of the Jewish canon is not the only paradox on which the writing of the *générations d’après* is predicated. Indeed, two authors as different as the fiction writer Gérard Wajcman and the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet both use, independently from each other, the term «paradox» to come to terms with the unique phenomenon of Jewish authorship. In his 1986 novel *L’interdit*, Gérard Wajcman reflects on the condition of his protagonist who only towards the very end of the novel recovers from his aphasia when he rediscovers the Yiddish language spoken by his parents:
Coming from a different angle – from historiography – Pierre Vidal-Naquet acknowledges in the preface of his study *Les Juifs, la mémoire et le présent* (1981) the intricacies inherent in the process of writing about Jewish history:

Assez paradoxalement, je dirai volontiers que c’est moins parce que je suis Juif que j’ai écrit ces pages que l’inverse: c’est en écrivant ce livre, et quelques autres travaux, que je suis devenu Juif, Juif de volonté si l’on veut, ou Juif de réflexion.¹

Not directly affected by the Shoah, the children and grandchildren of the victims and of the survivors have begun to search, often in different directions, for paths that would bring them back in touch with a Jewish past about which many of them had known very little. Cut off by the persecution of their ancestors and by the temptations of acculturation, they are trying to acquaint themselves with strains of traditions lost to acculturation, persecution, and emigration. Writing, for them, is a means of reinscribing themselves into tradition. This endeavor may consume large parts of a writer’s production or surface only occasionally, as in the case of Alain Fleischer’s short autobiographical pieces. In his «Librairies et charcuteries. Fragment autobiographique I», Fleischer responds to his father’s non-conforming way of being Jewish by drawing the lines of his own position somewhat closer to tradition: «Je me sens peut-être encore plus juif que mon père....»³

In France as in many other countries of the diaspora, many young Jews would not reconnect to their ethnic and cultural heritage until after the student rebellion had reached its ideological climax and opened up discourses beyond the realm of class politics. The processes set in motion by the student rebellion, according to the Jewish writer Martine Partouche, caused a «crise d’identité qui traverse l’Europe» and affected the members of the 1968 generation, who mostly had been too young during the Algerian War, most profoundly.⁴ Dany Cohn-Bendit, in retrospect, acknowledges the blindness of the Left:

---

Younger Jews no longer concealed their curiosity about the course Judaism took in the United States, where a multitude of voices had created different strands of Jewish identities and communities and had started to contribute to public discourse. What earlier had been denounced as a category of the accidental and subjective now became celebrated as a particularity worth exploring. The path taken by the historian Annette Wieviorka, born in 1948, is typical for the retour identitaire: the daughter of non-religious parents of Polish descent with Bundist convictions, motivated by a political agenda, spent a couple of years teaching in China at the height of the student movement, and returned disillusioned and eager to discover her family’s cultural and linguistic heritage, writing in 1979 an autobiographical book (L’écureuil de Chine) in which she reflected on the path her life had taken: «Je sentais confusément que j’avais trahi une judéité que je ne situais pas.»

After her studies of Yiddish in New York, she went on to publish Les livres du souvenir (1983), a study of books commemorating life in the shtetl before the Shoah. A specialist on the Nazi persecution, Wieviorka became a driving force of the mission Matteoli. André Neher, one of the grand old men of Jewish thought and criticism in France, had stated in 1969 at the occasion of the first Colloque des intellectuels Juifs «Longtemps, l’intellectuel juif a fait figure d’enfant perdu du judaïsme.» Not even ten years after the first gathering of this kind, the Jewish intellectual had returned home for good.

This aspiration to author one’s own script of identity, to invent oneself, became the major objective of Rosenzweig’s generation, which had grown up under a legacy of a silence that the perpetrators intentionally had spun around their crimes and that the survivors could not break because of the paralyzing effects of the trauma they had experienced and the feeling of guilt of having survived while their friends, family, and neighbors had been murdered. They had grown up in families that had been shaken and truncated by the genocide, in which the Shoah was not just a singular event but a continuing force of emotional destruction. From the perspective of a Jewish child of survivors whose heritage goes back to Eastern Europe, Alain Finkielkraut attempted in Le juif imaginaire (1980) to locate his own upbringing on the map of Jewish experience. The essay by the child of survivors accomplished at the level of identity discourse what the Six-Day War had done at the political level: it complicated, if not fractured, tendencies.
towards a mythologization of the Jew as the victim *per se*. In highly self-critical words, Finkielkraut took on the self-fashioning of young Jews who cast themselves in the tragic role of the victim, the outsider, the persecuted.

Shedding obsolete and stifling templates of identity, including Sartre’s influential notion of Jewish identity as a projection by the anti-Semite, and bidding farewell to the *juif invisible*, a number of theoretical reassessments began to explore the conditions of contemporary Judaism and the leeway available for identity negotiations: «Ce n’est pas l’antisémite qui fait le juif», André Glucksmann categorically stated in 1984, and Luc Rosenzweig juxtaposed the essentialist reductionism with the fundamental principle of the philosophical Enlightenment. In his collection of essays with young Jews, which appeared in 1980, he declared provocatively:

Ce qui nous fait juifs, ce n’est pas le regard de l’autre, fût-il antisémite (et donc reconnaissant dans le juif une spécificité), mais bien cette impossibilité de se considérer comme un homme nouveau, ce refus d’un des axiomes de la modernité: l’être cause de soi-même.  

Rosenzweig’s insistence on the claim for autonomy as the foundation of modern subjectivity acknowledges the situation he and his peers (Rosenzweig was born in 1943) were facing when they set out to delineate the shape of their Jewishness both by relating it to and by differentiating it from the traditions of Jewish discourse, from the attitude of «le quant-à-soi» and the acculturation practiced by the *israélites*, from the Bundist secularism of Jews of East-European descent, as well as from Sephardic religiosity of the Maghrebian immigrants who soon outnumbered their Ashkenazi coreligionists in Belleville.

2.

The opening sentences of the autobiographical account written in 1979 by Robert Ouaknine (who was born in 1950 to Moroccan immigrants) illustrate the circumstances under which many of the young Jewish authors set out to write in the late Seventies and early Eighties:  

Une annonce dans «Libé» invitant à l’écriture; une occasion de fouiller, de retrouver une histoire, de régler un vieux compte, du genre «la différence que je revendique, d’où elle sort?» Pourquoi m’affirmer juif alors que je ne pratique plus depuis longtemps, que je n’ai aucun lien avec la communauté et qu’Israël reste quelque chose de lointain (même si mes contradictions passionnées ne me permettent pas une position claire sur la question. Et pourquoi après tout en aurai-je une?). Pourquoi ne pas écrire ces choses qui sont mon

---


This passage shows very well how the turn towards Jewish writing after 1968 responded to the call to revisit a particularity hitherto kept hidden. The call to which the author refers had been issued by Luc Rosenzweig, who had been soliciting contributions to his Catalogue pour des Juifs de maintenant with an ad placed in Libération. Just a few years earlier, at the peak of the student movement, such an acknowledgment of Jewish difference, such an appreciation of the contradictions governing personal identity, would have been decried as sheer private indulgence. These statements now stand as a prelude to Ouaknine's reconstruction of an autobiography that admits how complex identities actually are and that does away with the imperative to subsume everything under an overarching political agenda. The act of writing as a recherche du temps perdu recognizes the author's Jewish heritage as the formative context of his biographical development, in which his ancestors naturally play a major role. The pun of the title of Ouaknine's piece, «Autojudeographie», elicits different associations. It suggests that the author's autobiography is essentially a Jewish one, that his Jewishness may have been created by himself, and that his very act of recording his life as a Jew is what «makes» him a Jew in the first place. But the neologism may also allude to the contradiction of recording a life that to a certain degree has been written for him already. «Autojudeography» indeed is an apt term to describe the dynamics of contemporary Jewish writing. It is the very act of writing, more so than the fact of ethnic belonging, that creates the unique attitude toward Judaism and the Jewish people displayed in the literary projects of these young generations of authors. The proclivity towards the autobiographical (auto) and the self-reflexive preoccupation with the nature of writing (graphie) provide, as it were, the narrative frame within which the notion of Jewishness (judéo) appears.

Writing his autojudeography, Ouaknine has to take into account that the power of his authorship regarding the text of his biography ends where his family heritage begins: his own autograph, so to speak, bears the mark of his Jewish heritage. And yet, without his act of writing it, the text would not exist as a record, and the author would not be able to face up to it. The American anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin formulates the situation of this generation as follows:

Seeing ourselves as pre-placed and placing ourselves within the tradition, we are also
cognizant of the demands expressed by Walter Benjamin's dictum that in every era the at-
tempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower
it.\textsuperscript{11}

Georges Perec, whose «Ellis Island, description d’un projet» had appeared
in Rosenzweig’s \textit{Catalogue} as well, once elaborated in an interview on the
relationship between his writing and his Jewishness in a manner that illumi-
nates the very concept of autojudeography:

\begin{quote}
Je crois que j’ai commencé à me sentir juif lorsque j’ai entrepris de raconter l’histoire de
mon enfance et lorsque s’est formé le projet longtemps différé, mais de plus en plus in-
éluctable, de retracer l’histoire de ma famille à travers les souvenirs que ma tante m’a
transmis. Cette recherche de mes racines, qui m’a depuis conduit vers de nombreux che-
mins que je n’ai pas fini parcourir, m’a fait, je crois, prendre conscience de cette apparte-
nance à une culture fondée sur l’exil et sur l’espoir, sur l’effacement et sur le recommen-
cement.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

The «tradition» with which Ouaknine’s «autojudeographie», the autobio-
ographical writing of Georges Perec, and the fiction of many of the authors
of the \textit{générations d’après} struggle is the already-mentioned vacuum of
tradition that consisted in silence – the silence of the dead, silence of the
survivors, the \textit{mutisme} of the Sephardic immigrants. It is this very vacuum
of tradition and heritage – what Alan Astro has called the «minimization of
Jewishness»\textsuperscript{13} – that provides the crucial stimulus for writing, especially
when the authors try to trace what the problematic notion of «Jewish
authenticity» could possibly mean. They had to «reconstitute the past from
stories rather than direct knowledge», as Geoffrey H. Hartman pointed
out.\textsuperscript{14}

The term «autojudeography» can help avoid the misunderstanding evok-
ed by the expression «Jewish literature». It succeeds in fending off the
charge of essentialism most vehemently brought by the literary critic Itamar
Even-Zohar, who in regard to debates about contemporary Israeli literature
warned that only a nationalistic Jewish approach, or a racist anti-Semitic
one, or ignorance ... would adopt the term «Jewish literature» on the basis of
the origin of writers.\textsuperscript{15} «Autojudeography» directs the attention to the dy-

\textsuperscript{12} Georges Perec and Jean-Marie Le Sidaner: «Entretien». In: \textit{L’Arc} 76 (1979), 8–9.
namics of Jewish writing that are predicated on a writer’s Jewish affiliation but that are characterized by a paradoxical nature: it is a process that creates, to use the terminology of Albert Memmi, the judéité of a text rather than being the product of the judéité of the author. Given the «trou de mémoire», to quote the paradigmatic title of Serge Koster’s autobiography, this writing cannot be the reflex of the writer’s Jewish background precisely because this background so often is missing:

Pas de généalogie, pas de racines, pas de lopin, pas de maison, pas de fibres juives. Pas de spoliation, puisque pas de possession.\(^\text{16}\)

The book that Annette Kahn, daughter of a Jewish resistance fighter, wrote as a journalist for Le Point on the Barbie Trial, is yet another example of how autojudeographic writing reconstitutes filial bonds to confirm, in the end, the affiliation with the Jewish people. Kahn (born in 1941 in Saint Etienne) was a young child when her father Robert died as one of the last victims of Klaus Barbie. As she states in the preface to the book commissioned by an American publishing house, she «had no real memory of him».\(^\text{17}\) As Kahn uses the assignment to cover the trial for her own Trauerarbeit, her writing delves into the memory of her father further than ever before. Thus, in the epilogue she can exclaim that the work on the book has changed her profoundly:

As for me, I have come out of the Barbie trial a different person. Thanks to the trial, and to this book, I have finally gotten to know my father. I have taken the faint memory of a man, a mere fistful of dust, and lent him substance. (238)

In one of the chapters, Kahn talks about her mother’s silence she had encountered as child and later as an adolescent who was afraid that she would have to listen to her mother’s stories about her and her husband’s past. Covering the trial, Kahn for the first time in her life begins to approach the mother, «determined to make her speak», while feeling that she is becoming her mother’s torturer. In her following book, Personne ne voudra nous croire (1991), Kahn refers to the children’s complicity in their parents’ silence as the point of departure of her new interest in documenting the testimonies of survivors, «afin que ces voix nous survivent à jamais».\(^\text{18}\) Kahn has put her writing in the service of preserving the memories of a generation of witnesses who, as Elie Wiesel had indicated in his testimony at the Barbie trial, are about to perish: a form of affiliation initiated by the act of

---


revisiting her filial bonds against the backdrop of judicial writing. To be sure, the motive of zakhor, the imperative to remember, has prompted many Jewish writers to document in their works the lives of those who fell victim to Nazi persecution. However, this act of prendre la parole by itself does not have to generate the kind of autobiographical discourse that is of interest here. For example, the works of Myriam Anissimov are from the very beginning predicated on a strong self-identification as a Jewish writer – more precisely as a Yiddish author writing in French. The autobiographical narrator of Sa Majesté la Mort (1999), Anissimov's most recent novel, is the recipient of an assignment given to her by her mother: «Elle décida alors que je serais la dépositaire de sa mémoire, de celle de tous les siens; les vivants et les morts.» After all, it is one of the most essential features of the situation of Jews writing in the 1980s and 1990s that they are working at the historical moment when the survivors are about to cease living. The death of their elders is an essential point of departure for the literary projects by young writers. Like in some of her previous books, Sa Majesté la Mort continues to intertwine the narratives of the parents and grandparents with stories from the life of the author. Anissimov creates with her book a forum on which she stages crucial moments of her own life, asserting her own presence in this book of family remembrances. Switching back and forth between scenes from the ancestors’ lives in Poland and the survivors’ lives in French exile and vignettes from her own early childhood hiding under the care of a Protestant nun, Anissimov continues to create family tableaux as the narrative framework for her self-portraits.

The dynamics of «autojudeography» leave it to the writers to contemplate what being Jewish could entail for them as imaginative rather than as imaginary Jews. A majority of texts of the générations d'après indeed are bound to the autobiographic experience of the authors and, via writing, they do uncover relationships towards the past and present of the Jewish people and their own family, which otherwise would have gone unnoticed and which now become embraced in their works. Alain Finkielkraut coined the term «le roman de dés-apprentissage» to describe the development of the children of Jewish immigrants who came of age in the 1970s, only to realize that they are at home neither in a Jewish community that may have been part of their parents’ experience nor in gentile society. Not only the country their parents left behind, but also the culture that now surrounds the

children, has an identity less recognizable than expected: «Le lieu qu’il aurait pu quitter et celui qu’il aurait dû rejoindre – le judaïsme communautaire et la France indivisible – ont ensemble disparu de la carte, ou, si on les y retrouve, c’est à titre de vestiges» (114).

Jean-Luc Allouche’s *Les jours innocents* (1983) documents the enthusiasm with which the younger generations had turned their backs to countries – in Allouche’s case, Algeria – that they had perceived as «une marche d’empire, trop étroite ...»23 They would come to realize that their new home offered them an «espace intermédiaire» (36) beyond the «âpreté» of Africa, but also that the space was inhabited by the specter of anti-Semitism ready to rise out of interpersonal interaction, which the newcomers would perceive as superficial.

But despite the complicated courses of these passages narrated by the younger authors, the majority of their texts do not subscribe to the parents’ and grandparents’nostalgia for the Jewish communities or the countries of origin left behind. This characteristic certainly sets them apart from the previous generations of authors, whose texts, according to Clara Lévy, «sont imprégnés d’une forte nostalgie à l’égard de temps et de lieux disparus....»24 Allouche (born in 1948 in Israel and currently an editor of *Libération*) states quite categorically in his account of immigrating to France as a twelve-year-old boy how little he cared about leaving:

[... ] la folie du désert, la nostalgie d’une terre fichée en chair comme une inguérissable blessure, la halte précaire, le cimetière des éléphants, le camp de fortune de gens qui n’avaient plus le courage de rebâtir une vie, la lente dégradation de la tribu, l’épuisement, la coupure, le fief des jours qui passent sans espoir alors que ceux d’hier furent de miel, le ressassement, l’hystérie des soirs où le pain n’a plus de goût, où le vin est amer, le chant étouffé sous la cendre.25

Allouche’s younger colleague Gilles Zenou (born in 1957 in Morocco) provides a very similar diatribe against his country of origin, Morocco, when in his novel *Mektoub* (1987) he has the young Emmanuel – a Jewish Candide of frivolous adventures and of a tragic ending – look forward to moving to Strasbourg to attend a yeshiva. The tirade is caused partly by the young man’s boredom with the Moroccan provinces and their backwardness («ville visqueuse, ville close, ville morte»26), partly by his weariness with a small Jewish world subjugated by constant angst, «la peur du rabbin, la peur du voisin, la peur de l’Arabe, la peur du roi Mahmoud VI» (50). In his *curriculum vitae*, this «résident temporaire» notes «Refus d’être juif» under the

rubric of crimes committed and «'Etre juif à perpétuité» under the rubric of penalties served. In Zenou’s La Désaffection (1990), Emmanuel has in the protagonist Elie a counterpart who leaves behind his meaningless existence in a small French town to become a writer in Istanbul. Regardless of their individual cultural and geographical coordinates, Zenou’s protagonists are driven by a decisionism that echoes Camus’ Existentialism (and, in the case of Mektoub, Gide’s L’Immoraliste) and haunted by the notion of the Absurd. For Elie, his wanderings provide the external conditions for his writing, which is driven by the desire of self-determination: «Je me récris pour naître à moi-même.»

Writing as a form of self-conception drives the dynamics of autojudeography. In the works of the Sephardic authors who arrived in France following their parents’ exodus from the Maghreb or who were born in France after decolonization, this self-conception appears in the form of a metamorphosis that the members of these generations underwent upon their arrival in the modern Western world, and that they try to understand through their writing. In the case of Allouche, who came from a very observant home, this kind of écriture de soi entails initially loosening the ties to the family’s practice of Judaism. Whereas the older ones respond to Ashkenazim rites prevalent in France in the 1950s and 1960s by rapidly establishing the religious and cultural infrastructure to accommodate their Sephardic heritage, the belief system of the younger ones often suffers its first fissures upon encountering a different form of Judaism. This experience as well as the influence of the philosophical paradigms governing the education provided by the schools puts an end to the «jours innocents». Arnold Mandel’s insistence on looking at the young French Jewish writers as intellectual products of the «lycée français avec son cartésianisme endémique» thus needs to guide the reading of the works of their Sephardic peers as well in order to understand that they, too, «sont aliénés par rapport à eux-mêmes.» Allouche recounts how the impact of the humanities professor came to replace the power of the rabbi because the formative experience of schooling succeeded in displacing the world of Judaism altogether: «Le lycée devenait une Athènes aux fastes intellectuels si éclatants qu’elle en éclipsait la Jérusalem terne de mon logis.» The French diaspora became the setting of a process of dejudaization, from which many children of the

---

30 Jean-Luc Allouche: Les jours innocents (note 23), 32.
immigrants would not recover until they managed to gain some distance from the domination of Western universalism and secular rationalism.

Allouche, in search for «un autre Dieu que les petites divinités barbues» (54), bids farewell to Paris, the capital of the political, for Jerusalem, the capital of the religious land. At this point, his account also leaves behind the first-person narrative and switches to the third person—a form of narrative distancing reflective of the distance that separates the author from Orthodoxy. The sojourn to Israel does not succeed in undoing this detachment. The first person does not reappear until the last section of the book, which recounts his visit to his native Algeria.

Algeria, he has to acknowledge, is no longer an inhabitable diaspora for the Jews. In Constantine, all the sites of religious practice have been erased, his «Jérusalem d’enfance est désolée et ravagée» (141). In images depicting the destruction of yet another temple, Allouche’s melancholy is evoked not by the thought of the lost mitzrayim but by the fact that he, unlike his predecessors, has only the French language to articulate his feelings towards the new Algeria and the painful history of the destruction of Jewish sites. Whereas his ancestors employed their mastery of «toutes les louanges de la Terre sainte» (131) to celebrate the beauties of Israel and to espouse the laws of Judaism in their book, Allouche has been robbed by the diasporic experience of the possibility to write in any language other than French. Thus, his book is a manifestation of the point of autojudeographic departure:

Le mien respire l’exil, parce que nous sommes dépouillis de notre héritage, projetés en d’improbables enracinements, précaires, dangereux, dérisoires. Fils de nous-mêmes, engendrés dans les tours et détours de la dispersion, détachés de la tutelle bienveillante, protectrice et exigeante de nos ancêtres. (131)

Allouche’s Les jours innocents originates in a Cartesian desire to find through the reflexive monologue of writing a foundation of the self, framed in quotes from the Hebrew Bible and from the Talmud introducing the individual segments of the book. The Talmudic tale that Allouche has chosen as the book’s motto comments on the task of the scribe who, according to Rabbi Meïr, is charged with an assignment that will result in the destruction of the entire world if it is carried out the wrong way. Such profound impact, Les jours innocents concedes, is reserved for a tradition of Jewish writing to which the authors of les générations d’après look back not without awe.

The difficulty of finding such models among Jewish and non-Jewish authors challenged them to create narratives that can be called «autojudeographies» also in the sense that the Jewish vitae of the post-Shoah and postcolonial generations are not scripted on the conventions of autobiographical writing but rather without them or even against them. Serge Koster can state about Rousseau’s Confessions in his Trou de mémoire that
Rousseau, too, knew what persecution is all about, but this shared experience does not allow him to look at the *Confessions* as a literary paradigm for his own undertaking. Pierre Vidal-Naquet in his autobiographical speech «Protestants et Juifs pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale en France: Souvenirs d’un témoin» (delivered at the *Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* in 1990) pays less respect to Rousseau’s autobiography when he accuses him of «arrogance». Bernhard-Henri Lévy, in his autobiographical sketches *Comédie* (1997), appears to be the only author of his generation to survey a larger tradition of autobiographical writing when he examines, aside from Rousseau, the works of Jean Paul Sartre and of Michel Leiris, who in the 1946-préface of his *L’âge d’homme* had predicated the liberation of the individual on the fight for the liberation of all people.

«J’ai acheté les *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée* à la librairie française. Pas mal. C’est les mémoires d’un jeune homme dérangé que je devrais écrire.» 31 This claim made by the protagonist of Claude Gutman’s autobiographically informed narrator in his *Les larmes du crocodile* (1982) articulates the point of departure of the *générations d’après* who have stories to tell about their lives to which the French nation ought to listen because they complement the official discourses of a country that for a long time had difficulties allowing the expression of ethnic, religious, and cultural differences. When the political radical Pierre Goldman presented in 1975 his autobiography *Souvenirs obscurs d’un juif polonais né en France*, the Grande Nation had to acknowledge that a Jewish autobiography cannot possibly follow the conventions of gentile French autobiographical literature because the lives narrated in them do not follow progressive trajectories but are from the outset marked by the history of persecution, which can weigh as heavily as the experience of persecution:

Je suis né le 22 juin 1944 à Lyon, en France, en France occupée par les nazis (longtemps j’ai pensé que j’étais né et mort le 22 juin 1944). Je suis juif. Je suis d’origine juive et je suis juif. 32

Goldman’s book, written to save his life from unjust legal prosecution, must not be confused with the «roman de l’étoile jaune», which according to Alain Finkielkraut in 1980 is authored by the young Jew who has inherited from the survivors the language but not the experience of suffering, the topos of persecution, but not the experience of oppression. 33 When Goldman turned to Franz Kafka’s *Der Prozess* to find in literary history a precursor to his own personal history, this unique form of intertextuality is part not of a psychological syndrome of self-indulgence or self-pity, but of a legal strat-

egy of self-defense, which ultimately was successful and resulted in a new trial for the author that acquitted him from a murder he never had committed. Autojudeography here is a form of auto-, of self-, defense, an attempt to save your life from a system of justice prone to anti-Semitism by writing.

After the killing of Pierre Goldman by right-wing extremists, after the desecration of the Jewish cemetery in Carpentras, the humanist pathos that characterized Albert Cohen's *O vous, frères humains* (1972) will hardly be found again in the autobiographical writings of the younger generations of Jews. They may continue to tell – like Cohen had done – the story of disillusionment with the French nation, and of the psychological weight the pariah status exerts on the ethnic and religious outsider. And they may even take recourse in elevating their narratives of stigmatization to elegiac tone as did the late Albert Cohen in his book. Yet whether they will, like him, convey a message of reconciliation even to the anti-Semites among their readers remains to be seen. Cohen's *O vous, frères humains* on the one side of the spectrum, and Finkielkraut's *roman de l'étoile jaune* on the other side, most likely will continue to frame the narrative possibilities which contemporary Jewish writing about the self has to navigate. To explore the space in between and, possibly, beyond these poles, is one of the many tasks the writers will be facing.