

# Walter Abish's Postmodern Strategies in *Double Vision*: In Relation to His Humanism and the Holocaust

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## 1. Introduction

Walter Abish is very conscious of his writing and devises a unique literary style in each book, such as alphabetically restricted choices of words in *AA (Alphabetical Africa)*, many questions with an affirmative function in *HG (How German Is It)*, and simulation of a picaresque style in *EF (Eclipse Fever)*. It is not, however, only with styles that Abish is concerned, as the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* points out in an apt summary of his writing: "He is a boldly innovative, critically acclaimed writer committed to ludic compositional procedures; yet, Abish's fiction has been found to yield sharp social criticism" (4). In fact, Abish is much concerned with social, political and moral questions and connects those concerns with the innovative styles of his writing.

In *DV (Double Vision)*, his main literary materials are autobiographical but he forms them into a unique fiction with accumulated layers of double vision to intimate his social, political and moral concerns. This essay, therefore, first analyzes the way in which Abish uses his autobiographical materials with their double vision. Then this analysis will be related to his literary concern as well as other concerns in the light of Postmodernism and the Holocaust so that the nature of Abish's writing will be more clearly presented at the end.

## 2. The Impossibility of a Self-Portrait in "The Writer-to-Be"

*DV* carries the subtitle, "A Self-Portrait," and is based on Abish's own autobiographical materials, consisting of two sections, "The Writer-to-Be" and "The Writer." "The Writer-to-Be" section depicts the journey caused by the Anschluss, the Annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany and this journey begins in Austria and, via Italy, France, and China, ends in Israel. "The Writer" section, on the other hand, deals with the reaction to *HG* published in 1980 in the USA and the subsequent trips to Germany and Austria. The two sections are narrated in the first person in turns so that it looks as if the journey to leave Austria as a child and the journey to go back there as a writer intersect each other.

The two intersectional journeys supply a double chance to look at his childhood and its historical

background which were so full of problematic incidents as Thomas Peyser suggests in his comment on Abish's childhood: "A more thorough schooling in the precariousness of civilization can hardly be imagined" (n. pag.)<sup>1</sup>. Still a double chance to look at them does not mean that the reader is allowed to have a clearer vision of them. It is true that Abish is better informed when he looks back at the past events, but because of his wider view and deeper understanding of the world as a writer, he is all the more cautious in avoiding a simplified vision. This is why Joseph Dewey suspects that this double vision has a double function:

[...]does double vision suggest the notion that life's events are witnessed first as they happen only to be enriched in re-seeing them, coaxed into clarity as part of the intricate process of looking-back. Or does double vision refer to blurred vision, the optical catastrophe that dooms even the most accessible objects to inaccessibility, that makes ironic even the premise of understanding. Not surprisingly, Abish insists on both [...]. (n. pag.)

And in performing this double function, what Dewey regards as "Abish's strategy of both endorsing and undercutting introspection" (n. pag.) plays an important role.

For example, the very act of looking back at his childhood as a writer "endorses" introspection about many incidents in Abish's childhood and offers the reader subjects to consider. The wide range of childhood incidents, however, do not seem to be directly related to his becoming a writer, as Jason Warshof comments: "A purported aim of this section, titled 'Writer-to-Be,' [sic] is to assess the influences that propelled Abish into the life of a creative writer. But these chapters just as validly give Abish a slate on which to recount the stories of his youth for their own sake" (n. pag.). In spite of this first impression, these incidents are actually described as the background which prepared him to write in a style characterized by the "undercutting introspection."

Abish admits in my interview with him: "In the first of the two journeys I describe, I was immersed in the world of a child with only an incomplete awareness of my constantly changing environment" (76). Hence, he "undercuts" the description of his childhood with many interesting vicissitudes in order to reflect the limitation of a child's incomplete awareness in "The Writer-to-Be" section. "The *Complete Review's* review" recognizes this literary effect and comments: "Among the most interesting aspects is a childish incomprehension of what is happening around him: the world (and his parents) are puzzling, and much remains a mystery" (n. pag.). As a result, Abish's abundant retrospection about his childhood actually demonstrates a situation so frustrating as to drive him into becoming a writer.

This will be more clearly understood through his description of the Anschluss. As an adult and a writer, he is certainly better informed of the incident than in his childhood and expects the reader to know the fundamental facts about it as well. Therefore he "endorses" his childhood, referring to some Anti-

Semitic incidents in relation to it, such as the neighborhood synagogue being set on fire and his father's arrest soon after Kristallnacht. Yet, when he looks back on the first day of the Anschluss, he remembers only what a six year old child could notice and confesses: "The Germans may have marched in, but I couldn't see any evidence of their presence" (22). He then wonders: "How could I fail to comprehend what was going on? Didn't my parents' unease rub off on me?" (24). These questions are left unanswered while suggesting that there was more to know there and that his protected situation from the difficult days and his failure to recognize them later induced him to examine himself and the world as a writer.

"Abish's strategy of both endorsing and undercutting introspection" is also found in his self-portrait as the writer-to-be when he again refers to his parents' role in making him a writer:

I would like to think that together, though each not communicating his or her desire to the other, they [my parents] managed, if you will, to fabricate a writer. [...] It was their unspoken plan — a desire they had never voiced. Evidently a desire so secret that after I became a writer they continued to withhold their approval for fear that I might yet change my mind. "Ah, a writer!" My father glanced doubtfully at me, not wishing to say anything that might wound me. "A risky business!" (3)

Abish revealed a similar view to Vineta Colby, the editor of *World Authors*, before writing *DV*:

I think I am not distorting my past if I contend that I did not choose to become a writer — it was a role that was thrust on me. Looking back at my youth, I can only conclude from the way my father [...] and my mother [...] nurtured my disquietude and, without communicating their intention to each other or to me, seemed to have gone out of their way to ensure that I would become a writer. I can see myself at the age of six, an only child, overprotected, egotistical, rebellious, already the writer-to-be, keenly assessing and questioning the veracity of everything that was taking place around me. (1)

Abish must have strongly felt that his childhood circumstances nurtured him as a writer. Nevertheless, in the above context of *DV*, his statement about his parents' secret intention to make him a writer does not look reliable at all. Because his father was a respectable businessman, it is far more natural to presume that his father would have been happier if his only son had secured a steadier job than that of a writer.

A similar twist in his interpretation can be detected when he negates his father's candid hope and tries to read more meaning in his expression:

What was I being prepared for?

My father didn't conceal his hope, once there was peace, that I would become a perfumer. He said as much, but he said it wistfully, as if aware that it was not likely. He would have wanted me to receive my training at Molinard in Grasse. (53)

Here Abish will not take his father's hope at its face values but tries to interpret it according to his pre-decided partial conviction. He seems to distort a simple reality deliberately into complication by insisting

on his parents' secret intention.

The fact that Abish was blind to the catastrophic incidents around him as a child may have been a very important factor in encouraging him to develop his sensitivity to events around himself. Still, it is far more natural to think that his parents' first concern was to protect their only child from frightening incidents as well-off decent parents are supposed to do. In fact, he recollected those days in my interview and admitted: "Almost without exception the adults went out of their way to spare the children awareness of the danger we were in" (76). Consequently, in spite of his knowledge of history as an adult, his preconception distorts his interpretation of some of the past events and makes them look more confused and ambiguous than in his childhood.

Actually, in addition to the above case, Abish often insinuates the unreliability of his interpretation of the past in "The Writer-to-Be" by referring to his prejudiced description of other people. For example, when Abish witnesses his father affectionately caress his mother, he is "amazed that he was given license to approach her in such an intimate manner" (20) and wonders if he might have misunderstood his parents' relation. He also admits his biased tendency to depict his uncle Phoebus as a scoundrel: "The nomenclature of black sheep I bestowed on him is misleading" (73). If his ability as a writer was developed by the lack of understanding, therefore, it should not only be attributed to a child's limited perception of the world. It could also be caused by adults' preconceptions and prejudices, which are further observed in "The Writer" section.

### 3. The Impossibility of History in "The Writer"

While "The Writer-to-Be" section deals with Abish's personal world and focuses on his imperfect perception of himself and the world around him, "The Writer" section aims to discuss on a larger and universal scale how imperfect one's images of other people and other countries are. Depicting Abish's journey to Germany and then to his birthplace, Vienna, Austria, as well as to Italy and Yucatán, Mexico, this section repeatedly presents the stereotypical images or prejudices people have about other people and other countries.

The first part of "The Writer" describes how first German readers of *HG* tried to relate the book to Abish's personal background. Even when he explains, "I intended *How German Is It* to elicit a multiple, if indeterminate, response" (30) and that the German sign in *HG* reflects only "a decided view of Germanness" (30) which anyone outside of Germany surely holds, Abish is embarrassed to realize that he is still expected to tell how much he suffered from the Holocaust and "that the novel was written out of a perhaps justifiable, even spiteful anger at Germany" (31). To his amazement, one of those Germans even confesses to him that "a friend of hers regarded *How German Is It* as the Jew's revenge" (32). Abish's

puzzlement at these reactions reveals how inappropriate their preconceived ideas of a Jewish writer who writes about Germany are.

It does not mean, however, Abish particularly criticizes these Germans for their shallow reading because he reveals a similar preconception in himself on his first visit to Germany. At the border of Germany, he is already surprised at the border guard's "unkempt appearance — his long, disheveled blond hair and poorly cut uniform" (40) because it is completely contradicted by his images of Germany such as "self-discipline, stoicism, law-abiding people, even a decided lack of humor and a certain insensitivity" (35). On the other hand, he is very pleased at the sight of the row of houses which confirm his expectation and excitedly takes pictures of them. When he realizes that the camera was empty, therefore, he comments: "Somehow, it seems appropriate that I'd been nailing my first impressions of Germany with an empty camera" (40). He feels his deed is appropriate because our ideas of other people or other countries are so unreliable that trying to pick up some convenient samples to prove them correct is as absurd as taking pictures of them with an empty camera.

While presenting how absurd one's preconceived ideas of other people and other countries can be, Abish turns his eyes from his personal past to historical events, insinuating that one's understanding of past historical incidents can similarly be precarious.

For example, when Abish first goes back to his former home in Vienna, he is disappointed to find that "the houses and stores lining Mariahilferstrasse — even the large department store Gerngross, once the pride of the area — looked worn and neglected, the gray, dusty facades covered by a historical fallout of ages" (111). He wonders, "Had the street always been so run-down?" (111). This is one of his typical questions without answers and raises the possibility of the mistakenness of his own memory though it might simply indicate the aging effect in the passage of time. This uncertainty in his memory of the personal past is followed by another uncertainty provoked by a question without an answer on the Anschluss: "Hadn't they spruced it [Mariahilferstrasse] up a bit for Hitler's exuberant entry into Vienna [...]?" (111). In relation to the Anschluss, Abish further recollects "a man [...], risking his life to suspend from between two windows the celebratory banner that reached all the way down to the first floor" (111-12) and calls the Nazi banner "that already ominous emblem" (112). He even ironically accounts for people's zeal on that day: "The annexation by Germany may well have been viewed as an opportunity to finally shed some of that Austrian ambivalence [...]" (112).

It is easy to detect in these statements, Abish's criticism of Austrians who welcomed Hitler with zeal. At the same time, however, he wonders: "Is there in that house, where the tenant on the fourth floor had overcome such hurdles to hand out the banner, still some trace of that event? A memory of his zeal? Of his exuberance?" (112). He will not answer these questions so that there may well be no sign of the past

excitement in the house any longer. It is very probable that people looked excited at Hitler's arrival only because they were forced to do so. After all, by presenting questions without answers, Abish not only implies his opinion that Austrians made a wrong choice but also presents another interpretation of the past incidents, suggesting that even one who experienced a historical incident as a child and who is more informed about it as a writer cannot understand it fully.

"The Writer" section thus clearly demonstrates that one can never be sufficiently free from distorted preconceptions and precarious memories to establish an authorized opinion of anything, anybody, or any history. This is a notion common to the writers after the 1970s who are influenced by what Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* describes as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv) or the "delegitimation" of grand narratives (37-41). If the limitation of Abish's perception is his starting point as a writer, therefore, it is also his destination as a writer. And if the precarious perception was realized through his childhood experience during World War II and the Holocaust and was the main factor in making him a writer, it is also related to Postmodernism, under whose influence he became a writer.

#### 4. Abish's Uniqueness in His Postmodernity

Incidentally, it has first to be admitted that the definition of Postmodernism varies and is so ambiguous that Terry Eagleton calls it "such a portmanteau phenomenon that anything you assert of one piece of it is almost bound to be untrue of another" (viii). It is not surprising, therefore, that Abish does not completely meet the definition of Postmodernism defined by such philosophers and cultural historians as Lyotard and Frederic Jameson. If Lyotard and Jameson reject grand narratives and authority and insist on such uncertainty and unreliability as is easily found in Abish's writing, they also assert that Postmodernism is fundamentally non-ethical and apolitical. For example, Lyotard denies that "the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end — universal peace" (xxiv). Likewise, Fredric Jameson claims that Postmodernism focuses on "the 'aestheticization' of reality" (x) and that "it is hard to discuss 'postmodernism theory' in any general way without having recourse to the matter of historical deafness"(xi). In contrast, in spite of Abish's strong concern with literary devices and artistic expressions, most of the critics who discuss him admit that his work is not characterized by what Jameson calls "historical deafness." In fact, Abish's work always reminds the reader of the unsettling times and places of history in his childhood and one's responsibility to them. Lyotard and Jameson would have related such social, historical and moral concern to modernism but in Abish's work it is combined with the most innovative literary challenges and is characterized by the liberal Postmodern openness towards others advocated by other Postmodern philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

A typical example of Abish's Postmodern liberal social, historical, and moral concern can be seen in

his description of an incident in Nice during the war. There he once walked with his mother and came across a group of men and women “almost gaily shooting at pigeons” (47). He hoped that “they [would] miss at least once” (47). Then they actually missed and the injured bird fell down at his feet. A uniformed attendant came around to pick it up and kindly assured him, “It’s all right, [sic] We’ll take good care of it” (48) in order to relieve his anxiety. He accepted the attendant’s words though he already knew better and understood “that the care would at best be transitory, that when healed the bird would be released in order to become a target once again” (48).

This description is characterized by Abish’s typical “endorsing” and “undercutting” style of writing. He observes the incident in such detail that the reader can easily share the pain a small child underwent at the sight. On the other hand Abish refrains from accusing the men and women who enjoy shooting pigeons as a sports if it may look easy to denounce them. Thus he invites the reader to consider how and why those nice looking young people can kill helpless creatures without feeling any pangs of conscience. As a result, the description takes on a more important characteristic than that of a testimony to a certain distasteful act. It warns the reader against committing a similar violence unconsciously in any social or historical situation.

The same characteristic is found in the description of the two Chinese policemen in Shanghai, who were “laughingly kicking a bulky package — actually a dead infant neatly wrapped in newspaper and tied with cord — back and forth across the street” (95). Abish first tries to explain why they can enjoy such cruelty and asks himself if they “were simply passing the time by imitating the behavior of their European superiors, or was this mindless cruelty a grotesque antidote for their sense of powerlessness” (95-96). His “endorsing” speculation exemplifies our reasoning procedure in the face of such a wanton cruel act. It even tries to excuse their behavior by suggesting their tribulation under Japanese rule and Western oppression.

However, he immediately rejects his speculation:

No. Of course not. They were simply kicking the package — the content was insignificant — as they might a ball, for recreation, unthinkingly. [...] The ubiquitous package, which was how dead or unwanted infants were disposed of, lent itself to kicking, and they needed a pastime — nothing more, nothing less. I tend to theorize, to speculate too much about motives. Sometimes motives are simply an after thought. (96)

Abish’s outright denial is so rare as sharply to warn us against easy reasoning. Giving justifiable explanations for such thoughtless behavior dismisses the real atrocity we may commit with careless unconsciousness. When Abish “undercuts” a further discussion of the two policemen’s responsibility, he lets the reader consider it for himself instead and realize that any one can easily fall into such apathy or thoughtlessness in certain outrageous circumstances.

Resorting to Postmodern literary devices such as “endorsement” and “undercutting,” Abish makes his

text liberal enough to extend a certain particular incident at a historical moment into a universal moral and social subject to be applied to anybody in any country in future. This is why his social, historical, and moral concerns have nothing to do with rigid and dominant modern authorities but have a closer affiliation to what Robert Eaglestone, in his analysis of Jacques Derrida, calls “a sense of openness towards the future” (299).

## 5. Abish’s Double Vision of the Holocaust

Eaglestone relates Derrida’s liberal humanism to his effort to prevent another incident like the Holocaust in the future. This supplies a subject to consider in Abish’s writing because in *DV*, the presence of the Holocaust is also apparent. It is partly because “The Writer-to-Be” section is based on his childhood experience of exile starting with the Anschluss and the anti-Semitic Nazi Germany and partly because “The Writer” section deals with his visit to Germany and return to Austria after writing *HG*, which caused a lot of controversy about its German signs. Abish’s relation to the Holocaust, however, is not so simple as it appears.

In “The Writer” section, Abish is in general very sensitive to Germans who treat him with exaggerated familiarity. He is doubtless hesitant about being treated as a victim of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, his reaction to the euphemism of asking after his family in the Holocaust is devious:

On the drive back to the city, in what may have been a further attempt at unburdening himself, Werner inquired if I had lost any members of my family. “Lost?” I said. “Yes, half my family.” However, I didn’t take the trouble to inform him that the family I had lost, to use his euphemism, had remained virtually invisible to me, so that their loss was somehow evanescent. I didn’t press him for personal details. I didn’t inquire if he had lost any members of *his* family, for my question might balance in his mind our respective losses. (31)

Abish admits to the reader that his father’s relatives were “virtually invisible” to him so that the loss of his family is not so important as the expression “the loss of half my family” is supposed to indicate. He thus announces that he did not suffer so much as “the victim” of the Holocaust is expected to have done. Nevertheless, he will not admit it to Werner. It is certain that he does not mean to abuse Werner’s German complex about the Holocaust. He simply does not want to give Werner a chance to “unburden” himself because it would help Werner avert his eye from the ominous facts of the Holocaust.

It is obvious that Abish regards the Holocaust as one of the historical events that we should remember and that he thinks we should keep considering how and why it was allowed to occur. On the other hand, he has no intention of continuing to resent Germans for it. In fact, just as he emphasizes that the Germany used in *HG* is simply a sign, so is Germany in *DV*. Jason Warshof, a reviewer of *DV*, recognizes this and



observes that Germany is “a concept rather than a set of facts” (n. pag.). This is why Abish can treat the German Jews as the Germans in his retrospect without hesitation. The German Jews (among whom Abish often includes the Austrian Jews) in *DV* usually behave like the Germans, which was noticed by the reviewer in *Publishers Weekly*: “Abish watched European Jews recreate their familiar cultural fabric” (45).

Abish's intention to identify the German Jews as the Germans is especially clear in the section called “The Germans” in his Israel days. There, he depicts the German Jews who “despite the humid weather always wore jackets” (142) and notes that they were called “the Jekkes,” a Yiddish term derived from the German word for a jacket:

[...] the Jekkes seemed to inhabit a sedate world so redolent of prewar Europe that it struck many as affected and even artificial. Though Israelis were quick to compliment the Jekkes on their accomplishments and skills, not to mention their integrity, they also inclined to add nastily that in the final analysis little distinguished the German Jews from the Germans. (142-43)

The German Jews may have been victims of the Nazis in the sense that they lost their native country and sometimes some of their relatives to them. Nevertheless Abish notices that when they keep their old European customs in Israel, they adopt a superior attitude towards other Jews as the Germans used to do to the Jews during World War II.

Abish admits this double vision of the German Jews in the interview with Aaron Retica:

I was intrigued — as I still am — by the relationship of the German Jews to Germany and their fellow Germans. Keep in mind that the German Jews were the initial target — I hesitate to use the word victim, since often the ones who embrace victimhood aren't necessarily victims. (n. pag.)

As the subtitle of *DV* is “A Self-Portrait,” “the initial target” was the search for his own self and the people around him — the German (Austrian) Jews. And when he identifies the German Jews as the Germans and refuses to categorize them into one big group of “the victims,” he intimates that the German Jews — he and people around him — face the same danger as the Germans fell into during World War II.

This universal warning is reconfirmed in his trip to Uxmal, Yucatán, in the last chapter, “The Scribe's Dilemma.” In the interview with Retica, Abish explains why he introduced the Mayan scribes: “Now that scholars have deciphered the script, what scholars took to be tranquil religious communities turn out to have been warring states” (n. pag.). Actually, in the last chapter, Abish observes that the Mayan scribes depicted “[w]hat nations tend to conceal and deny [...] as a central function, virtually a necessity of the state” (216) and he cannot help wondering “how to relate these awe-inspiring structures in one of the most beautiful Mayan sites to the unappealing torture of captives and the perpetual bloodletting” (217).

Being forced out of his native country, Abish is in a way the victim of Nazi Germany. Still by writing *DV*, he is no longer a mere victim but evokes what the passage of time may conceal, in order to let future

generations ask the same kind of question as that suggested by the records of the Mayan scribes — how men could commit such an atrocity as the Holocaust.

## 6. Conclusion

As he remembers “the tiny Christmas tree near the entrance to [his] dining room” (9), Abish’s family on his mother’s side was not very Jewish. He also registers his mother’s discomfort on their visit to his father’s more orthodox parents. Moreover, he even states that her reaction was normal for many middle-class Austrian and German Jews in those days. Abish also claims that not all Jewish refugees were “the victims.” He is thus very cautious not to be identified as a Jewish American writer or an exile writer related to the Holocaust. The very act of trying to relate him to those groups, therefore, will be regarded as another dangerous and silly racial discrimination. It has then to be admitted that what I will point out in the following paragraphs can be a simple coincidence. Yet, it will be a very interesting coincidence.

In my interview, Abish refers to the influence of Michel Leiris: “Resorting to a loaded or charged text, Leiris explores what you might refer to as his ‘private’ self” (76). Leiris’s text is open to many interpretations and so is Abish’s text. Leiris is, by the way, a member of The College of Sociology, with which Walter Benjamin was associated during his stay in Paris in the 1930s. Martin Jay, in his book on Theodor Adorno, explains that Benjamin shared some philosophical interests with The College of Sociology. According to Jay, Benjamin also influenced Adorno’s way of thinking. Benjamin is a connecting factor between The College of Sociology and Adorno. Jay further points out that Benjamin’s ideas adapted by them have some similarity to Deconstruction, which Derrida later theorized and established.

Jay’s explanation is intended to endorse his proposition that many of Adorno’s thoughts are parallel with deconstruction while they were forged through the Holocaust. Jay then claims, “The major lesson Adorno drew from the Holocaust was, in fact, the link between anti-Semitism and totalistic thinking” (20) and in a later chapter explains this in more details, referring to what Adorno called “the ticket mentality”: “The ‘ticket mentality’ that characterized the victims of the culture industry could be compared [...] to the anti-Semitic mentality that had fed fascism” (38-39). He also argues: “The Jews [...] were prime targets of the totalitarian identity principle of instrumental rationality because they were the most resolute repository of otherness and difference in the Western world” (39).

This argument by Adorno is quoted when Terry Eagleton criticizes Postmodernism in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. In the 1980s, he seemed fully to accept Postmodernism and tried to explain it in light of Marxism but in this book of 1996, he defines it as “a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the ideal of universal progress or emancipation, of

single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation” (vii) and then denounces it by insisting that traditional moral notions should be taken into considerations to avoid “a falsely homogenizing habit of thought” (50). He also maintains that there is a history we should not forget and quotes Adorno’s famous phrase which he regarded as “delivered in the shadow of Auschwitz” (51): “No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb ... the One and All that keeps rolling on to this day — with occasional breathing spells — would teleologically be the absolute of suffering” (50-51).

“The ticket mentality” which Adorno regards as the primal cause of anti-Semitism and “a falsely homogenizing habit of thought” which Eagleton insists on avoiding in order to prevent another Holocaust is nothing but an easy generalization and a careless deduction that Abish strongly warns against with his double vision and highly charged texts. And it is the same with Derrida’s decentering, too, which, as I have already mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 5, Derrida’s critic, Eaglestone, ascribes to Derrida’s intention to prevent another Holocaust. Eaglestone also relates it to the futuristic liberalism and it is another characteristic which Derrida shares with Abish’s writing. In fact, it is not difficult to relate Abish’s social, historical and moral concern to Derrida’s criticism of the lack of otherness, time, or history in Western philosophy. Derrida emphasizes their importance and claims that “la philosophie soit morte hier, depuis Hegel ou Marx, Nietzsche ou Heidegger” (117), blaming traditional Western philosophy as “des philosophies de la violence” (136), in his famous thesis, “Violence et Métaphysique” in *L’écriture et la différence*.

Both Abish and Adorno are from well-assimilated middle class families and Eagleton is an Irish Christian. It is, therefore, certain that this kind of moral thinking should not be ascribed only to Jewish tradition and Judaism. Nevertheless, it may not be so extravagant to presume that Abish’s precarious childhood during World War II and the Holocaust made him susceptible to Leiris’s “loaded or charged text” characterized by the liberal and humanistic thinking typical among the philosophers who are very conscious of the Holocaust and try to prevent another incident like that in future. And it is this liberal humanism concerned with one’s responsibility to society and history that enables Abish’s work to be open to other people and to the future, and distinguishes his innovative writing with his tenacious “endorsement” and tantalizing “undercut” from other Postmodern stylists’ literary challenges.

## Note

<sup>i</sup> Though Peyser appreciates this book as if it were an autobiography of a survivor of the Holocaust who became a successful writer, Abish uses his bibliographical materials only to create another literary work of his.

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# 『ダブルビジョン』におけるウォルター・アビッシュの文学的戦略

——ポストモダンとホロコーストとの観点から

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## 梗概

ナチスによるオーストリア併合とユダヤ人迫害によって祖国を離れることを余儀なくされたウォルター・アビッシュの作品には、ナチスドイツへの示唆が繰り返し現れる。しかし、ポストモダンの新しい文学技法を駆使した彼の作品では、ナチス時代のドイツに新しいドイツを皮肉に重ね合わせた『すべての夢を終える夢』(1980)のような場合でさえ、ドイツは〈サイン〉として用いられているにすぎず、作品は特定の歴史的事実を証言したり説明したりすることではなく、もっと普遍的なメッセージを伝えることを意図している。

同様の傾向は、この作品がきっかけとなり、アメリカからドイツへ、そして祖国オーストリアへと旅する現在の作家の姿と、それと交差するように、祖国オーストリアを出て、イタリア、フランスを經由し、日本軍が占領する上海へ、さらにはイスラエルへと向かう幼少期の作家の姿を描いた、最新作『ダブルビジョン』(2004)にも窺える。副題に「自画像」と掲げられているように、作品の題材はすべて事実である。しかし、自身の姿や体験を描く際にアビッシュが試みた様々な文学的戦略は、当時の状況を証言しようとする伝統的語りの枠を超えた、より普遍性の高い新しい文学作品を生み出している。

本論では、『ダブルビジョン』におけるこうした文学的戦略を、ホロコーストの影響を受けた当時の思想家たちとの関連において分析する。そして、ホロコーストの影響を受けた思想家と共通する、他者と未来に開かれたリベラルなヒューマニズムが、ホロコーストを脱構築し、新しい反戦作品・平和文学を作り出すアビッシュのポストモダンの姿勢を特徴付け、彼独自の文学世界を構築する不可欠の要素となっている点を明らかにする。