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Citation	Davison, N. R. (2014). Schwarz-Bart, Levinas, and Post-Shoah–Postcolonial Gendered Ethics. <i>MFS Modern Fiction Studies</i> , 60(4), 767-795.
DOI	
Publisher	Johns Hopkins University Press
Version	Version of Record
Terms of Use	http://cdss.library.oregonstate.edu/sa-termsfuse



SCHWARZ-BART, LEVINAS, AND POST-SHOAH—POSTCOLONIAL GENDERED ETHICS

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In a 1967 interview with *Le Figaro*, André Schwarz-Bart explained that he and his wife, Simone, had collaborated on their new work, *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (*A Dish of Pork with Green Bananas*), as a first installment of their plan to write a seven-volume cycle of novels engaging the history and culture of the Afro-Caribbean experience in the French Antilles ("s'explique"). The interview was one of Schwarz-Bart's first public statements since the 1959 publication of *Le Dernier de Justes*, translated as *The Last of the Just* in 1960. In what the critic Francine Kaufman eventually labeled *l'affair Schwarz-Bart* (126–27), the novel had been attacked since its appearance for plagiarizing the research of Leon Poliakov and other early historians of the Shoah.¹ In leading these charges, Poliakov denounced the supposed Christological martyrdom of the novel's protagonist Ernie Levy, accusing Schwarz-Bart of promoting a will-to-victimization that was foreign to Judaic sensibility. In the wake of that controversy, Schwarz-Bart felt betrayed, angered, and demoralized. For years afterward, he and Simone traveled a great deal, living in Senegal and Israel for a time, and eventually settling in her native island of Guadeloupe. By that moment in his career Schwarz-Bart had apparently decided not to return to the Shoah as subject matter, but to focus his future work on his wife's Afro-Caribbean world. In the *Figaro* interview, he reminisced about his original interest in the immigrant French-Antilles

community he lived among in the Latin Quarter in postwar Paris. He recalled how intrigued he had become with Francophone Caribbean history as well as with what he perceived as the inviting cultural temperament of his new acquaintances. Eventually, he came to view his Jewish identity as an empathetic liaison to the history of the African diaspora; he suggested both groups' consciousness shared the formative experience of slavery and that this history made their respective abjectness in the modern world parallel. Ultimately, he believed this offered the potential to discover a transcultural affinity between the two peoples. He noted the belief had inspired his present project, *La mulâtresse Solitude*, translated as *A Woman Named Solitude* in 1972, which he hoped would represent the trauma inflicted through the destruction of the family bonds he saw as a product of both the African slave trade and the Shoah.

In expanding on the humanist ideals he felt allowed him this identification with an ethnic or racial group other than his own, Schwarz-Bart declared that he believed in

the fundamental unity of the species. I believe in the eternal possibility of communication. I believe in terms Lévinas uses in relation to Martin Buber, that the essence of dialogue is not in universal ideas common to all interlocutors, nor the ideas that one creates in the other, but in the very encounter itself, in the power that *I* have to say *You*. I believe finally, with my dear Jean-Jacques, that every human mind is the site of experimentation with validity in relation to what happens in all other minds. ("s'explique")

The statement not only reveals that Schwarz-Bart was familiar with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, but also implies his own points of contact between post-Shoah Jewish and postcolonial positions are best understood through Levinasian ethics. Yet, he also employs here Levinas's premise that otherness is not manifest in the subject's awareness as a formational aspect of a totality (such as politics or history), nor as a rationalist ideation, nor as an empowering representation, but in the lived moment of the encounter with the face and its expression of a disturbing immanence and familiar weakness. Although he does not extend this into Levinas's height of infinity gained through being-in-the-other, nor to the essential nonreciprocity of this relation, he suggests the philosophy can be best understood through Levinas's revision of Martin Buber's I-Thou arguments.² But while both philosophers' ethics issue from an existentialism that is experientially prior to culture (and for Levinas prior to both external time and Henri-Louis Bergson's *durée*), Schwarz-Bart's work is still most often examined through such lenses as historiography, Holo-

caust and narrative studies, social theory, and, most recently, colonial trauma framed by postcolonial politics.

Both the nature and failure or success of Schwarz-Bart's project to read post-Shoah diaspora consciousness through such contexts has become over the past two decades a reinvigorated discussion. Ronnie Scharfman's work in the mid-1990s on the couple's biracial literary achievement forms one foundation of this re-interest, especially her 1995 argument that the collaborative *Un plat de porc* was the coded Shoah novel Schwarz-Bart couldn't bring himself to write.³ Bella Brodzki's 1993 investigation of textualized memory in *La mulâtresse* has also remained influential. Michael Rothberg's 2009 study of the "multidirectional memory" of Holocaust trauma and Laurel Plapp's 2008 arguments about the revolutionary potential of European Jewish writers' blurring of the borders of culture, race, and gender both refigure these earlier examinations.⁴ Most recently, Estelle Tarica suggests Schwarz-Bart's fiction pursues the interpersonal as a quasi-mystical moment allowing an "escape from history" that makes fellowships between traumatized groups possible (90).⁵ But while both gender and postcolonial issues do proceed from Schwarz-Bart's life and work, outside of a Levinasian frame such observations can be limited, if not perhaps even demagogic in their desire to enlist Schwarz-Bart as a spokesman for political positions he may have never desired or even entertained.

The majority of these studies, for example, bracket the role that *The Last of the Just* played in Schwarz-Bart's search for philosophical meaning even before he committed his political life to the Afro-Caribbean experience. But in the few interviews Schwarz-Bart gave during the decade of his notoriety, it is clear that he saw his literary themes and political commitments as fluid, moving from his survivorship to his first novel, to his attempts to narrate discrete moments of Afro-Caribbean history. *The Last of the Just* of course introduces historical anti-Jewish antecedents to the Shoah and implies historical causation from medieval Judeophobia to Nazism. In its penultimate chapters, however, the narrative refuses any teleology or messianic message and rather shifts from history to private memory as its mechanism for creating meaning—framed only by hesitant nods to scientific rationalism.⁶ Both the novel's narrator and protagonist reject orthodox Hebraic eschatology in lieu of how knowledge of the camps must become an imperative for a subjective vigilance toward the suffering of all innocents. In the text's final passage, the names of the most infamous *lagers* gain liturgical reverence by comprising the record of European Jewry's martyrdom to this universal-yet-apolitical cause. The self-sacrifice displayed in Ernie Levy's choice to enter occupied Paris and then Drancy itself finally suggests a com-

mitment to both Jewish unity and Jewish suffering as simultaneously real and symbolic (and not a Christ-like martyrdom either because he is also motivated by the desire to rejoin his lover).⁷ The envoi image confirms that this symbolism gains its most profound meaning through a personally felt presence of the victims and thus a ghostly interpersonal ethics rather than a sectarian commitment.

In his 1996 *Symposium* piece, "A Dangerous Text," Raymond Bach goes further in arguing that Schwarz-Bart's mnemonic use of Auschwitz implies that postmodernity demands an ethic of otherness as the centerpiece of post-Shoah consciousness. Although Bach sees a Levinasian imperative in the novel, he doesn't ground this in the specifics of the philosopher's program other than the general demand to see the other's vulnerability as sacred and to accept that obligation beyond self-interest. He does demonstrate, however, how Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, an influence on both Schwarz-Bart and Levinas, provides a literary framework for this reading (172–74). But while *The Last of the Just* perhaps remains both Levinasian and Judaic in implying the subjective call for kindness toward the stranger,⁸ Schwarz-Bart's attempt to enact this through a sympathetic identification with the Afro-Caribbean position may not have been grounded in a precise understanding of Levinas. Despite this, however, both the limits and accomplishments of the couple's project to forge interracial or intercultural diaspora identities are ripe for reevaluation through a more careful Levinasian frame than has yet been applied. In what follows, I reread *Last of the Just* in this manner, offering an interpretation that sheds new light on the couple's later transcultural promises.

Schwarz-Bart into Levinas

The accuracy of Schwarz-Bart's *Figaro* proclamations prescribe the need to first establish which Levinas works—and which philosophical principles among them—the author was familiar with by 1967. The concepts he understood from those texts appear to have shaped his thought, fiction, and life choices for some time afterward. Similar to Levinas himself, Schwarz-Bart may have absorbed the former's philosophy as a postmodern expression of certain Biblical *mitzvot* he had been familiar with since childhood.⁹ Such an influence would not have had to be direct or even self-conscious to impact both his life and work. Rather, in both endeavors, Schwarz-Bart would have been testing the boundaries and value of Levinas as he understood him through a humanism he first knew as Judaic. As a survivor whose experience during the Shoah transformed him into a writer in a similar

manner to how the era transformed Levinas's prewar thought toward his arguments about being and alterity, that struggle is especially poignant.¹⁰ Indeed, given Schwarz-Bart's failure to regain notoriety as a novelist after *The Last of the Just*, his significance as a mid-century figure becomes more apparent through understanding him as a disciple of Levinas. Levinas's influence on postmodernity is, of course, irrefutable, and both writers share a Jewishness understood in part through the Shoah's impact on that wide cultural turn. But even while Levinas insisted his so-called confessional essays on Judaism were distinct from his philosophical writings, both his and Schwarz-Bart's purviews remain alloyed to each writer's idiosyncratic distillations of a Judaic consciousness.

By mid-century, the most important Levinas works available in their original French were "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," *Existence and Existents*, *Time and the Other*, *Totality and Infinity*, and some of the selected essays eventually published in *Difficult Freedom*. From these, Schwarz-Bart would have gained an informed understanding of the differences between Levinas's phenomenology and that of his former teachers Husserl and Heidegger. Through those disagreements, Levinas formed his own arguments surrounding being-through-the-other as an ethics that has its origins in philosophy. Yet as part and parcel of this, he continually accused Heidegger's ontology of being an ego-ridden philosophy of the power of the I through objectification and sameness—an "ontology of nature, impersonal fecundity, faceless generous mother, matrix of particular beings, inexhaustible matter for things" (Levinas, *Totality* 46). While Levinas remains in conversation with Heidegger throughout *Totality and Infinity*, the original aspects of his philosophy Schwarz-Bart seems familiar with above are first articulated in *Existence and Existents* and given greater resonance in *Time and the Other*, both of which he would have read prior to his completion of *The Last of the Just*.¹¹

"Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" was published in 1934 in a progressive Catholic journal when Schwarz-Bart was six years old and was not reprinted until an English translation appeared in *Critical Inquiry* in 1990. Yet Levinas's discussion here of Nazi philosophy finds parallels in *The Last of the Just's* emphasis on the racial body as a Nazi centerpiece of Jewish degeneracy. In the rise of fascism, Levinas asserts,

Man's essence no longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage [*enchaînement*]. To be truly one-Self does not mean taking flight . . . above contingent events that always remain foreign to the Self's freedom; on the contrary, it means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain

that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining. . . . A society based on consanguinity immediately ensues from this concretization of the spirit. And then, if race does not exist, one has to invent it! (69)

Although in *Existence and Existents* Levinas returns to the body and hypostasis, he does not engage any extant politics. He does, however accuse Heidegger there of misunderstanding these relations. And in "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," Levinas references "Heideggerism" as inculpated in a "current of modern thought [and technology-worship] which emerged from Germany to flood the pagan recesses of our Western souls" (231).¹² Informed by the later texts, Schwarz-Bart gained a tacit knowledge of both Heidegger's ontology and his early ties to the Nazi party.

While *Existence and Existents* is the first Levinas text that begins to map out his understanding of being, time, and otherness, a full explication of those arguments is beyond the scope of this essay. Yet Schwarz-Bart's words above appear to draw directly from the content of this book, and its publication date suggests he wrote *The Last of the Just* with those ideas in mind. While Schwarz-Bart's life and work after 1960 seem also influenced by a reading of *Totality and Infinity*, the ideas about the other he discovered in *Existence and Existents* did not so much alter in this second book as expand into a more refined discussion of the relationship between totality, metaphysical desire, and the ethics discovered in the face and the feminine. This last aspect of Levinasian thought became pivotal to Schwarz-Bart's turn from Holocaust novelist to student of the African diaspora precisely because he came to it through his wife and the mother of his children. Even before this, however, *The Last of the Just* anticipates Levinas's role of the feminine in the ethical in its characters of both sexes, and I explore these below. While I also engage before this the controversy of what the philosopher meant by the feminine, I turn first to some assertions in *Existence and Existents* that inform Schwarz-Bart's statement concerning "the power that *I* have to say *You*."

The initial inquiry of *Existence and Existents* surrounds Levinas's rejections of Heidegger's ecstasy of care and power discovered in the subject's awareness of its own annihilation into nothingness in death. Levinas rather suggests that being is always an instituting of the present or a perpetual awakening through the angst of being. The *I* is established not through the transcendence of death but a primordial anxiety originating in a being without content other than its own awareness, which derives solely from its insurgence against existence. Existence is too dense and generic to give meaning to

this awareness, which Levinas names the existent. This "anxiety over Being—horror of Being" (20) is more primal to Levinas than a triumphant ecstasy over death; the vastness of existence—"like the density of a void"—is rather felt as neither an emptiness nor an exteriority (63). Rather, "Being remains, like a field of forces, like a heavy atmosphere belonging to no one, universal, returning in the midst of the negation that put it aside, and in all the powers which the negation may be multiplied" (58). He names this the *Il y a* or *There is* and describes the experience as "essentially alien and strik[ing] against us. . . . There is a pain in Being [Being is *mal*]" (23). Thus the ground on which we become an existent within existence is the pain of asserting a formless singularity against an incomprehensible fullness—not the nothingness of death, nor fear thereof, or empowerment through, but a devastatingly amorphous somethingness: "the fear of nothingness is but the measure of our involvement in Being. Existence itself harbors something tragic which is not only there because of its finitude. Something that death cannot resolve" (20). His metaphors for the paralyzing awareness of this experience are fatigue, indolence, or insomnia—states of flux chained in passivity and unable to assert a full sense of being (61–65). Levinas locates the unconscious and the body as initial sites of this position, which becomes the event of consciousness in an evanescent instant—experienced neither as a Bergsonian durational reflection or a Platonic rational ideation.

In *The Last of the Just*, Schwarz-Bart draws on these premises during scenes of Ernie Levy's childhood crises. In self-imposed trials to discover his duty as a *Lamed Vov* (Just Man) in Stillenstadt, Ernie experiences a Levinasian awareness during two successive moments of existential crisis. After a series of self-mortifying acts and compassionate gestures fail to achieve for him the spiritual transcendence he assumed would manifest his role as Just Man, Ernie becomes confused and despondent. Isolating himself, he projects his frustration and fears onto a weaker, nonhuman object and resuscitates his faith by declaring himself anew as "the Just Man for the flies" (196). But the apparently redemptive identification with all existence proves a chimera once he becomes a victim of Nazi violence. If ethics arrives at the face, Ernie now only meets there its denial. It is at this point of his narrative that Schwarz-Bart invokes the *Il y a*. Degraded and ashamed of his inescapably Jewish body, Ernie has "his first intuition of emptiness" (239). Awash in a seemingly endless field and skyline, Ernie recognizes that on a primordial level his existence is nearly indiscernible, an unidentifiable "mote," and forces himself to utter, "I am nothing" (239). Devastated by the racist negation of his bodily existence, Ernie confronts a universe devoid of certainty-of-being gained

from the belief that a transcendent exteriority (God) acknowledges and corresponds with one's subjectivity. Schwarz-Bart here returns his protagonist to the moment of the existent, in which "the subject is stripped of his subjectivity, of his power to have a private existence" (*Totality* 61). Against this horror of being, a state of hypostasis can assert itself only through "position . . . the *here* of position [that] precedes every act of understanding, every horizon and all time. . . . This is what makes the body the very advent of consciousness. . . . The materiality of the body remains an *experience* of materiality" (71–72). Having had his body metaphorically taken from him, Ernie can only ironically imitate position by destroying the body and becomes enraptured in an orgy of crushing insects, the most vulnerable and easily annihilated bodies to be found in the subject–object relations of his everyday world. The scene not only precisely reverses Ernie's former benevolence, but Schwarz-Bart here allows Ernie to feel the *schadenfreude* of his persecutors, who consistently used the same metaphor in their programmatic murder of Jews as subhuman. The power Ernie believes he gains over an impenetrable existence initially displaces his pain—"it seemed to him that all the emptiness in his heart was there, pinched between those two fingers" (240). But he soon recognizes that "each insect death cost him more," and thus the only way to completely rid himself of the burden of the body when set against the density of existence is suicide, which he goes on to attempt with the zeal of a prophet.

In *Existence and Existents*, too, the event of being in which "taking position in the anonymous *there is* a subject is affirmed" is the site of hypostasis but also a kind of dead end (82–83). But this is not a moment in which self-destruction seems the only alternative. Consciousness here is like sleep; through the unconscious it asserts its own being against existence, but is incapable of action or of experiencing its own subjectivity. This is the moment where Levinas arrives at the notion of the other as ground zero of subjectivity. He posits the ego's inescapable solipsism ("the tragic element in the ego [is] the fact that it is riveted to its own being" [84]) and its desire to conquer by way of its projecting itself onto objects as "a mastery, power, or virility" (83). He argues that the other moves the subject in this state toward an insatiable desire for something beyond what it can ever conceive (later his concept of infinity in a subject as "thinking thinking more than it thinks") as opposed to all other satiable hungers, such as the need for and enjoyment of food (Levinas, "God and Philosophy" 70).¹³ In *Totality and Infinity*, this desire provoked by the face is the root of the metaphysical transcendence and thus the ethical. But in his reading of *Existence and Existents*, Schwarz-Bart would have understood this equation more

simply as a product of what might be called the vacuum of the ego and the need to objectify, such that

Solitude is accursed not of itself, but by reason of its ontological significance as something definitive. Reaching *the other* is not something justified of itself . . . on the ontological level, [it is] the event of the most radical breakup of the very categories of the ego, for it is for me to be somewhere else than my self; it is to be pardoned, to not be a definitive existence. (84–85)

Schwarz-Bart's explanation that Levinasian ethics cannot be experienced through "universal ideas" or "ideas that one creates in the other," but only in the acknowledgement of the other as sacred, echoes this passage. By 1967 he also had the benefit of reading the expansion of such arguments in *Totality and Infinity*.

Levinas's description of the ego as "virile" in its objectifying reflex leads him as well to invoke for the first time in this work the notion that "the plane of *eros* allows us to see that the other par excellence is the feminine, through which a world behind the scenes prolongs the world" (85). As evidenced in his fiction, Schwarz-Bart's sense of the sacred in a world absent of God focuses on a similar sense of the feminine that he first encountered in the Bible's matriarchal figures and Levitical prescriptions, in which *eros* and the maternal become vehicles through which humanity fulfills its ethical destiny. *Eros* in Levinas is also eventually contextualized within a Hebraic frame rather than a Greek one; while *eros* is always associated with voluptuousness for him and of course cannot exist without it, between men and women sexual love also always sustains the possibility of his unique interpretation of fecundity. As a site of otherness where *eros* gains its ethical potential, fecundity does not strictly imply biological reproduction for Levinas; neither is it an act of historical significance as the legacy of families or species. Rather, fecundity signals the continuance in subjectivity of a demythologized eschatological hope.¹⁴ Levinas argues that in *eros*

transcendence can be conceived as something radical, which brings to the ego caught up in being, ineluctably returning to itself, something else than this return, can free it of its shadow. To simply say that ego leaves itself is a contradiction, since, in quitting itself the ego carries itself along—if it does not sink into the impersonal. *Asymmetrical intersubjectivity* is the locus of transcendence in which the subject, while preserving its subject, has the possibility of not inevitably returning to itself, *the possibility of being fecund* and (to anticipate what we shall examine later) having a son. (96; emphasis added)

Eros-into-fecundity appears here for Levinas to be about male desire and paternity alone. As demonstrated in Claire Katz's 2003 study, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine*, however, confusions surrounding eros and alterity in Levinas may be best clarified by aligning his arguments with Torah narratives and midrashic commentary. Most central here is fecundity as a metaphor of the Talmudic imperative of *Tikkun Olam*, the human need to repair, strengthen or "finish" the world toward its messianic potential (Katz 87–89). Her study thus further elucidates the Judaic ground through which Schwarz-Bart came to Levinas, and I return to her arguments below.

Nonetheless, many readers struggle over the precise meaning and intentions of the feminine in Levinas. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's accusatory note in *The Second Sex*, both the definition and role of the feminine have been argued as the gendered limits of Levinasian thought.¹⁵ His implication that alterity is experienced in the male heterosexual subject alone, as well as the question of whether feminine dwelling is metaphorical or based on the presence of an empirical woman, were soon taken to task by Luce Irigaray and others.¹⁶ His idea of the feminine as other par excellence was argued as relegating woman to a nonsubject who acquires meaning only as a reflection of male desire.¹⁷ In *Time and the Other*, Levinas states that eros becomes "a pathos of insurmountable duality of beings" through the feminine (86):

Does a situation exist where the alterity of the other appears in its purity? . . . What is the alterity that does not purely and simply enter into the opposition of two species of the same genus? [The] absolute contrary contrary [*le contraire absolument contraire*], whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship that can be established between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the *feminine*. (85)¹⁸

The passage seems to confirm the subject to be a heterosexual man and the feminine to be a correspondent sexualized woman whose otherness is simultaneously physical and yet transcendent (essence). This would imply male subjectivity alone is capable of ethics, and that the feminine remains an agent of this but never the subject herself.

But while the feminine in eros is also likened to an absence or "withdrawing elsewhere" (88) beyond the conscious and unconscious, that mysterious counterpoise remains unrelated to "romantic notions of the mysterious, unknown, misunderstood woman" (86). Moreover, this "hidden" element, further expressed as "modesty," is not predicated on a woman's body or male projections of female nature but arises from the encounter with the other as a dynamic duality in which

"feminine alterity does not exist in the object's simple exteriority" (87). Neither is the erotic in Levinas produced by the ego's power to conquer through representation: "if one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be the other [;] possessing, knowing, and grasping are synonyms of power" (90). Also neither a fusion nor reciprocity, feminine absence is "not the absence of pure nothingness, but an absence in the horizon of the future, an absence that is time" (90). Again in *Time and the Other*, this futurity is located in the secondary movement of eros into fecundity (and in *Totality and Infinity* related to the infinite of the face). The feminine thus seems to name a meeting of equal differences beyond both voluptuousness and empowerment through representation. Understood this way, Schwarz-Bart may not have found the feminine in Levinas disturbing. Given the Hebrew Bible's heteronormative sense of the erotic as primordial and yet divine in essence, its assumption of female nature as uniquely different (domestic) yet as powerful as that of male nature, and Schwarz-Bart's arrival at a global ethics through his own erotic experience in Simone's face, he may have well even found this both obvious and sacred.

Levinas's later work suggests the feminine as a metaphor to express the reflective in subjectivity, or what he calls dwelling, which is only a posteriori concretized in an actual home. Dwelling represents, a priori, a gentleness and welcome from the world of elements to which inwardness must always return (*Totality* 152–56).¹⁹ Gentleness is the familiarity and intimacy found in the face, presupposing it as always "an intimacy with someone" (152). But the other must be first present then absent in dwelling as recollection; in noting this, Levinas returns to what appears to be an essentialist view of femininity: "And the other whose presence is an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman. . . . The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation" (155). In his capitalization, he signals the conceptual and not the actual, yet seems also to assume male subjectivity again as the only locus of these events. As this quality of inwardness transpires from the absolute otherness of the feminine, how could it not originate in the presence of an empirical woman?²⁰ Are gentleness and dwelling thus impossible in the male subject prior to the experience of the alterity of the feminine? Does this begin with the maternal body (as in Lacan) and afterward become the erotic? Or does the ontological dialectic between interior–exterior on its own provoke a secondary internal tension between a feminine gentle dwelling and a masculine ego-based conquering?

Levinas addresses this challenge in *Totality and Infinity* but, after this, remained reticent about how these observations might be problematized. He asserts there that "the feminine has been encountered in this analysis as one of the cardinal points of the horizon on which the inner life takes place—and the empirical absence of the human being of 'feminine sex' in a dwelling nowise affects the dimension of femininity which remains open there as the very welcome of the dwelling" (158). The statement confirms that the feminine remains an event in consciousness experienced as "a coming to oneself, a retreat to home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers a hospitality . . . a human welcome," but also that this essential interiority is "the inhabitant that inhabits it before every inhabitant, the welcoming on par excellence, welcome in itself—the feminine being" (157). The desire or infinity in the face must then be in dialectic with this dwelling, which appears to encompass not only the refuge of home, but the here and now of the erotic as well. But could a metaphor linking dwelling with inwardness be experienced without the presence of an actual woman? If so, the feminine remains also a symbol of the welcome and gentleness necessary to sustain otherness as the seat of ethics. Katz notes, as others have before her, that Levinas indeed alternates seamlessly throughout his work in using *le feminine* and *la femme*, suggesting not an either/or but a both/and definition (2). Femininity then, on one hand, is the human counterbalance to an egotistical virile retreat from interpersonal ethics toward totalities such as myth, politics, or history. But if the feminine does not represent a sexed quality, on the other hand, how is it that for the male subject, it arrives as a contrary element of the otherness of woman? If the feminine is uncoupled from woman's body, could it establish a woman's subjectivity predicated on the erotic as dwelling in her own gaze at the male (or female) face?²¹ Could it be seen as part of the intersubjectivity of two men who are compelled to set up a home and adopt (fecundity)?

In line with Katz's arguments, attempts to clarify these ambiguities may be best accomplished in a return to the Hebraic ground common to both Levinas and Schwarz-Bart. To Levinas, the erotic as defined in part beyond bodily pleasure in its potential ethical desire finds conceptual provenance in stories of the Hebrew patriarchs and Talmudic arguments about femininity. This is in part demonstrated in his 1963 essay "Judaism and the Feminine," as well as in his alteration in *Otherwise Than Being* of the role of fecundity in alterity as symbolized by the maternal rather than the paternal. While Schwarz-Bart may never have read the later book, the earlier essay haunts his post-*The Last of the Just* turn toward the feminine and Afro-Caribbean as provoked by his Jewishness; the essay also seems

foreshadowed in the embodied-yet-transcendent Jewish femininity that underscores much of that first novel. Notwithstanding these arguments (some of which with Schwarz-Bart was undoubtedly familiar), the role of the feminine in ethics becomes a theme of *The Last of the Just* that subsequently set the stage for the author's second life as a writer. His encounter with feminine alterity—in his own subjectivity, his fiction, and Simone's presence—led him not only to fecundity, but to an awareness of colonial injustice that expanded the ethical in his own consciousness.

Levinas into Schwarz-Bart

In "Judaism and the Feminine," Levinas splits the significance of Judaic womanhood into an ancient Torah-based prominence and a lack thereof in the era of the prophets. In the latter, the role of femininity in Hebraic visions of humanity, the sacred, and the eschatological have all been replaced by the male figure of Elijah, who repeats Adam's virile insularity before Eve. The latter era thus also extends the inverse image of woman in Hebraic lore as the source of all immodesty and decline. In diaspora, this prophetic direction is

foreign to all compassion for itself, spirit in its essence, virile, superhuman, and solitary. . . . The figure in whom is stored up for the Jews all the tenderness of the earth, the hand which caresses and rocks his children, is no longer feminine. Neither wife nor sister nor mother guides it. It is Elijah, who did not experience death, the most severe of the prophets, precursor of the Messiah. (38)

The passage ends the essay in a lament for the lost significance of the feminine, eros, and maternity in the Bible as Levinas understands these through selected midrashim. In *The Last of the Just*, Schwarz-Bart reverses this order by making the novel's first section, "The Legend of the Just Men," more like the era of Elijah in that it is a genealogy of solitary male figures taking on the collective suffering of the world through humiliation, torture, and death. No women figure in this history and Just Men appear—ironically like the priests who persecute them—to be ascetics even before they are martyrs.²² As a pseudo-study of chronicles and legends, the section represents an ontological virility in which totality as war usurps the feminine and alterity.²³ Given the unquestionable power of the church depicted in the section, Levy Just Men of the medieval and early modern periods accept degradation and death as a Jewish transcendence beyond any interpersonal relations.

Only with the advent of modernity in Mordecai Levy's nineteenth-century Polish shtetl, Zemyock, does the alterity of the erotic become pivotal to the *Lamed-Vov* mission. Living in the germinating period of ideological movements that culminate in the Shoah, Mordecai's experience of the feminine indicates Schwarz-Bart's belief that Jewish modernity warrants the recognition of the intersubjective as the seat of ethics.²⁴ Levinas argues that Torah itself suggests the Jewish woman "plays an active role in the attainment of the Biblical purpose and are placed at the very pivot of Sacred History"; messianic progress is "supervised and controlled by women" and common characteristics of the matriarchs include "their watchful lucidity, the firmness of their determination, and their cunning spirit of sacrifice" ("Judaism and Feminism" 31). He also argues that the primary Judaic feminine operates from "a secret presence, on the edge of invisibility," in which "their silent footsteps in the depths and opacity of reality, [draw] the very dimension of interiority and [make] the world precisely habitable" (31). The Levys are an *Ostjude* family soon at the center of the modern deflection of the feminine other, in which the conquering forces of fascism objectify humans and assert mythic forms of masculinity, the mechanical, and race as models of futurity. In opposition, Levy femininity is represented in the internalizing, gentle temperaments of *Lamed Vovnik* men and the welcoming-yet-assertive temperaments of their mothers and wives. Modern Levy men dream of discovering the most ethical roles suited for progressive iterations of Yiddishkiet *Luftmenschen* and how to negotiate these within modern skepticism and violence. In the midst of this struggle, their female counterparts draw them away from their mission as agents of abstract moral concepts and theological imperatives toward the body, the interpersonal, and infinity discovered in the face through the erotic and fecundity.

Schwartz-Bart represents these women as gentility and absence, but also as possessing an inner fortitude that, in combination with the former, remains disruptive (alterity), attractive (eros), and empathetic ("the nakedness of the face is destituteness") to the Just Men's gaze (Levinas, *Totality* 75). *Lamed-Vov* subjectivity is thus founded on the vulnerability they discover through feminine alterity. Schwarz-Bart reveals this through their reactions as they fixate on how this arresting presence alters their consciousness as both men and Jews. Ultimately, the disconcerting other provokes heightening toward the infinite within the subject's interiority. This progressive phenomenon bookends the three generations of modern Just Men, from Mordecai's marriage to Judith Ackerman to Benjamin's irresolute refusal of his role, through Ernie's amoral period in "The Dog" section of the novel to his death alongside Golda Englebaum and the children they attempt to comfort during the journey from Drancy to the gas

chambers as Auschwitz. The arc also frames the waning rabbinic tenor of Mordecai's sensibility as it morphs into Ernie's existential search for the meaning of suffering. In the final leg of that dynamic, Ernie Levy's experience of sacred transcendence is radicalized even at the very mouth of the beast that was Auschwitz. While historic forces such as pogroms, emigration, urbanization, a loss of faith, and the rise of fascism propel the novel's broad narrative, it is this gendered interpersonal transcendent in the text that suggests the most vital sense of modern Jewish identity. This movement not only parallels the supposition that Levinas's phenomenology relies on rationalist uses of Talmudic ethics, but also suggests *The Last of the Just* was the laboratory for Schwarz-Bart's enactment of a similar amalgam in his life with Simone.

Mordecai frames Judith's initial attractiveness through animal metaphors that surround and characterize her sensibility throughout the rest of the narrative. Whether Schwarz-Bart had in mind here the ferocity of the apocryphal Judith and her beheading of Holofernes is unclear. The figurative language at first blush might suggest the male gaze's objectification of woman as bestial—signifying her closer proximity to nature in the reproductive process and as the hypersexual, predatory femme fatale as well. Such passages range from ". . . there was in her an incipient animal; the supple beauty of her gestures suggested a restrained menace" (42), to her reactions to his requests in asking "am I a horse . . . a donkey, a bull, a camel?" (42), to his emphasis on her "black mane" of hair (43), to the catlike quality of her features and movements, to his dealing with her anger with "the expert, resigned patience required with animals" (56), to her embracing him like a "furry, frightened animal" (60). But each and all of these are Schwarz-Bart's attempt to represent Mordecai's sense of the strange otherness of Judith's presence, which includes her beauty, confident physicality, and strength of will. (The latter is ultimately confirmed in Judith's spontaneous attack on the Cossack about to murder the entire Levy family while Mordecai stands by in awe during the Zemyock Pogrom scene.) Schwarz-Bart represents Mordecai's inward reflection of this erotic as "I like her. I like her a lot, even, but . . . I'd beat her with pleasure" (42). The line suggests not only his nutritive sexual need, but also desire expressed as the imperative to feed the other (to take the bread from one's own mouth); in this, the erotic presages the ethical. Even with the violent verb (as metaphor), he does not fix, control, or represent her as an object. Rather he is compelled to give her pleasure as a response to her alterity. The midrash Mordecai offers her to aid his seduction is nothing less than a fundamental ground of Hebraic ethics: "Do you know that God chose Abraham for having granted hospitality to beggars?" (43). Eros here is thus the welcome of dwelling in the feminine.

During their courtship Judith asserts her will against Mordecai's destiny as a Just Man. Her repugnance at becoming a tzaddik's wife is based on her desire "to live, Live! Live!" and she laments the irony of her misfortune that of all the men in the world, she has fallen in love with one of only thirty-six *Lamed Vovniks* (49). The protest sounds at first like the irreverent arrogance of an egotist. But it is rather the expression of the feminine that demands dwelling as the seat of the interpersonal—the here and now of the erotic. After her protest, the narrator informs the reader that, to punctuate the inescapability of her fate, Judith sighs "with a gentleness all the more poignant in a tall, fierce woman" (50). Here too Schwarz-Bart signals that even with the majesty of her powerful bearing, in Judith what is fierce is also a welcome. Moreover, the gentleness in her tone does not arise from the silence or mystery of a feminine inarticulateness, or from the exoticness of her body in the male gaze, but rather from her participation in the overabundance discovered in face-to-face relations, which trumps Mordecai's conceptually based suffering as ironically distracting to lived ethics.

After their marriage, Mordecai sustains this view of Judith through the lens of their physical intimacy as both disruptive to his *I* and yet empathetic in her destituteness—two key sensations of the inwardness of the subject as produced in the acknowledgement of the other's otherness: "At night, while she lay beside him, he was taken by an obscure pity for her, *for himself*, Mordecai, for these two *strangers* whom the lightening madness of love had thrown into the same bed and whom were still unable to address each other like creatures of reason" (56). Their need of each other is suggested as beyond the rational, romantic, or Talmudic parameters of a well-made marriage. It is rather a strange-yet-gentle dynamic discovered in the encounter with the other through the erotic and finally in dwelling. In the narrative, the scene precedes fecundity in the birth of their son.

But that son, Benjamin Levy, has his potential as a Just Man destroyed by a figure in the novel who works to indicate that, whatever cultural assumptions or personal history may foster it, Jewish self-hatred is also a product of withdrawing from the ethic of otherness. When Benjamin encounters the "young Galician" Yankel, he strikes him as one who is "suffering in the soul" (89). The sentiment betokens a stance of being based on the other as neighbor ("*L'absolument Autre, c'est Autrui*" [*Totality* 39, 71]). Yankel's bitter condescension in return rejects this, and his loss-of-faith pogrom tale ends in his rage at failing to find a second home, as a Jew, in socialist circles. As examples of totality, these blows represent first a theological and then political substitution for alterity. However, Benjamin's feminine gentleness toward the nudity of the other's face ("Brother . . . why

all this shame and unhappiness? Awake, I beg you. . . ." [96]) alternately represents the "language and goodness" (Levinas, *Totality* 47) of "the *saying*" (48) in what Levinas calls religion (40). But Yankel rebuffs the former's welcome and dwelling and rather responds with a violent threat: "Jew, little Jew from the old home town, you're very sweet, do you know? So sweet that a man would like to bust your teeth in, one by one" (96). To Levinas, threat derives from the opposite impulse of discovering the infinite in the face, namely, the desire to murder as an assertion-of-being by annihilating the other's disturbance to the dominance of the ego (*Totality* 232). Katz argues further that in alluding to the Biblical injunctions to love thy neighbor and the stranger and not to murder, Levinas throughout his later work implies that Hebrew scripture "illustrate[s] the origins of human subjectivity" (12).²⁵ Although in deserting his interlocutor, Yankel apologetically leaves behind some earnings and good advice for Benjamin, he denies the imperative of his ultimate responsibility for the other.

Devastated by this event, Benjamin refuses his *Lamed-Vov* role and instead chooses the prosaic life of an assimilated, small-town tailor. His son Ernie, however, is influenced by grandfather Mordecai to take on the mantel of the Just Man. After Ernie's persecution at the hands of Hitler Youth playmates, the S. A. Brown Shirts, Nazi teachers, and a misguided Gallicized Jewish soldier, his desperation to rid himself of all ethical responsibility leads him first to his suicide-attempt and finally into his transformation into "the Dog." His family deported, in this last phase Ernie is bereft of the relationships that sustain his humanity through the interpersonal. Enraged at God for this, he defies all semblance of Judaic sensibility and attempts rather to live in a debauchery he imagines befits an animal. Adrift as a metaphorical dog answering only to the surname Bastard, he drinks in taverns, carouses, fights, and consumes bloody raw meat in defiance of the Levitical prohibition. Later, when his adulterous lover rejects him after her provincial discovery that circumcised "Israelites were *automatically* Jews" (296), Ernie accepts the inescapability of his Jewishness as the object of the gaze of a local blacksmith. A former prisoner himself, the tradesman recalls the haunting eyes of Jewish children he witnessed being shipped from Drancy as holding the same expression in Ernie's eyes. Although Schwarz-Bart inserts here a non-Jewish character's ability to perceive a quasi-mystical Jewish suffering, the blacksmith does not represent, as Bach claims, a Levinasian height nor even the acknowledgment that compels the subject to feed the other before oneself (169–70). Rather, while he does reveal Ernie's Jewish destiny to him through the memory of the children, the blacksmith hopes he never sees the like of that expres-

sion "again in this life" (299). He makes no effort to help, hide, or rescue Ernie, and functions as another gentile who, while sympathetic to Jewish vulnerability, doesn't make himself vulnerable to the alterity of the other ("the Other's very alterity . . . is what I myself am not . . . intersubjective space is not symmetrical . . . [it] is not . . . a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place. . . ." [*Time* 83–84, 75]). To represent the asymmetrical, absolute other, Schwarz-Bart instead follows a stricter Levinasian protocol; Ernie achieves an ethical intersubjectivity only in the face of an empirical woman.

Like Judith before her, Golda is described as gypsylike despite the differences between their appearances; while the former is tall, dark haired, and flamboyant, the latter is short, red haired, handicapped, and unassuming. Judith's initial presence in Zemyock is indeed greeted by the villagers' derogation, "look at that gypsy!" (55). Ernie's infatuation with Golda proceeds from the sentiment that, despite her lame leg, she "looked like a little gypsy, with her disheveled red hair, a cotton garment floating around her like a tent, and the impertinence in her high, lusterless, Provençal cheekbones, the impertinence and candor that had been so attractive in the wild flowers along the roads. . . . The yellow star was like a gaudy trinket over her heart, a gypsy woman's showy jewel" (315–16). In both instances, "gypsy" is a metonym for the character's otherness in opposition to the humility, fears, and conventionalism of the traditional pious Jew. (The figure recalls that the Roma were the only other European people the Nazis labeled as similarly racially degenerative and therefore slated for genocide as well.) Thus held in Ernie's gaze, Golda's presence is compelling in a way that doubles her otherness; her optimism, warmth, and gypsy-impertinence become complementary to Ernie's renewed struggle as a Just Man; under the influence of the feminine, his earlier failed Romantic-transcendent sensuality is transformed into the dwelling of eros through gentleness and welcome.

Through these awe-inspiring aspects of Golda's exteriority, Ernie is moved toward the inwardness of the infinite of the face:

Ernie discovered that his old mask of blood and earth was dissolving in Golda's words. Pulling back, he looked at her and saw something like a distant reflection of his own face deep in the girl's eyes. He did not know what his true face was composed of, the interior face he could sense confusedly within him, but Golda's eyes seemed to be smiling simply at the face of a man, and, liberated, Ernie smiled. (328)

Ernie's liberation from Talmudic-based saintliness unexpectedly becomes his most lived ethical moment. Ernie represents to Schwarz-Bart a passive, Jewish interiority broken by a debilitating modern self-consciousness. In this Jewish hypostasis of the existent, the mature Ernie is locked in an assertion of being devoid of subjectivity and thus confused about how to achieve sacred purpose. Each in their own way, Judith and Golda are instead self-possessed, gentle, and absolute in their commitment to the other; their captivating presence informs the perceptions of the Just Men and so implies the assumption of a fractured Jewish-male ontology sustained through the ego's representation of an ideal—the virile conquering of the isolated tzaddik. Those animal metaphors, which often surround Golda as well, again do not reify patriarchal control but rather issue from an internalizing moral seriousness lost to its most human agency. Golda's otherness allows Ernie to understand the impairment of the Just Man who must fulfill his role as sufferer in a faithless modernity; her injured leg thus becomes a symbol for such a crippling state overcome. With that victory, she enters the text not only as a pivotal agent of Ernie's moral growth, but is herself already an ethical being as woman. Nonetheless, it is through her "gypsy confidence," psychic strength, and erotic welcome that Ernie experiences desire—"the very dimension of height"—in her alterity's imperative to feed her, to love her, and to perish alongside her: "to die for the invisible—this is metaphysics" (Levinas, *Totality* 34–35).

Eros in Levinas reaches its ethical apogee in fecundity; but given Ernie and Golda's impending deaths in the gas chambers, biological fecundity is of course moot for them. The concluding section of *Time and the Other* that Schwarz-Bart read prior to finishing *The Last of the Just*, however, was in fact Levinas's most explicit statement on the moral efficacy of his sense of fecundity to that date. Here he argues that only through paternity (later in *Otherwise Than Being* changed to maternity) can humans achieve a state "in the alterity of you . . . I remain I, without being absorbed or losing myself in that you, [while] the ego that I am remain myself in a you, without being nonetheless the ego that I am in my present—that is to say, an ego that inevitably returns to itself . . . the ego become other to itself" (91). But in a later interview, Levinas also asserts that

the father-son relationship . . . should not be thought of only in biological terms . . . [it] can exist between beings who, biologically, are not father and son. Paternity and filiality, the feeling that the other is not simply someone I've met, but that he is, in a certain sense, my prolongation, my ego, that his possibilities are mine—the idea of the responsibility for the other can go that far. ("Paradox" 179–80)

The dream Ernie has the night before boarding the cattle cars indeed frames the couple's ensuing "fecundity" with the oracular line "the separation from a loved one is the most painful foretaste of death" (347).²⁶ Although the statement is what Levinas calls the said rather than the saying, it nonetheless reflects Ernie's recognition of the feminine gentleness that welcomes the other as also a defeat of death through futurity—the absence, which is time, understood as a horizon overcoming the pure event of death by way of fecundity.²⁷

To portray this, Schwarz-Bart exploits Poliakov's research on Vichy official Piere Laval's 1942 order that children under sixteen be included in the transfer of Jews from the free zone to camps such as Drancy so as to "reunite families" (358).²⁸ When Ernie discovers that Golda has been selected for this kind of transport, he takes the final step in his commitment to both her and Jewish unity by requesting to be assigned to the shipment. Reunited in the camp's staging area, the couple becomes parental surrogates for the frightened children. While they sleep there "with two children between them," later in the darkness of the freight car, Golda implores Ernie, "they're waiting for you to say something" (360–62). Taking up the responsibility to relieve suffering (hunger) in the mold of the maternal—to give the bread from one's mouth—Ernie, the novel's paradigm of spiritual integrity, is impelled by parental love not only to caress the children, but to lie to them as well. The lie most readily available is the prophetic messianism referenced throughout tractates of the Talmud as "The World to Come." But Schwarz-Bart drives home Ernie's deceitful action as rather a pure ethics by the *deus ex machina* of the doctor character, whose cold rationalism suggests Schwarz-Bart, at least, saw the feminine as not only an *a priori* aspect of empirical women:

"How can you tell them [the suffering and murder] is only a dream?" She breathed, hate in her voice.

Rocking the [dead] child mechanically, Ernie gave way to dry sobs. "Madame," he said finally, "there is no room for truth here." Then he stopped rocking the child, turned and saw that the old woman's face had altered.

"Then what is there room for?" she began. And taking a closer look at Ernie, registering every slight detail on his face, she murmured softly, "Then you don't believe what you're saying at all? Not at all?"

She was weeping with bitter sorrow and laughed a short, terrified, demented laugh. (366)

Her craven laugh preempts the absurdity-within-the-horror of Primo Levi's Auschwitz, but Ernie's visions are simultaneously revealed in the scene as not a belief in a Hebraic eschatology or theodicy, but in a Levinasian ethic.²⁹

While Nazi genocide was predicated on the historical totality of denying a Jewish future as much as it was on murdering Jews, Ernie defies both history and inhumanity by deflecting his fear of death to comfort the children as an eschatological act. As there is no possible future for any of them, his lie is the only fecundity available; it is a horizon gained between them through the asymmetrical interpersonal that Ernie knows he must sustain up until the moment of their death. His final audience after this becomes Golda, who even in the throes of asphyxiation cannot regain a child's gullibility. But Ernie maintains the lie even with her, which, at his own death, allows him the Levinasian religious revelation that "he knew he that he could do nothing more for anyone in the world" (373–74). As a storyteller (and not a philosopher), however, Schwarz-Bart cannot resist rewarding his hero—even in a work so intent on demythologizing metaphysics. He thus allows Ernie a last-minute memory of his grandfather's tale of the Roman-era immolation of Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion, who when asked by his students what he saw as he and his Torah burned said "I see the parchment burning, but the letters are taking wing" (374). Repeated in whisper, these become Ernie's final words too. As trope of the ethics in the saying in the novel, the line is self-reflexive; Schwarz-Bart's textual saying carries, on the wing, the possibility of hope for himself and his readers, and as such is a kind of fecundity as well.

Schwarz-Bart into the Afro-Caribbean

Given its status as a controversial Holocaust novel, it may seem an oblique move to read *The Last of the Just* through a gendered Levinasian lens. But such a reading is by no means extraterritorial to the landscape of Schwarz-Bart's lived post-Shoah experience. Schwarz-Bart's life as a Jewish writer assumed its transnational mantle through his relationship with his own Golda as it were; Simone's moral courage to confront the burden of her racial identity became for Schwarz-Bart the experience of what might be called a double-otherness based in both the feminine and racial other. Schwarz-Bart understood Levinas's feminine alterity first through his characters, then in Simone, and saw this as a manifestation of an erstwhile Judaic sensibility he had all but lost faith in during the Shoah. Reading Levinas, Schwarz-Bart must have seen those arguments as in part

a kind of Jewish homecoming he was just then exploring the limits of during its most cataclysmic era—one that demanded a thorough reevaluation of the Hebraic God's presence in history and consequent arguments over theodicy in Talmud.³⁰

And yet, the similarity-of-differences Schwarz-Bart believed he discovered between the Jewish and Afro-Caribbean consciousness—however well-intentioned—may ironically suggest what Levinas saw as an untenable (unethical) identification of sameness; here a seemingly productive study of a group's history may be counterproductive to the asymmetrical intersubjectivity of ethics preceding the time of clocks, in which subjectivity is established as ahistorical. Without the imperative of sacrifice discovered in the face, one might through history unintentionally move toward the final elision of difference in the ideation of a universal emotional ground, such as the now popular assumption of the parallel nature of all colonial trauma. Without the metaphysics of the infinity arrived at in desire, the subject loses the mysterious awe of "thought overflowing the capacity of thought" (*Totality* 49) and thus the imperative of nonreciprocal, absolute responsibility for the other. Ethics in this manner can degenerate into the totality of politics, which, to Levinas, is always based on contingency, vengeance, and reciprocity—despite his guarded sense that liberal politics advances toward the ethical more than any other system of government.³¹

Alternately, if Schwarz-Bart felt his investment in the history of Guadeloupe and its slave past could be the basis of a humanist interracial consciousness, such an ethic could arise from the historical alone, which can provide alliances or shared teleologies but is again void of the infinite in the face:

if [history] claims to integrate myself and the other within an impersonal spirit this alleged integration is cruelty and injustice, that is, ignores the Other. History as a relationship between men ignores a position of the I before the Other in which the other remains transcendent to me. Though of myself I am not exterior to history, I do find in the Other a point that is absolute with regard to history—not by amalgamating with the Other, but in speaking with him. History is worked over by the ruptures of history, in which a Judgment is borne upon it. When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history. (*Totality* 52)

In the *Figaro* interview, Schwarz-Bart too appeared aware of how history can act as a foil to ethics as first philosophy. In the piece he also revealed that, even after living in and studying the islands, he felt he had not penetrated the culture's "unknowable core." He

recognized that his initial enchantment with the Latin Quarter islanders in Paris was based in "their ways of being, their gaiety . . . their gentleness, their wisdom . . . for this kind of verbal lyricism such that, in the mouth of a West Indian . . . all becomes poetry, beginning with himself. In all, as often happens, I loved, I admired, the Antillians for the qualities I do not possess." Although he stopped short of finishing this last phrase with the distinction, "I do not possess" as a Jew, his relocation to Guadeloupe and research on the island's cultural history suggest a further attempt to draw closer to this difference as a counterpoint to his own cultural temperament—a kind of ego projection of sameness. Moreover, even at the outset of the collaborative project Schwarz-Bart believed would reveal the connective tissue between these two worlds, he admitted,

I discovered, in despair, that there is one way to respect a people entirely: that is to be one of them. And, to speak in a lighter vein, it seemed to me then and only then, that if I were, for about ten years now, up to smelling the perfume of the Antilles, to appreciating it, to describing it, if need be, it was impossible for me to become the perfume itself. (Interview)

Plapp asserts that in turning to Simone's contribution as this missing perfume in his work, Schwarz-Bart indirectly promoted an "essentializing of ethnic identity," but also made the novel "immune to accusations of racism or masculinism" (144–45). More to my point, his observations about the differences and limits of ethnic consciousness cast an even more complex light onto his prior allusion to Levinas in the same piece.

And yet, despite these philosophical or psychological lacunae, the Schwarz-Barts' project to write a series representing a trauma-based interplay between their different racial identities and cultures did produce the two works mentioned above, which allow a reader empathetic access into a fictive world through which he or she may discover an imagined position of responsibility toward the other. Moreover, a decade later, that plan culminated in the couple's exhaustive three-volume encyclopedia of historically notable black women, *Homage à la femme noire* (1988). With her husband's encouragement, Simone Schwarz-Bart of course wrote two more important novels and a late drama, all with Afro-Caribbean subjects and protagonists portraying how the feminine operates in Antilles folk traditions. But André's hope to become the emissary of a black-Jewish cultural dialogue failed after *Solitude*, effectually silencing him for thirty years until his death in 2006. His posthumous work, *The Morning Star* (2010), assembled by Simone from an incomplete manuscript, for-

goes any interest in Afro-Caribbean issues and returns to the Polish shtetl, the folktale's magic realism, and the Shoah as its subjects.

Whatever caused his inability to complete his role in the couple's plan, however, Schwarz-Bart's attempt to capture the sinews of a black–Jewish psychosocial fusion nonetheless represents a profound moment in which Levinasian ethics underwent a living experiment during the rise of the New Left. And while recent criticism has focused on how that effort opens important vistas on the role of post-Shoah Jewishness as it intersects with the decolonized West, it is just as fruitful to investigate Schwarz-Bart's endeavor as one in which the absolute alterity of the feminine presents as promising a frame as a socio-historical one alone. Schwarz-Bart's Levinasian inspiration is indeed more discernible in his awe of a single black woman than in whatever political agency he imagined he could discover through Afro-Caribbean history; in the end, however, the latter is incontrovertibly tied to the former through what Levinas saw as the ethical potential toward justice within liberal politics. After *Last of the Just*, Schwarz-Bart never again published a complete work with a male protagonist. Rather, his later collaboration with his wife and second novel each focused entirely on the feminine and abjectness in a colonial setting. Through this responsibility toward race-into-gender and gender-into-race via the interpersonal, Schwarz-Bart was able to represent both the reverent boundaries of racial difference and the height of infinity through the ethics of otherness. And it was perhaps only through Levinas that he discovered a humanism capable of allowing him to commit his life—as a Jew—to a subjugated people not his own.

Notes

1. The controversy became known both through Schwarz-Bart's reactions to the criticism in the October 29, 1959 *L'Express* interview as well as in Linda Kaufman's *Réflexions sur la 'Shoah.'*
2. For Levinas's discussion of how his work differs from Buber's, see *Totality and Infinity* 68, 155.
3. For Scharfman's detailed discussion see 250–63.
4. See for example Rothberg's chapter entitled "Anachronistic Aesthetics: André Schwarz-Bart and Caryl Phillips on the Ruins of Memory" in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* or Laurel Plapp's chapter entitled "Le Parfum des Antilles: The Caribbean Revolutions in the Works of Anne Seghers and André Schwarz-Bart" in *Zionism and Revolution*.
5. Tarica's phrase, "escape from history" (82), is borrowed for Scholem 20.

6. See *Last of the Just*: "And so it was for millions, who turned from *Luftmenschen* into *Luft*. I shall not translate. For the smoke that rises from crematoriums obeys physical laws like any other; the particles come together and disperse according to the wind that propels them" (374).
7. For these scenes, see 305–74. For a discussion of how *The Last of the Just* moves from lamentation tale to historical record and contingency see Davison, "Inside the *Shoah*: Narrative, Documentation, and Schwarz-Bart's *The Last of the Just*."
8. This is an allusion to Exodus 22:20–22, often quoted by Levinas.
9. Schwarz-Bart was raised in an observant home in which his *Yeshiva*-educated father taught him Talmud until the family was evacuated by the Nazis in 1940 when he was eleven years of age. See Davison, "André Schwarz-Bart."
10. The coincidences of their wartime experiences are notable. Although both were naturalized French Jews, both were imprisoned as soldiers rather than as Jews. Schwarz-Bart was captured as a Resistance member in Limoges by the Gestapo but soon escaped; Levinas enlisted in the army officer's corps; his unit was captured and sent to the Fallingsbotel, a prisoner-of-war camp near Hanover. He lived in officers' housing and began the notes there that eventually became *Existence and Existents*.
11. For the accretion of Levinas's thought in his progressive texts, see Richard Cohen's introduction to *Time and the Other*.
12. This essay appears in *Difficult Freedom* 231–34.
13. Earlier in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explains the feeling of infinity as it arrives in the face: "To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object. But to think what does not have the lineaments of an object is in reality to do more or better than think" (49). He also relates this to his own concept of God: "The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed" (79).
14. Levinas argues for a different eschatology from religious doctrine or Hegelian teleology. He sees an interpersonal eschatology "*beyond the totality or beyond history . . . with a surplus always exterior to the totality,*" and names this "the first 'vision' of eschatology . . . that is, the breach of totality, the possibility of a *signification without context*" (*Totality* 21–25). His correspondent discussion of fecundity argues that the erotic broaches infinity by way of fecundity, which is always a relation of the other (the lover, the child) that surrounds futurity more than eros (267–77). He also discusses these ideas in "Judaism and the Feminine" 34–36.
15. For her critique of Levinas see Beauvoir 16.
16. For a review of these arguments see Stanford.

17. For a succinct discussion of the problem see Tina Chanter's introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*.
18. This is the passage on which Beauvoir focuses in her critique of Levinas.
19. Levinas emphasizes that "The isolation of the home does not arouse magically, does not 'chemically' provoke recollection, human subjectivity. The terms must be reversed: recollection, a work of separation, is concretized as existence in a dwelling, economic existence . . . but it is first important to describe the 'intentional implications' of recollection itself and of the *gentleness* in which it is lived" (153–54; emphasis added).
20. In a Freudian sense, dwelling could be seen as a return in both men and women to a residue in the unconscious of the precognitive feeling of being in the womb. Or in a Lacanian sense, it could be a residue of the premirror stage of unity with the mother's body.
21. See Katz 92–96. She argues that the Book of Ruth can be interpreted as Ruth's participation in the ethical through her experience of the feminine at the face of Naomi. This would be alterity through the homoerotic. Fecundity would be Ruth's devotion to her late husband's line in that it represents the future of Judaism and hence the messianic.
22. One minor woman character does appear here. "Maria Kozemeniczka, a daughter of Jesus," brings a child to the Grand Synagogue of Vilna, confesses she "received the boy from the hands" of the wife of her Jewish employer "as the Russians broke down the door" during a pogrom, and requests the rabbi take and protect her adopted son from conscription (15–16). While she does not function as other to a Just Man, she symbolizes fecundity in the maternal.
23. See the preface to *Totality and Infinity* on war and totality.
24. This trajectory associates to the novel's title and its origins. The *Lamed Vov* is often incorrectly identified as originating in Hasidic legend. Rather, it first appears in the Talmudic *Amora* Abbaye's assertion in *Sanhedrin* 97b that "the world must contain not less than 36 righteous men who are vouchsafed the sight of the Divine Presence." See Werblowsky and Wigoder, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Religion* 234. Schwarz-Bart's title implies the point of history where this imperative ends. Thus such a trajectory in full would suggest a fourth era of Judaism—from Temple, to Prophetic, to Rabbinic, to Existential or Levinasian.
25. About the mitzvah *Thou Shalt Not Murder*, Katz cites Levinas's statement that the commandment "is not simply the prohibition against murder. It becomes a fundamental definition or description of the human event of being, a permanent prudence with respect to the violent and murderous acts against the other which are perhaps the very assertion of being, as if the very imposition of a being's existence were already to jeopardize someone's life" (qtd. in Katz 12).

For Levinas's original statement, see Robbins, *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Immanuel Levinas* 62.

26. The line also foreshadows Schwarz-Bart's later belief that the destruction of the family bonds in both the slave trade and the Holocaust made the trauma suffered by victims of those events similar.
27. See *Time and the Other* 79, 90.
28. Laval's reasoning could have been born of sympathy for the victims, but the transports nevertheless went from camps like Drancy directly to Auschwitz where the children were often gassed on arrival. See Poliakov 177.
29. Levinas asserts "there can be no knowledge of God separate from the relationship with men. The other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relationship with God" (*Totality* 78). In "Useless Suffering" he claims that "Perhaps the most revolutionary fact of our twentieth-century consciousness—but it is also an event in Sacred History—is that of the destruction of all balance between the explicit and implicit theodicy of Western thought and the forms which suffering and its evil take in the very unfolding of this century," and along with Emil Fackenheim, believes "[t]he disproportion between suffering and every theodicy was shown at Auschwitz with a glaring, obvious clarity" (161–62). Ernie's lie to the children is born from compassion for the other in a century in which he knows well no theodicy can justify the murder of millions of innocent children.
30. In "Useless Suffering" Levinas quotes Fackenheim's *God's Presence in History*. See 162.
31. When asked in an interview if his philosophy "offers any practical advice for solving political problems," Levinas responded that "there is no politics for accomplishing the moral, but there are certainly some politics which are further from it or closer to it. For example, I've [previously] mentioned Stalinism to you. I've told you justice is always a justice that desires better justice. This is the way I characterize the liberal state. The liberal state is a state which holds justice as the absolutely desirable end and hence as a perfection . . . [it] has always admitted—alongside the written law—human rights as a parallel institution. . . . Human rights are the reminder that there is no justice yet. And, consequently, I believe that is it absolutely obvious that the liberal state is more moral than the fascist state, and closer to the morally ideal state" ("Paradox" 177–78).

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