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**„...so spielen wir auf dem Friedhof“:
Ilse Aichinger's *Die grössere Hoffnung* and the Holocaust
through the Eyes of a Child**

by

Emily P. Sepp

B.A. The University of Montana, 1999

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

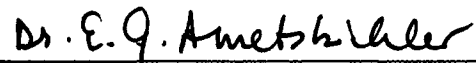
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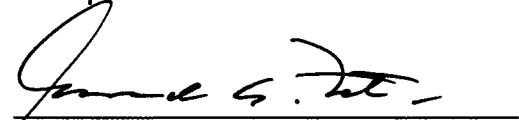
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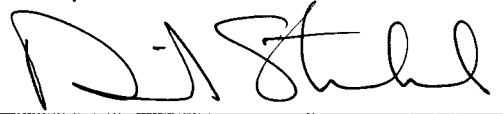
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„...so spielen wir auf dem Friedhof“: Ilse Aichinger's *Die grössere Hoffnung* and the Holocaust through the Eyes of a Child (193 pp.)

Directors: Gerald Fetz 
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In this thesis I undertake an examination of the Holocaust experience from the perspective of the child, both in fiction and in factual historical accounts. I introduce the problematics of dealing with the subject of the Holocaust and its implications for the field of German studies. I also present background on the half-Jewish Austrian writer Ilse Aichinger, whose only novel, *Die grössere Hoffnung*, is the centerpiece of my thesis. This particular novel singles out the child's experience in the Holocaust and, in doing so, illustrates its tragedy with incredible poignancy.

The body of the thesis examines this novel and its main character, Ellen, against the backdrop of first-hand historical accounts of those who experienced the Holocaust as children – including both famous accounts (such as those of Anne Frank and Elie Wiesel) and those perhaps less well-known (such as Ruth Klüger, Elisabeth Welt Trahan and Alicia Appelman-Jurman). I discuss the particular “Otherness” of Jewish children under Nazi domination, and in doing so highlight both the tragedy and the strange advantage of that “outsider view.” I then turn to the reality of the child's world in the Holocaust, both in the daily experiences and feelings of Aichinger's Ellen and in the words of child survivors of that era. I relate Ellen's story to those of several survivors who themselves lived that horror, whether in cities, in hiding, in the ghettos or even in the camps. In the final phase of this thesis, I turn to a discussion of ways in which children in the Holocaust undertook resistance to their subjugation and annihilation – whether physically, through fantasy and play, through education or through language itself. I place particular emphasis on the acts of resistance, great and small, undertaken by Ellen and the Jewish children in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, and on the life-affirming stories of the children of Theresienstadt, Warsaw, Łódz and even Auschwitz. While these accounts fill the human soul with outrage and sadness, their brightness against the backdrop of the darkness of the Holocaust highlights a “*grössere Hoffnung*” – a greater hope that transcends even overwhelming evil and thus, however softly, defies it.

Preface

The Holocaust is one of the most tragic and morally significant events of the twentieth century, acting as a sort of watershed of conscience. In the years since, the civilized world has been obsessed with attempting to explain it, to comprehend it, and to come to terms not only with its horror, but also with its implications for civilization and the human spirit. The calculated murder of millions of innocent people is a catastrophe so unfathomable that the statistics can often obscure the human face of this tragedy. Perhaps one of the most poignant ways of looking at that human face is to consider the Holocaust through the eyes of its children.

It is ethically impossible – in fact, undesirable – to impose a rank of worth on the victims of the Holocaust: the loss of each life, whether old or young, Jewish or Gentile, is its own tragedy. However, perhaps the murder of over two million Jewish children under the age of twelve is particularly tragic – not only because of the ultimate powerlessness of the children to save themselves, but also because of the potential and possibility of that entire generation that was all but snuffed out. In mourning the death of those children, and in seeing the culture of hate through the eyes of those who grew up in its shadow, we can gain a new perspective on the Holocaust and find a compelling argument for the commitment to vigilance and tolerance for the sake of coming generations.

The Austrian writer Ilse Aichinger drew from her own experiences as a *Mischling* (a person of “mixed race”) under Nazi rule when writing her first and only novel, *Die grössere Hoffnung* (1948)¹. She tells the story of Jewish children growing up in wartime Vienna and of how these children created an imaginary world around themselves – one based not on the harsh and insurmountable realities imposed on them by the edicts of the Third Reich, but on “*die grössere Hoffnung*” – the “greater hope” in the existence of goodness, in spite of all the incomprehensible horror that closes in around them. Aichinger focuses particularly on a young girl, Ellen, who finds herself an outsider on many levels. First, she is half Jewish in a society that has declared in its madness that Jewish ancestry was cause for death. Second, she is an outsider among the outcast Jewish children with whom she wants so much to identify; Ellen is not Jewish “enough” for these children to whom virtually every normal ritual of childhood has been denied. Third, as children, Ellen and her young friends are outsiders in an adult world that had robbed them of the vitally important opportunity to freely explore themselves and create their own destinies. In telling the story of Ellen (which is, in many ways, her own story), Ilse Aichinger gives her readers an illuminating and touching perspective on childhood, play and innocence in the face of hatred and death.

¹ Ilse Aichinger (born 1921) owes her literary fame primarily to her short stories, among them her 1952 story *Spiegelgeschichte*, which was awarded that year’s first prize by the *Gruppe 47*, a groundbreaking group of German-language writers that dominated and defined German-language literature in the post-war era. Aichinger’s works of fiction have earned her numerous other awards, including the *Georg-Trakl-Preis* (1979), the *Petrarca-Preis* (1982), the *Franz-Kafka-Preis* (1983), the *Großer Literaturpreis der Bayerischen Akademie* (1991) and the *Großer*

My exploration of *Die grössere Hoffnung* will be interwoven with true-life stories of children who lived under the circumstances depicted in Aichinger's novel. The ways in which children in the Holocaust managed to find ways of expressing their thoughts and feelings, act out their childhood emotions, and even to play and create in the shadow of death are almost breathtakingly remarkable. They constitute, in their own way, resistance to insurmountable darkness. Yet, in the face of an evil its victims knew they could not physically overcome, children of the Holocaust still grew up, learned about the world around them and about themselves, and simply in asserting their existence fought against the fate to which they had been condemned. For a child to sit on a park bench, to go to school or to ride on a carousel would, in a sane world, be taken for granted as normal. However, in a society that denied Jewish children even the most basic of human needs, such acts that clung to life – however fleetingly – represented courage and defiance. Even in the constant presence of death, the bittersweet voices of these children rise up against their fate, if only by the tenacity of their hope:

Wenn ihr uns verboten habt, im Stadtpark zu spielen, so spielen wir auf dem Friedhof. Wenn ihr uns verboten habt, auf den Bänken zu rasten, so rasten wir auf den Gräbern. Und wenn ihr uns verboten habt, das Kommende zu erwarten: wir erwarten es doch! (Aichinger 53)

Österreichischer Staatspreis für Literatur (1995). Aichinger currently lives in Vienna (Richard Reichensperger, Preface. *Die grössere Hoffnung*. By Aichinger).

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Introduction
**Ilse Aichinger, the Problem of the Holocaust
and the View of the Shoah through the "Child Outside"**

The fundamental goodness of humanity, the ability of the human spirit to triumph over adverse circumstances, to take charge of destiny, even to overthrow tyranny and create a better world – these are the staples of Enlightenment thought that form the heart of the modern liberal humanist tradition. The Western mind places the highest value on the worth of human life, and cherishes the notions of self-determination, freedom, and the ultimate power of reason to discover truth and enact justice. Since the Enlightenment, the ultimate goal of civilized society has been viewed as the guarantee of liberty, and the preservation of "inalienable" human "rights."

However, in examining the historical events that have paralleled the human journey since the Enlightenment, it is obvious that despite the nobility of the humanist agenda, humanity itself has proven no less capable of destroying itself and no less willing to violate the very tenets of the philosophy to which most "great thinkers" and ordinary people alike claimed to subscribe. Humankind has since experienced the "dark side" of Enlightenment rationalism; the reduction and abstraction of beings into classifications and the notion of worth based on utility, when perverted to serve ideological purposes, lead modern thinkers to question the role of "reason" in our times – or to wonder whether it even exists (Tirumalesh 488). The twentieth century alone provides more than ample evidence that the human "rights" we believe should be

“inalienable” in an ideal world are, in reality, very fragile and must be vigilantly protected – protected from greed, from corrupt power, from evil itself – particularly in the name of the most vulnerable members of society who lack the power to defend these rights for themselves.

Perhaps nowhere can this truth be more effectively illustrated than in the German-speaking world of the twentieth century. After the dissolution of Empire in both Germany and Austria, both countries adopted representative democratic forms of government with constitutions modeled after that of the United States. Both countries, in the wake of the most horrific war Europe had seen to date, and at a time of worldwide economic depression and hardship that hit Germany with particular ferocity, attempted to set in place a social and political structure that could deal with and provide solutions to the problems of the modern era. Unfortunately, for reasons both complex and simple, the fledgling democracies proved unable to withstand not only the economic difficulties, but also the profiteering, the political and social unrest, and the frustration and anger of a population still suffering in the aftermath of defeat. Society was primed to embrace any ideology that could guarantee an end to the monotony of chaos and restore security and prosperity – even at the price of sacrificing an innocent scapegoat. Both in actively perpetrating and in tacitly accepting the Holocaust through silence, the German-speaking world perverted its proud tradition of the “*Dichter und Denker*” and, as a result, inflicted a grotesque wound – both on its own culture and on human history – that will never fully heal. The notions of

progress and of the fundamental goodness of mankind are now called into question. How can a culture that produced such horror call itself "enlightened"?

The Holocaust¹ presents an enormous problem not only for the Enlightenment tradition and the basic beliefs of modern humanism, but also specifically for scholars of German studies. Not only must we morally come to terms with this evil, but we are also faced with the problem of how best to address the Holocaust and its role in and effect on the broader culture of the German-speaking world in literary terms. In view of the fact that the sum of the great cultural tradition in the German-speaking world not only failed to prevent this horror, but in many ways was perverted to perpetrate it, how should German studies continue in its treatment of cultural issues? Scholars such as Theodor Adorno articulated the precarious and paradoxical position of art and literature in German culture:

[...] [N]ach Auschwitz, in dieser Situation noch Lyrik zu schreiben, sei barbarisch... die Dichtung müsse so sein, daß sie nicht durch ihre bloße Existenz nach Auschwitz dem Zynismus sich überantwortete. Ihre Situation ist paradox [...] Das Übermaß an Leiden duldet kein Vergessen, aber es heischt auch die Fortdauer von Kunst, kaum wo anders findet es noch seine eigene Stimme, den Trost, der es nicht sofort verriete. (Adorno in Kaiser 19,20)

¹ The term "Holocaust" is Greek in origin. The Greek translation of the Old Testament translates the Hebrew word *olah* as *holokauston*. The Hebrew literally means "that which is offered up;" it signifies a burnt offering offered whole unto God. Despite the widespread use of the word "Holocaust" to refer to the genocide of millions of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators, many scholars feel that it is inappropriate in that it softens the event by giving it a religious significance. They find the Hebrew word "*Shoah*," meaning "destruction," a more accurate and respectful term (Berenbaum 1,2). I use both terms interchangeably throughout this thesis.

The problem of dealing with the Holocaust through literature, therefore, is less *whether* to address it at all, but more *how* to do so – remaining faithful to fact and true to the demands of conscience while at the same time allowing the freedom of expression that makes literature a fitting vehicle for discussing the Holocaust and fashioning those memories and expressions of tragedy into what can rightly be called “art.” What genre is most appropriate? Which styles, theories and devices may or may not be used to deal with this tragic event? What, if anything, should be “taboo” with respect to portraying horror? How much artistic license may be taken, particularly in fiction?

There is by no means a consensus among writers and scholars concerning the Holocaust, and even less unanimous agreement between the scholars of the Shoah and those who experienced it firsthand. However, perhaps in considering both the fiction dealing with the Holocaust and the testimony of those who lived it, we can come to a greater and more complete insight into that most tragic and incomprehensible event. As scholar Peter Demetz quite rightly points out, despite disagreements on complexities, there should by all rights be a general moral consensus concerning the central purpose of Holocaust literature:

In the long run, our discussion of what kind of writing should be appropriate to the age of Auschwitz is totally irrelevant, if it touches on issues of genre alone and does not look for the presence of compassion. I cannot believe that categories of tradition and experimentation, realism and surrealism are more important than the individual text, in whatever mode, as long as it prevents us from believing that Auschwitz was just another event in world history. (Demetz 22)

The Austrian writer Ilse Aichinger is one of the most fitting literary figures to examine within this context. Not only did she publish one of the very first German-language novels to directly address the Holocaust (*Die grössere Hoffnung*, 1948), but she herself lived in Vienna during those horrible years and deals in her novel with her own past as a young half-Jewish girl under the Nazi regime. Her personal experiences and observations form a basis for the story she weaves in *Die grössere Hoffnung* – which, according to Peter Demetz, “reflects historical events without false illusions” (22). The novel consists of a series of episodes, “loosely” connected as if from a child’s perspective, in the life of a young half-Jewish girl, Ellen. Unable to emigrate to America with her Jewish mother and abandoned by her Aryan father, who joined the Nazi party, Ellen struggles to find her own identity in a society that denied her one. Aichinger, in her own unique style, thus gives her readers a view of the Holocaust through the eyes of perhaps its most vulnerable victims. She does so not only in making children the central figures of her novel, but also by relating their experiences in a language that defies oversimplification and challenges her readers to consider the Holocaust from the perspective of those who were, in a sense, the most powerless “outsiders” of all.

A look at Aichinger’s own life reveals just how closely her experiences parallel those of her character, Ellen. Her maternal great-grandfather worked as a railroad engineer on, among other projects, the station at Oswieçim, Poland – later known in its infamy as Auschwitz. Her maternal grandfather, Jakob

Kramer, was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army in the era of Kaiser Franz Joseph and was stationed in Lemberg, Sarajevo and Vienna. Though he was Jewish, Jakob converted to Catholicism and was baptized in order to further his career – something that many Jews did in order to gain greater acceptance in that strongly Catholic society. Ilse Aichinger's mother, Berta Kramer, studied medicine and managed to earn her degree from the University of Vienna in 1910. This was quite an achievement in the anti-Semitic and strongly patriarchal society of turn-of-the-century Vienna – the archives of the University of Vienna (which had granted women admission only since 1900) indicate that at that time, only twenty-one women in the entire Austro-Hungarian realm were even admitted to study medicine at this institution (Reichensperger, "Orte" 233). In 1920 Berta Kramer married Ludwig Aichinger, a teacher and the son of a stonemason and a textile-weaver's daughter. Their twin daughters, Helga and Ilse, were born in Vienna on 1 November 1921. However, the marriage ended in 1927, and in the often ultra-conservative Viennese society, divorced women were considered and treated as outsiders (Reichensperger, "Bergung" 7). Helga and Ilse often found a refuge of stability and love at the apartment of their grandmother, which she shared with her daughters Klara and Erna, in Vienna's Third District, close to the area that became part of the ghetto to which Jews were later forcibly relocated.

The young Aichinger twins attended a *Volksschule* and, later, the *Gymnasium* of Sacré Coeur on Vienna's *Rennweg*. Ilse Aichinger was an avid

reader and studied with intensity. During this time, she developed her writing skills and her perceptions of the world (Reichensperger, "Orte" 234). Still, the world in which Ilse Aichinger and her twin sister came of age quickly became a hostile one, particularly for those with Jewish ancestry.

In 1935, the Hitler government, in power in Germany since 1933, promulgated a series of anti-Jewish laws, which, in effect, robbed Jewish citizens of Germany of their rights with ever-increasing severity. The National Law of Citizenship, instituted on 14 November 1935, established for the first time the "official" definitions of "*Volljude*" (anyone who had two Jewish grandparents and was a member of the Jewish religious community,² and anyone with three or more Jewish grandparents) and "*Mischling*" (mixed race; that is, part Jewish) (Hogan 93,94). Historian Martin Gilbert states:

The Nuremberg Laws made it clear that the Jews were to be allowed no further part in German life: no equality under the law; no further citizenship; no chance of slipping back into the mainstream of German life in which for several generations they had been an integral part, but from which, for two and a half years, they had been gradually cut off. (Gilbert 48)

The restrictions on German Jews may have been gradual, but with the Nazis' annexation of Austria in March of 1938, the changes that "happened over five years in Germany took place in just a few months in Austria" (Hogan 127). These "changes" meant that the nearly 200,000 Jews of Austria – the overwhelming majority of whom lived in Aichinger's native Vienna – were

² In her novel, Aichinger touches on the distinction between a *Mischling* who observed Jewish religious practices and a *Mischling* who did not. As a *Mischling*, Ellen is not required to wear the *Judenstern*. However, her choice to willingly identify herself as a Jew has consequences.

deprived of citizenship and, among other things, the right to own their own businesses and the right to government funding for their congregations and organizations (which other religious communities traditionally received). Segregation was imposed in its strictest form; Jewish children were first required to attend all-Jewish schools and later were forbidden to attend school altogether. Stores, restaurants and public parks – including Vienna's *Prater* and the *Stadtpark*, both of which Aichinger alludes to in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, were "off limits" to Jews. Attacks on Austria's Jews, now so clearly "outsiders," began almost immediately:

Jews were assaulted by Nazis on the street, and became subject to the infamous Nuremberg Laws. The Nazis also subjected Jews to numerous forms of humiliation. Jews had to run in circles until they collapsed, while some men had their beards publicly shaved. Many elderly Jews died as a result of heart attacks caused by their torment, and hundreds of others committed suicide rather than be subjected to Nazi oppression. [...] The Nazis established concentration camps in Austria, among them the infamous Mauthausen. [...] Most of Austria's Jews died during the seven years of Nazi rule. (Hogan 127)

Ilse Aichinger, who was sixteen years old at the time of the *Anschluss* (the Nazi takeover of Austria), experienced these ever-increasing restrictions in a very personal way. As the situation for Jews worsened, Berta Aichinger began to make plans for her daughters and herself to leave Austria. Ilse's twin sister Helga was able to go to England in July 1939 on one of the *Kindertransporte* organized by Quakers. Klara Kremer, Ilse's and Helga's maternal aunt, had been able to secure a job as a domestic worker in England the year before and was

making arrangements for the rest of the family to join her there. However, with the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939, these hopes for emigration were destroyed (Reichensperger, "Orte" 234). Ilse Aichinger poignantly incorporates these autobiographical events into the first chapter of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, entitled "Die grosse Hoffnung." Like Aichinger herself, Ellen had to give up "the great hope" of escaping and find her way to "a greater hope" – the hope of growing up and surviving despite the odds against her.

According to the Nuremberg Racial Laws, Ilse Aichinger's mother was categorized as a *Volljude*, and Ilse herself was a *Mischling 1. Grades*. Because of Ilse's racial classification, she was allowed to complete her *Abitur*, but not to pursue higher education; the fact that she was part "Aryan" did afford her a modicum of protection from the fate of a *Volljude*. Her mother, however, was exempt from the ominous fate of deportation "to the East" only as long as she lived in the same household with her half-Jewish daughter. Even then, they could never be guaranteed that Berta Aichinger – who, as a *Volljude*, was required to wear the *Judenstern* in public – would not be rounded up in a random raid and deported. This was of particular concern after Ilse turned twenty-one (November 1942³), at which time her mother was no longer legally

³ In fact, by late 1942, the *Endlösung der Judenfrage* ("Final Solution to the Jewish Question," a euphemism for the mass murder of Europe's Jews) had already been set out in detail at the Wannsee Conference. Among the fifteen men present were members of the Reich Department of Justice, the Foreign Ministry, and the S.S. and Gestapo. Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or Reich Security Main Office) chaired the proceedings and assigned Adolf Eichmann to prepare the protocols of the meeting. At this conference, the Reich's best and brightest, many of whom held master's, doctoral and even divinity degrees, set down in detail the method by which they would go about annihilating the Jews (Berenbaum 103-5). In light of these developments, the danger to Ilse Aichinger's mother was great indeed.

protected by being the mother of an underage, "half-Aryan" child (Lindemann 22). Ilse was now in the position of having to hide her mother; in doing so, she was committing the criminal offense of sheltering a Jew. "Wir lebten auf Abruf," Aichinger remembers, "[a]ber das Stück bis zum Abruf war ungeheuer intensiv" (in Kaiser 19). The intensity of daily life to which Aichinger refers is clearly communicated in *Die grössere Hoffnung*.

Mother and daughter shared a small room on Marc-Aurel-Strasse, uncomfortably close to the headquarters of the Vienna Gestapo (Reichensperger, "Orte" 235). The fear of *die geheime Polizei* often expressed by Ellen and her Jewish friends in *Die grössere Hoffnung* quite probably reflects Ilse's own proximity to that most terrifying of Nazi organizations: "Irgendwo ist die geheime Polizei" (Aichinger, *Hoffnung* 42, 71).

During the war, Ilse Aichinger and her mother were both *dienstverpflichtet*, or ordered to work – Ilse at an *Apothekenbuchstelle* on Schwarzenbergplatz in Vienna's First District and her mother at a leather factory in the Eighth District. Ilse participated actively in several secret resistance groups for young people. In connection with these covert activities, she became familiar with the pamphlets circulated by the Munich youth resistance movement *die Weisse Rose* and its leaders, the brother and sister Hans and Sophie Scholl. Ilse Aichinger found a source of strength through the words of Sophie Scholl, a young woman near her own age whose group constituted perhaps the most successful resistance movement in Nazi Germany – and whose young life was

ended by beheading when she, her brother and other leaders were caught.

Aichinger later commented on the hope that Sophie Scholl's courage engendered in her and that forms the heart of what she later defined in her novel as *die grössere Hoffnung* – it is less a hope of tangible success against the monstrous Nazi regime than it is a hope of moral victory:

[...] [I]ch weiß, daß von ihnen eine unüberbietbare Hoffnung auf mich übersprang. Diese Hoffnung hatte, obwohl sie es uns möglich machte, in dieser Zeit weiterzuleben, doch nichts mit der Hoffnung auf Überleben zu tun. (Aichinger in Kaiser 19)

Ilse Aichinger was, in fact, fascinated both by Sophie Scholl's example of girlhood resistance and by the potential of youth in general to deal with adversity, even death, with a courage that adults often lack:

Whenever I look at children or adolescents, I wonder: How would *you* manage to cope with a death sentence, passed either by the political powers or by physicians? How will *you* manage to grow old? (Aichinger in Bridges 70)

It is this childlike perspective that lends Aichinger's *Die grössere Hoffnung* particular poignancy and power. Her choice to take on the Holocaust, which remained so fresh in its pain at the time of Aichinger's first publication that many felt it should not be discussed at all, in a work of literary fiction was a courageous one. The motivation behind her choice to show readers the Shoah from the child's viewpoint is, however, more than autobiographical. Aichinger, like many other writers of her time, struggled with the use of a language that had been perverted and corrupted by the Third Reich for the purposes of hate. The German language, while being the medium of so many philosophers and

poets, now had to be scrutinized as the language through which the most egregious human catastrophe of modern times had been perpetrated.

In the center of this debate, Aichinger – herself and her family victims of that perversion of her native language – chose in *Die grössere Hoffnung* to address the Holocaust in the language of a child. Always seen as a symbol of hope, potential and renewal, the child also represents innocence – an innocence to which the characters of *Die grössere Hoffnung* cling, despite the awful reality in which they live their tragically short lives. The German language of *Die grössere Hoffnung* is not loaded with the euphemisms that characterize most discussions of the Nazi persecutions, nor is it pervaded by moralizing overtones. In her attempt to strip the German language of such terms, Aichinger deliberately rejects names of places, as well as the categorization of human beings – of which she herself, branded a *Mischling*, had been a victim. The Holocaust is an event incomprehensible in its tragedy. Ilse Aichinger chose not to attempt to reduce the Shoah to the level of human understanding – an “Enlightenment” tendency, unconscionable after the Holocaust, which risks an almost blasphemous oversimplification of the catastrophe.⁴ Instead, she shows her readers this world as filtered through the eyes, received by the mind and expressed in the words of a child.

⁴Schloar and critic Lawrence Langer, commenting on Theodore Adorno’s observations on literature and art after the Holocaust, notes, “the validity of [the] apprehension that art’s transfiguration of moral chaos into aesthetic form might in the end misrepresent that chaos and create a sense of meaning and purpose in the experience of the Holocaust (and, hence, paradoxically, a justification of it in aesthetic terms) depends very much on how the artist

The childlike language of *Die grössere Hoffnung* leaves the reader ashamed of the cruelty to which innocent children – and millions of others – were subjected. Yet, in all its horrific images, it stops short of despair. The central message of the novel, evident in the title itself, is hope. To many readers, the notion of “hope” in the face of the wretched conditions of life in the Holocaust may seem futile at best. However, a look at the accounts of children who experienced the Holocaust indicate that hope was not only possible, it was vital for survival – both that of the body (if only for another moment) and of the spirit.⁵ Aichinger’s tale illustrates how children used the elements of fantasy to cope with their Holocaust reality. In doing so, she encourages her readers to approach their own realities with a childlike criticism that rejects arbitrary norms (that is, externally-imposed standards and modes of thinking dictated by forces other than conscience) at the same time that it allows for hope and for the possibility of renewal.

In this thesis, therefore, I focus both on Ellen and the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* and on non-fiction accounts of the children of the Holocaust. I will first discuss the “Otherness” of the Jewish child in the Holocaust. As I show, Ellen’s observations and her interactions with other Jewish children and with adults, who have ultimate power over her life and death, illustrate the

exploits his material [...], and on the methods he employs to involve the sensibilities of his audience in the world of his imagination” (Langer, *Holocaust 2*).

⁵ Roberto Begnini’s critically acclaimed film *La Vita é Bella* (Life is Beautiful, 1998) utilizes a similar strategy as it tells the story of an Italian Jew who, through humor, play and indomitable optimism, attempts to shield his young son from the horrors with which they live in a

“marginalization” of the central figure on several levels. She is not only Jewish in a time and place in which Jews were marked for death (and, ironically, she is “Aryan” enough to be seen as an outsider by the very outcasts whose acceptance she so desperately desires), but she is also a child – powerless in yet another social dimension. This complex “otherness” not only figures in Aichinger’s novel, but also in the common experience of Jewish children in the Holocaust.

I then turn to a discussion of the conditions faced by Jews – specifically, by Jewish children – during the Holocaust years, as experienced by children and as portrayed in *Die grössere Hoffnung*. I follow the progression of the Final Solution from the first days of the Third Reich and show how children and their families attempted to cope with their precarious situations, whether in cities, in hiding, in ghettos or in the camps. In following this journey, I refer not only to Aichinger’s novel, but also to numerous personal accounts, including those of Anne Frank, Elie Wiesel, Ruth Klüger, Elisabeth Welt-Trahan, Alicia Appleman-Jurman and others.

Finally, I examine the various ways in which both the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* and the real children of the Shoah attempted to defy their subjugation and annihilation. Though physical resistance was rare (and, considering the force of the Nazi apparatus, virtually futile), children still managed to play, to create, to sing and paint, to learn, to write – all acts that

concentration camp. Beghini’s film, like Aichinger’s novel, presents hope as a survival strategy that bolsters the spirit despite circumstances that seem to render hope irrational.

affirmed life that the Nazis were inexorably committed to extinguishing. I describe stories of children's resistance through fantasy and play (including games and art), through education, and through language (including diaries). In exploring these accounts, I will show how Ilse Aichinger's mixture of fantasy and reality in *Die grössere Hoffnung* reflects the role that imagination and fantasy played in the attempts of children to cope with their situation. I will argue that her use of fantasy and characteristics of the Absurd are functions of the "resistance through language" with which both Aichinger and children who lived the horror responded to the Holocaust.

The "optimism" of *Die grössere Hoffnung* is complex. Far from resorting to naïve idealism, Aichinger, in showing a world of horror through the eyes of a child, trims away the superficial and demonstrates the power of the individual to choose "life" – spiritual and existential rather than merely physical vitality – in the face of death. As Ellen asks St. Francis, after the American consul denies her a visa that would enable her to escape with her mother to freedom: "Ich bitte dich: Was auch immer geschieht, hilf mir, daran zu glauben, daß irgendwo alles blau wird. Hilf mir, über das Wasser zu gehen, auch wenn ich hierbleiben muß!" (Aichinger, *Hoffnung* 32).

Aichinger's emphasis on the acts of hoping, believing and imagining rather than on the fulfillment of unreachable goals is echoed in the words of children who themselves hoped against reason. The following inscription,

written by a twelve-year old girl named Gretl, was found on a wall in the house where she had been hiding before her capture and murder by the Nazis:

I believe in the sun even though the sun does not shine for me. I believe in love which I still have not experienced. I believe in God even though He has not saved us. (qtd. in Eisenberg 220)

Though Ellen of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, like far too many children of the Shoah, never physically escapes the world in which she is trapped, by "giving herself a visa" she lives in hope through her own imagination. Even in death, she persists in seeing the *Judenstern* as a symbol of hope – an unsettling and provocative image through which Aichinger makes a profound statement about the value of the human spirit and the horrors of war.

Chapter One **The Tragic Otherness**

The concept of the "Other," developed by psychoanalytical, feminist and post-colonial theorists, not only draws attention to subjects and writers that have been excluded from the traditional Western canon, but also addresses the alienation of both factual and literary subjects from a sense of identity and self and from the dominant sphere. That which does not abide by or conform to the dominant power structure is relegated to the "Margins" – that is, the space outside power. Society's outsiders are, as Hans Mayer states, "marginal figures in an otherwise thoroughly homogenous society dominated by insiders" (Mayer xiv). The "marginalized" subject, therefore, experiences the effects of alienation from that power and is defined by the dominant discourse according to what that discourse excludes. Thus, the "Outsider" may be the woman who is shut out from a place in the patriarchal order, or the individual of an ethnic minority who is denied equality of opportunity and voice due to exploitation and exclusion by a "majority," or, as I argue, the child who, lacking the socially and legally recognized power to protect him- or herself, is subjected to an adult world that not only fails to shelter and nurture children, but even perpetrates their destruction. This moral tragedy defined the world of the Jewish child under the Nazis.

While much research has been conducted regarding the "Other" – from the woman as "Other" to the ethnic minority as "Other" – I believe it is also

useful to examine the idea of the child as "Other" and to look at the ways in which children in the Holocaust act as mirrors, holding up by their very experience the reflection of society's most obscene injustices. Further, by the right of their very exclusion from and oppression by the Nazi society, children – despite their utter powerlessness – found ways to subvert its distorted "norms."

The modern reader is certainly no stranger to diaries and first-hand accounts of children's experiences in the Holocaust (such as, for example, those of Anne Frank and Elie Wiesel); in fact, such autobiographical stories have long been fundamental to what may be called the "canon" of Holocaust literature. However, we may gain a deeper understanding of the Holocaust experience through a closer look at the many aspects of "Otherness" represented both in such fact-based accounts and in the fiction that deals with the horror of that period – whether the "Otherness" of the Jew under Nazi rule or the "Otherness" of a child in the often hostile adult world.

In doing so, we may also gain insight into the certain strange moral and epistemological "advantage" of those who are excluded or even deliberately victimized by those in power (Bridges iv). As we will see, it is precisely that position – external to both the power and the abuses of power characteristic of the dominant structure – that gives the "Other" the authority to criticize and subvert them. Critics Abdul JanMohammed and David Lloyd, pioneers in the study and application of Minority Discourse, assert:

[E]ven the very differences which have always been read as symptoms of inadequacy are capable of being

re-read transformatively as indications and figurations of values radically opposed to those of the dominant culture. And a *theory* of minority discourse is essential precisely for the purposes of such a re-interpretation [...]. In the task of re-evaluation of values, our marginality can be our chief asset. (qtd. in Peck 207)

This is by no means to imply that this special vantage point of the oppressed constitutes any sort of "privilege" that detracts from the all too real suffering of the victim or renders the exclusion or abuse of the outsider justifiable. It is simply to underscore the fact that the most marginalized subject is inevitably most able to recognize the dangers, problems and injustices of the discourse and structure of power from which it has been forcibly excluded. The "Other" develops a critical view of the dominant order not only due to its direct subjugation and oppression by that very system, but also because that exclusion forces the development of the marginalized subject apart – that is, "free" – from corruption by the dominant discourse. From the periphery, the "Other" often has a clearer and more insightful view of a society than do those who are caught up in its trappings of power and acceptance. The outsider "can be detached from these ideas because [he or] she [...] has never been empowered by them" (Bridges 13).

As mentioned in the introduction, Ilse Aichinger's presentation of the Holocaust experience through the eyes and in the words of children in *Die grössere Hoffnung* is illustrative of her own experiences and those of countless other children in the Third Reich. At the time of the novel's publication in 1948, writers in the German-speaking world were struggling with how the terrible

specter of the Holocaust should be dealt with in literature. Was it morally acceptable after Auschwitz, to raise Theodor Adorno's question, to write poetry – or any fiction at all? Should the literary world lead the way in facing up to the past, or should it turn from that overwhelmingly complex guilt, bury the past and set about rebuilding the German language along the lines of the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle)? With *Die grössere Hoffnung*, Ilse Aichinger not only addressed her own experiences, but also created a work of Holocaust fiction that took on the horror of the recent past and, at the same time, explored new usages of a language full of tainted euphemisms. As Birgid Haines writes:

Aichinger [...] uses a [...] third person narrator who sees things with the eyes of a child. The effect is far from being sentimental, however: the child's view liberates the reader from the known narratives of the Nazi period, with their moral certainties and unexplored blind spots, into the realms of naked experience, fantasy and dream, and exposes the so-called realities of the adults as learned ideology. (Haines 107)

Ilse Aichinger, herself a *Mischling* and, therefore, an "outsider," also made a deliberate choice to identify herself and her writing with the persecuted of Nazi society. In the post-war climate of the German-speaking world, this constituted a rejection of the Third Reich and all it had perpetrated. This purposeful association with the outsider was also part of Aichinger's vision of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past. She recognized the value of the "outside view" in pointing out society's wrongs – from which its outsiders suffer most – and in finding a path to societal renewal. "Die

Identifikation mit den Unterliegenden, den Außenseitern, den Verlorenen," notes Aichinger biographer and critic Richard Reichensperger, "ist auch die prismatisch gebrochene Formulierung einer 'grösseren Hoffnung' für eine sich täglich tiefer verfinsternde Welt":

Diese Welt und diese Gesellschaft, in der die Wertmaßstäbe der Effektivität, der ungeduldrigen Nützlichkeit ausschließlich zu werden drohen, könnte die Chance ihrer Erneuerung bei denen haben, die sie unnütz nennt. (Aichinger in Reichensperger, *Bergung* 21)

Ellen, the central figure in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, functions as a model of knowledge and a mouthpiece of poignant cultural and spiritual criticism precisely because, I argue, she is "doubly outside" the system that perpetrates her oppression. Ellen is racially "outside," not only in that she is half-Jewish in the most systematically anti-Semitic society in human history, but also in that she is half-Aryan – a fact that causes her Jewish playmates to question her loyalty and her right to belong to them. As an *unmündiges Kind*, Ellen is also "outside" an adult world that subjugates her and her Jewish friends, whether through animosity, abandonment or indifference⁵. Despite the anguish that threatens completely to define that "Otherness," Ellen defies such characterization and uses her "other" way of seeing things to look beyond the bewilderment and pain of the present. She and the other outcast children, through their imaginations

⁵ As various scholars, including Chris Weedon, have also noted, *Die grössere Hoffnung* was one of the first post-war novels to have a central character who defied the traditional definition of "female protagonist" (Weedon 247). Although Aichinger herself lacked a feminist agenda as such (Haines 106), Lorenz points out that the fact that Ellen defies all conventional, patriarchally-defined character norms is a direct function of Aichinger's dismantling of patriarchal discourse (in Bartsch 22, 23). Though this thesis does not focus primarily on feminist discourse, I touch on

and in the world they create around themselves, transcend the barbarous reality in which they lived their physical lives and find another reality – one that confounds the present one with its insight and condemns it with its innocence, “um eine reale Wirklichkeit in ihrer sachlichen Vorhandenheit, ihrer ganzen Perversion sichtbar zu machen” (Kaiser 29).

Examining the Holocaust in the light of “otherness,” whether that of the Jews, that of the child, or both, is a way of “marginalizing ourselves” (Peck 207) – one of the inherent goals of Aichinger’s novel. In showing her readers the Holocaust through the eyes of a doubly marginalized child, Aichinger works against an overly simplistic compartmentalizing of the past. She does not convey meaning, which is a complex and controversial undertaking in the light of the Holocaust, but rather portrays “the states of mind engendered in the victims of history through their ordeals” (Haines 109). This perspective, argues critic Jeffrey M. Peck, provides a basis for greater insight, even into an incomprehensible event such as the Holocaust, which beggars description and defies understanding:

Consciously taking on a position on the periphery, we can encourage journeys from privileged to non-privileged places, make ourselves strange, exoticize our own positions. Our dis-location and dis-placement can be the most productive mechanism to undermine the urge to own any one position or to rest too assured in the security of the position we may now be occupying. (Peck 207)

gender issues that relate directly to the exclusion of the “Jewish child outside,” especially as they pertain to Ellen’s story and true historical accounts of Holocaust experiences.

Racial "Otherness"

Historical Background

For thousands of years of recorded history, Jews have been "outside" the dominant social and political order. Discrimination against and oppression of Jews was based not least of all on religious differences: the New Testament reference to the guilt of the Jews in the execution of Christ has been invoked countless times throughout history. However, as history repeatedly bears out, religious beliefs are often enlisted in the service of causes other than pure faith – usually distorting and perverting these beliefs in the process. Therefore, while anti-Semitism may have initially had its roots in religious difference, we will see that Jews also came to be perceived as cultural and political outsiders – a status forced upon them for the purposes of the dominant social order. We will also see that the Nazi measures against Jews had numerous historical "precedents."

With the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 A.D., the Jewish population was forcibly dispersed from its historical homeland. The Diaspora, as it came to be known, resulted from the scattering of Jews throughout the Western civilized world. Driven not only out of their own land, but also expelled from virtually every European country at one time or another in modern history, Jews were largely kept from striking permanent roots. Relegated to ghettos, on the physical margins of towns and cities, Jews in medieval times were often required to wear distinctive clothing or badges that

visibly separated them from the larger community.⁶ The old religious accusation that Jews were “Christ-killers,” along with Jews’ refusal to convert to Christianity (be it Catholicism or Protestantism), provided sufficient grounds for many to justify their continuous alienation and persecution. As historian Martin Gilbert states, “For many centuries, primitive Christian Europe had regarded the Jew as...an enemy and a threat to be converted and so be ‘saved,’ or to be killed; to be expelled, or to be put to death with sword and fire” (Gilbert 19).

The Catholic Church ruthlessly enacted this policy, both during the Crusades (the supposed liberation of the “Holy Land” from Muslim domination, during which Jews were also targeted) and during the years of the Inquisition (which instituted a “religious” court to forcibly baptize or kill not only Jews, but anyone who posed a perceptible threat to the absolute power of the Church). The Protestant Reformation, which effectively defied the supremacy of the Catholic Church, brought about religious and social change and offered inclusion to those who accepted its doctrine. However, Reformation founder Martin Luther articulated in 1543 sentiments that were typical of his time and that embody the reaction of dominant power toward what it perceived as a “threat,” and that are strikingly similar to the anti-Jewish propaganda of the Third Reich. Jews who refused to convert and turn their back on their identity and culture, Luther argued in his book *On the Jews and their Lies*, should be treated without mercy:

⁶ Legislation by Caliph Omar II (634-644) had decreed that Jews wear yellow belts; the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 built on this notion and required that Jews wear a badge on their outer clothing. The Nazis drew upon this notion in the decree of 1 September 1940, that required that all Jews over the age of six wear the *Judenstern* in public (Hilberg 10).

Their synagogues should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. [Jewish homes should be] broken down or destroyed. [Jews should then] be put under one roof, or in a stable, like Gypsies, in order that they may realize that they are not masters in our land. [They should] earn their living by the sweat of their noses, [and if perceived even then as too dangerous, these] poisonous bitter worms [should be stripped of their belongings] which they have extorted usuriously from us [and driven out of the country] for all time. (Gilbert 19)

This brand of anti-Semitic sentiment is, however, directed against an “enemy” of the dominant power structure’s own making. If the accusation was made that Jews were “shiftless parasites” who attempted to “worm their way” into countries not their own, it was because they were indeed driven out of their own, never finding “place.” If, as Luther and others charged, Jews were “usurers” who “extorted the money of Christians,” it was because the Church forbade Christians to practice moneylending; it was one of the few ways in which Jews, who were forbidden to own land or practice other professions, could earn a livelihood. Michael Berenbaum points out that for all the hatred directed toward the Jews, “where they were needed, they were tolerated [...].⁷ Where they were permitted to participate in the larger society, Jews thrived” (Berenbaum 13). The fact was a source of perpetual animosity toward them

⁷ This “tolerance,” however, seems to have only been skin-deep. For example, Martin Luther justified his recommended action against Jews by saying, “We are not at fault for slaying them. Rather we allow them to live freely in our midst despite their murder, cursing, blaspheming, lying and defaming” (Berenbaum 14). Such sentiments point to the sort of anti-Jewish feelings that remained latent under society’s surface – notions that, once broadly accepted, died hard.

until the nineteenth century, particularly in times of social conflict and widespread economic hardship:

Even when Jews were allowed growing participation in national life..., no decade passed without Jews in one European state or another being accused of murdering Christian children, in order to use their blood in the baking of Passover bread. This 'blood libel,' coming as it did with outbursts of popular violence against Jews, reflected deep prejudices which no amount of modernity or liberal education seemed able to overcome. Jew-hatred, with its two-thousand-year-old history, could arise both as a spontaneous outburst of popular instincts, and as a deliberately fanned instrument of scapegoat politics. (Gilbert 19, 20)

In response to this ever-present threat of persecution, Jews reacted in various ways. Many sought assimilation and attempted to fit in to society as much as possible, even if this meant conversion to Christianity to gain broader social acceptance and opportunity. Others maintained their identity as Jews, either seeking the refuge of a separate Jewish life completely apart from the larger social structure, or striving to strike a balance that would allow for both religious integrity and social recognition (Gilbert 20).

The dawn of the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century brought a glimmer of hope for Jews in European society. With the move from the blind acceptance of age-old religious dicta toward reason and enlightened democracy as a base for social morality came the possibility of Jewish emancipation and equality. Jews began to be integrated more broadly into cultural and national life not only in the German-speaking realm but in other European nations as well. Such ideas as articulated in the great Enlightenment-age work *Nathan der Weise*,

written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, advocated a morality based not one or another religion, but on common humanity.⁸ Lessing uses a Jewish figure, Nathan, to embody and articulate religious tolerance. This choice shows how Lessing recognized the strange “advantage” of the Jews’ “outside view” of a society that had shut them out and persecuted them:

Kommt,
wir müssen, müssen Freunde sein! – Verachtet
Mein Volk so sehr Ihr wollt. Wir haben beide
Uns unser Volk nicht auserlesen. Sind
Wir unser Volk? Was heißt denn Volk?
Sind Christ und Jude eher Christ und Jude,
Als Mensch? Ah! wenn ich einen mehr in Euch
Gefunden hätte, dem es genügt, ein Mensch
Zu heißen! (Lessing 50)

Empowered by this new social openness, Jews came to prosper in the German-speaking countries to a degree that Jews in other countries such as Russia (where Jews were constantly subjected to unpredictable and ruthless pogroms) and even France⁹ did not enjoy. The new social policies instituted in Western Europe in the time since Napoleon benefited Jews and non-Jews alike; the founding of the German nation in 1871 was a source of pride to Jews as well

⁸ “Just how much the play *Nathan der Weise* was interpreted...as the incarnation of Enlightenment, tolerance, and Jewish emancipation, is shown not only by the disfavor into which this work and indirectly its author fell from 1933 to 1945. As complement to that, immediately after the end of the war were the reactions in the four zones of occupation, when theater directors invested there, that is to say those who were not politically suspect, immediately set on the program, as if to cleanse and rededicate the house, this work...which had been silenced for so many years” (Mayer 287,288).

⁹ French anti-Semitism is best illustrated in the infamous Dreyfuss case: “Captain Alfred Dreyfuss [was] the only Jewish officer attached to the army’s general staff. Dreyfuss was tried and convicted on the basis of a trumped-up accusation of treason. During his trial, a mob chanted ‘Death to Jews!’ in the streets outside the courtroom” (Berenbaum 15). Though Dreyfuss was eventually proven innocent, the case and his treatment revealed how fragile the tolerance for Jews was, even in a supposedly advanced and enlightened nation.

as non-Jews, and many Jews began to identify with "the Fatherland" as much as any non-Jewish German did.

Though life was easier for Jews than at any point in modern history to date, complete equality before the law and in public opinion was far from being fact. Before the outbreak of World War I, Jews could only enter military academies with difficulty, and there were certain regiments that "almost entirely excluded Jews" (Gilbert 21). The Emancipation of the Jews did not end anti-Semitism, but merely transformed it (Berenbaum 15). The religion-based foundation for anti-Semitism had been outdated by the scientific reason of the Enlightenment; now this was replaced by the pseudo-science of racism. In many ways, this was an even more dangerous brand of anti-Semitism: whereas a Jew could convert to avoid religious discrimination, a person is powerless to determine his or her own ancestry. This racial anti-Semitism became an effective political tool,¹⁰ creating a modern scapegoat upon which social ills could be blamed and which the chosen scapegoat could not effectively escape. It was only a short step from the belief that one particular group on the margins of society is the source of social ills to the notion that the physical elimination of

¹⁰ For example, in the 1890s the anti-Semitic politician Karl Lueger won the mayoral election in Vienna, the metropolitan capital of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire. Viennese cultural life was strongly influenced by the some 150,000 Jews who called Vienna home, including the playwright Arthur Schnitzler, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud.

this group will result in a perfect society. Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party took this final step.¹¹

Racial “Otherness” in the Third Reich

In the aftermath of World War I, which toppled both the German and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the new democracies of Germany and Austria faced the twin calamities of defeat and economic crisis in what was now a political vacuum. In Germany, Jews were among the most active in the rebuilding of their country, including the new Minister of Interior, Hugo Preuss (whose draft of the Weimar Constitution was one of the most progressive in contemporary Europe) and the new Minister of Reconstruction, Walther Rathenau,¹² who later served as Foreign Minister under the Weimar Republic (Gilbert 23).

Jews were also highly visible in the areas of finance, law, medicine, education and the arts, the last of which experienced an almost frenzied flowering during the interwar years. At the same time, however, millions of Germans were unemployed and disillusioned. Burdened with astronomical war reparations payments, then hit by the worldwide depression, the German economy spun out of control, and the currency became virtually worthless. Parents could not afford to feed their children. The plethora of political parties that sprouted in the extant power vacuum – including Communists, Socialists,

¹¹ Though Hitler fanned the flame of anti-Semitism in Germany, incidents of attacks against Jews were reported prior to Hitler’s advent on the political scene. In August 14, 1919, just months after the end of World War I, *The Times* reported from Berlin that “Indications of growing anti-Semitism are becoming frequent” (Gilbert 23).

¹² Walther Rathenau had also been instrumental in peace negotiations with the Soviet Union, which earned the hatred of right-wing demonstrators, who chanted in their street protests,

Conservatives and Nationalists of many stripes – were unable to hold together a coalition stable enough to remain in power for any considerable duration. Young war veterans returned to find no work other than to join the mercenary quasi-armies in the pay of the various political parties that fought not merely for control of the political apparatus, but for control of the streets themselves.

The ground was fertile for Adolf Hitler's message: one needed only to equate the present Weimar government – with its profiteers, corruption, instability and the present suffering of the German people – with the Jews, who not only had a hand in forming the Weimar government, but were ostensibly prospering and flourishing disproportionately under it. Hitler came to power legally on the coattails of this political and economic chaos and social unrest, and he succeeded in unifying the German people as others had not – under the banner of national, ethnic and racial pride and of hatred of its "enemies," among them the Communists, the Allied victors and, above all, the Jews. Thus a group of German citizens, who constituted less than one percent of the entire population, were blamed for all the evils which "good Germans" – that is, "Aryans" – were suffering.

The Nazi power structure relegated to the margins of its society anyone who defied it, including Aryans who voiced dissent or whose beliefs or politics were seen as a threat. However, as previously mentioned, Jews were excluded not on the basis of behavior or even of religion, but on the basis of race. As K.V.

"Knock off Walther Rathenau, the dirty, God-damned Jewish sow." The hatred these words inspired led to Rathenau's assassination on 24 June 1922 (Gilbert 25).

Tirumalesh states: "The victims cannot fight their objectification since in this instance the criterion used is something inalienable, something over which they have no control whatsoever – the criterion of race" (Tirumalesh 479). From its inception, the *NSDAP* (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*) called for the exclusion of Jews from German national life on the basis of race. The Nazi Party platform, articulated already in the Twenty-Five Points of 1920, set forth the criteria for German citizenship along racial lines and clarified the critical importance of ethnic membership for survival in a Germany under their rule:

Only members of the nation may be citizens of the State.
Only those of German blood, whatever their creed, may be members of the nation. Accordingly, no Jew may be a member of the nation...Non-citizens may live in Germany only as guests and must be subject to laws for aliens [...]. If it should prove impossible to feed the entire population, foreign nationals [non-citizens] must be deported from the Reich.
(Noakes and Pridham 38)

These "demands" were called for by what was then a small splinter party that very few took seriously. The idea that Jews who had multi-generational roots in Germany could be legally barred from voting, from owning, editing or publishing newspapers and magazines in their own language, from any participation in cultural life, let alone systematically murdered *en masse* was indeed unthinkable in a civilized society – now a democracy – with a constitution that guaranteed equal justice under law. However, the desperation of the times led to a search for immediate solutions – even drastic ones – solutions that Hitler and his Nazi Party seemed to provide.

Indeed, one must bear in mind that in addition to the expulsion of the Jews from German life, the Twenty-Five Points also called for the return of German pride and sovereignty, the institution of programs for welfare relief and social stability, and the repudiation of the punitive Treaty of Versailles that had brought Germany politically and economically to its knees. In the final analysis, perhaps the presumably temporary exclusion of a small segment of the population who, after all, were already “outsiders” and who were over-represented in certain areas of German life, was, to many, a small price to pay for the guarantee of a return to stable everyday life, the promise of work and bread, and the institution of a system that would restore order and certainty to a society overwhelmed by chaos.

Official actions against Jews in Germany began with the general boycott of Jewish-owned businesses on 1 April 1933 – only a few months after Hitler was legally sworn in as Chancellor of Germany. True to the original Twenty-Five Points, the new government passed a series of decrees that gradually shut German Jews out of professions in all areas of government, in education, in business, in media and in the arts. With the death of German President Hindenburg in 1934, Hitler assumed dictatorial power, and a year later, German courts passed sweeping anti-Jewish legislation – known as the Nuremberg Laws - that effectively denied the rights and privileges of citizenship to those who were deemed racially impure.¹³

¹³ The Nuremberg Laws were actually a series of decrees. The “Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor” forbade mixed marriages and interracial relations of any kind. Jews were no

In a supplementary decree to the Nuremberg Laws, known as the "Reich Citizenship Law," the Nazi government set forth its legal definition of a "Jew":

[A Jew is defined as] anyone with at least three full Jewish grandparents, those with two Jewish grandparents and who belonged to the Jewish religious community when the law was promulgated (September 15, 1935), or who joined later... (Dawidowicz 68)

Those who did not fall under this legal definition of a *Volljude* were also classified accordingly:

A person with two Jewish grandparents, who did not otherwise fit into the group defined as Jews, that is, who was not affiliated with the Jewish religious community, who was not married to a Jew, etc., was designated as "Mischling, first degree." A person with only one Jewish grandparent was designated as "Mischling, second degree." (Dawidowicz 68, 69)

The Nuremberg Laws were only the beginning of the ultimate exclusion of the Jews. Gradually driven out of any means of livelihood, barred not only from civic participation, but also from restaurants, shops, parks and entertainment venues and racially singled out under the law, Jews were isolated from any means of support or, soon, even escape.

Despite the well-publicized mistreatment of the Jews in Germany, including the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of 8 November 1938¹⁴, the nations of the

longer allowed to employ female non-Jews under the age of forty-five. Jews were also forbidden to fly the German national colors (Dawidowicz 66, 67).

¹⁴ When a young Jewish boy, Herschel Grynszpan, whose parents had been deported to Poland and died there, took his revenge by shooting the First Secretary in the German embassy in Paris, the Nazis exacted retribution on the Jewish community in Germany (which, by that time, also included Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia). Nazi thugs, dressed in plain clothes, destroyed Jewish businesses, homes, and places of worship. Some 30,000 Jewish men were then arrested and sent to concentration camps. The name of the pogrom, *Kristallnacht*, reflects the broken glass from the shattered windows.

world restricted Jewish immigration, leaving Jews no place of refuge in the world.¹⁵ This, in addition to the fact that the nations of the world mounted no effective resistance to Hitler's treaty violations and territorial conquests, essentially made it clear to Europe's Jews that they were not wanted anywhere, nor would any national force move to defend them. Thus, with the tacit permission of the outside world, the Nazis could come to the following conclusion, as phrased in a November 1938 article in the SS organ *Das Schwarze Korps*:

Because it is necessary, because we no longer hear the world screaming, and finally because no power in the world can stop us, we shall therefore take the Jewish Question toward its total solution. It is: total elimination, complete separation. (qtd. in Berenbaum 35)

Subverting the Star: the "Strange Advantage" Of Jewish Perspective

A history characterized by exile, persecution and "otherness" that reaches back thousands of years has formed and defined Jewish identity and cultural life in predictable ways. George Steiner argues that the very "rootlessness" for which Hitler and others condemned Jews was, in fact, historically "an enforced condition," which was ironically used to perpetuate that very injustice. Yet, the

¹⁵ The abandonment of the Jews by the free nations of the world was never more glaringly apparent than at the Evian Conference of 1938, which was convened to find a solution to the problem of Jewish refugees. Of the thirty-two nations that met there, only the tiny Dominican Republic offered to receive a sizeable number of Jewish refugees. Britain, which regulated immigration to Palestine, and America, the great nation built by immigrants, refused to significantly raise refugee quotas in order to rescue Jews (Berenbaum 49,50).

Jewish community developed a sense of identity that appropriated that exclusion:

Uprooted, driven from place to place, charged as an antinational and a spy, the Jew was conditioned to live vertically, in time, in the past which was also his hope for the future, believing and half-believing in the "chosen race" myth, a psychological imperative. (Tirumalesh 481)

Though expulsion, forced conversion, and every manner of rejection and exclusion can hardly be viewed as positive experiences, they contributed to the tendency of Jews to see themselves not in the context of national borders, of soil or of place, which were always denied them, but rather in the light of their long history – which hostile forces, for all their efforts, have not succeeded in destroying. As Steiner notes: "The Jew has his anchorage not in place, but in time, in his highly developed sense of history as personal context. Six thousand years of self-awareness are a homeland" (in Tirumalesh 481). Thus, Jewish tradition has always looked to a "*grössere Hoffnung*," beyond the hope of conventional acceptance and external affirmation, which, as historical experience bore out, were not to be expected or relied upon. Manfred Karnick argues that this "greater hope" of the Jewish spirit is echoed in Ilse Aichinger's *Die grössere Hoffnung*.

Wenn kein Weg auf Erden ist, so ist doch einer, wo es keine Grenzen gibt, im Medium des Traums, der Phantasie und Poesie. Wenn jeder der vom Judenstern Gezeichneten früher oder später festgenommen, deportiert, totgemacht wird und die große Hoffnung auf Rettung unerfüllt bleibt, so bleibt doch eine größere Hoffnung, deren Ziel nur indirekt anzuzeigen und direkt nicht

zu benennen ist. (Karnick 373)

The common Jewish response to persecution was typically not revolution; as historian Raul Hilberg states: "Preventive attack, armed resistance, and revenge were almost completely absent in Jewish exilic history." Jews developed a pattern of response to their exclusion from society that was based primarily, he argues, on alleviation, evasion and compliance (Hilberg 19). This pattern of response was characterized not by open defiance of the injustice to which they were subjected, but by the appropriation of their persecution. Even when escape from that subjugation was not realistically possible, Jews – as Hilberg writes – "gave in to a demand on [their] own terms" (Hilberg 21).¹⁶ This kind of response is visible throughout history, from the siege of Masada¹⁷ to the Holocaust. As David Biale asserts, the Jewish tradition is characterized by its tenacity in the face of immutable discrimination:

From biblical times to the present day, Jews have wandered the uncertain terrain between power and powerlessness, never quite achieving the power necessary to attain long-term security, but equally avoiding, with a number of disastrous exceptions, the abyss of absolute impotence. They developed

¹⁶ Hilberg sees this pattern of Jewish response in a negative light, pointing out that in the Holocaust "the Jewish community, unable to switch to resistance, increased its cooperation with the tempo of the German measures, thus hastening its own destruction" (Hilberg 24). I would counter that even in all the centuries of anti-Semitism before the 1930s, there was no precedent for the Holocaust. If the victims underestimated the German plan to execute a "final solution," it must also be noted that the rest of the civilized world failed to recognize the scope of the destruction as well, and, having the power to have done so, even failed to alleviate it before it escalated. Here, the appropriation of suffering as stated by Hilberg can also be seen in a more spiritual and epistemological light.

¹⁷ During the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Jewish Zealots fought "a full-scale military battle" against Rome. When the Romans had surrounded the last surviving Zealot garrison at Masada three years later and the Zealots could no longer hold on against the onslaught, the garrison chose suicide over surrender to their attackers (Berenbaum 10).

the consummate skill of living with uncertainty and insecurity. (qtd. in Berenbaum 16)

From the time Hitler came to power in Germany, Jews were singled out for ridicule and ever-increasing restrictions on their lives. On 1 April 1933, the date of the General Boycott within Germany of Jewish-owned businesses, Jewish shops were painted (not for the first time) with anti-Semitic slogans and caricatures, setting Jews and their property apart for ridicule, vandalism and increasingly severe financial setbacks. The year 1938 saw the enactment of several new restrictions against Jews, among them the marking of Jews' passports with the letter "J" (suggested by the Swiss as a way to halt the flood of Jewish refugees over its borders), and the order of 17 August 1938, that required all Jews to take new and "obviously" Jewish middle names ("Israel" for men and "Sarah" for women) (Berenbaum 35). On 15 September 1941, the Nazi government passed a decree that required every Jew (as defined under the Nuremberg Laws) over the age of six in the areas under German occupation to wear the *Judenstern*, "[der] aus einem handtellergroßen, schwarz ausgezogenen Sechsstern aus gelbem Stoff mit der schwarzen Aufschrift 'Jude' bestehende Judenstern, der laut Polizeiverordnung sichtbar auf der linken Brustseite des Kleidungsstückes fest aufgenäht zu tragen war" (Karnick 374, 375). This law not only facilitated the rounding up of Jews in street raids, but was designed to humiliate and isolate the Jewish population.

However, this action that aimed to humiliate the Jews was often appropriated by many of them as a source of pride and renewal. In a 4 April

1933 editorial in the German-language newspaper *Jüdische Rundschau*, Robert Weltsch pointed out that as Jews had been “forced to admit their Jewishness,” not for “inner conviction, not for loyalty to their people, not for their pride in a magnificent history and in the noblest human achievement,” but by “affixing of a red placard or a yellow badge,” Jews ought to now embrace their identity as Jews: “They meant to dishonor us... Jews, take it upon yourselves, that Star of David, and honor it anew” (Gilbert 35).

Jews, many of whom had been completely assimilated into the German culture, some families even for centuries, were now forced to take that Jewish identity upon themselves. Even those who had previously had no real connections to the Jewish community began to seek out and rediscover the Jewish roots that were now immutable, regardless of the efforts of their ancestors to distance themselves from that stigma. Now that being marked as Jewish was no longer a choice, many Jews chose to embrace that identity as a form of self-assertive defiance:

Jewish learning and education flourished as it never had before in post-emancipation Germany. The Jewish community came together and took on a new vibrancy even as life became more desperate. Joachim Prinz, who was then a young rabbi in Berlin, offered a course in Jewish history. The largest hall available seated thirty-five hundred people. Twice that number applied so the course was divided into two sections. Prinz spoke of these times: “To be a Jew was now a new discovery, and to emphasize one’s Jewishness in the face of danger and disgrace became the thing to do.” (Berenbaum 37)

This experience of self-discovery through persecution was common to adults and children alike; if anything, children, still in the developmental, emotional and mental maturing process, felt it more intensely. Germanist Ruth Klüger, in her recollections of her childhood in Vienna, recalls stealing into movie theaters (forbidden to Jews) and seeing the anti-Semitic propaganda films of the Nazis. This in itself became, for her, an opportunity for self-assertion – even for transforming fate into a kind of personal resistance: “Durch diese Filme lernte ich die herrschende Ideologie kennen, die mich ja betraf, die ich nicht einfach durch Gleichgültigkeit quittieren konnte. Der Reiz dieser Kinobesuche bestand in der zu leistenden Kritik, im Widerstand gegen die Versuchung zur Identifikation und Bejahung” (Klüger 80). In the face of racial persecution, Klüger embraced her Jewishness, even as a child. Though law required all Jews in the Nazi realm to take “Jewish” middle names, Klüger insisted on adopting a Jewish first name:

Bevor ich sieben war, also in den ersten Monaten nach dem Anschluß, legte ich meine bisherigen Rufnamen ab. Vor Hitler war ich für alle Welt die Susi, dann hab ich auf dem anderen Namen bestanden... Einen jüdischen Namen wollte ich, den Umständen angemessen.
(Klüger 61)

In a similar vein, Elisabeth Welt Trahan, who like Ruth Klüger and Ilse Aichinger herself, spent her youth in Vienna during the Nazi years, recalls the strange identity-affirming “phenomenon” that grew from the fear, alienation and persecution they endured as Jews. “...Hitler... imparted on my Jewishness a fervor, depth and loyalty which it would probably not have had otherwise” (Trahan 62).

Racial "Otherness" in *Die grössere Hoffnung*

The novel opens with the image of a world map; the adult reader senses that the shadows that are described as moving on the paper map have a very real significance. The fly that creeps along the map "von Dover nach Calais" (9) appears especially ironic because the child sleeping on the map with her arms symbolically stretched across the ocean is, in reality, not allowed that freedom of escape. Here, the half-Jewish child Ellen – "sie lag quer über der Karte und wälzte sich unruhig zwischen Europa und Amerika hin und her" (11) – represents the very real lack of place experienced by Jews in Europe most acutely in Nazi-dominated Europe, between 1933 and 1945, but also throughout modern history.

Ellen is visiting the American Consul to beg for a visa that would allow her to escape with her Jewish mother to America. Ellen dreams of a ship departing Hamburg, full of children, "mit denen irgend etwas nicht in Ordnung war" (9) – meaning Jewish children. "Kinder mit falschen Großeltern, Kinder ohne Paß und ohne Visum" (9, 10), these children in Ellen's dream are supported and befriended by personified elements of nature that are conventionally seen as predatory or hostile, such as a shark and the wind, but for whom no human being has spoken out in defense or welcome (Watt 245). Aichinger uses this imagery to subvert her readers' preconceived notions of inherent goodness or badness, forcing us to view both nature and humanity in a new light.

Ellen's plight as symbolized in this dream reflects the real-life tragedy of Jewish outsiders who attempted to flee the ever-growing Nazi threat. America, symbolically and historically the traditional haven of refuge for the persecuted, kept rigid immigration quotas and restrictions in place that effectively shut the gates of freedom to those in the direst need.¹⁸ Even in view of the ever-worsening situation for Jews in Germany and its territories, these restrictions were not mitigated, not least of all because of the lack of public support in America. Historian David S. Wyman sums up the shamefully prevalent attitude toward Jewish "outsiders":

America's limited willingness to share the refugee burden showed in national opinion polls. In 1938, a year when the Nazis had sharply stepped up their persecution of Jews, four separate polls indicated that from 71 to 85 percent of the American public opposed increasing the quotas to help refugees. And 67 percent wanted refugees kept out altogether. In a survey taken in early 1939, 66 percent even objected to a one-time exception to allow 10,000 refugee children to enter outside the quota limits. (Wyman 8)

The boat full of Jewish children in Ellen's dream echoes the story of the *S.S. St. Louis*, which departed on 13 May 1939 with 936 passengers, all but six of them Jewish refugees seeking a haven in the "new world." Notwithstanding the fact that all the passengers had Cuban entry permits, the vast majority of them were denied entry into Cuba; the United States, claiming the desire to abstain from interfering in Cuban affairs, also turned the ship away. Upon the

¹⁸ The quotas, established in the 1920s, placed limits on the number of people who would be allowed to immigrate to the United States from a given foreign country in a given year. As historian David S. Wyman points out: "The total for all quotas was 154,000. Almost 84,000 of this was assigned to the British and the Irish, peoples who had no need to flee" (Wyman 6).

ship's return to Europe, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and England admitted passengers; when war came to Europe in 1939, even those havens were not guaranteed. "Only the 288 passengers that disembarked in England were safe. Of the rest, only a few survived" (Berenbaum 58). A haunting vignette from the *St. Louis* mirrors not only Ellen's predicament, but that of Jews across Europe:

Children played a game in which two boys guarded a barrier constructed of chairs. Other children lined up and asked permission to pass through. "Are you a Jew?" asked one of the guards. "Yes," answered the child at the barrier. "Jews not admitted," snapped the guard. "Oh, please let me in. I'm only a very little Jew."
(Berenbaum 58)

Even those who were able to obtain entry visas to the United States had to have a sponsor who would guarantee that the immigrant in question would not constitute a burden to the government; the immigrants therefore had to be assured of work in the United States or have sufficient resources to support themselves. However, both the isolationist fear that these immigrants would take American jobs and the Nazi regulation that immigrants were allowed to take only a limited amount of money out of the country made legal immigration very difficult at best. The racial outcasts of the Holocaust, like Ellen and the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, often had no one to vouch for them (10, 32).

The Jewish children of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, some of them still very young, do not understand the source of the racial rhetoric of the Nuremberg Laws; they only know that they are somehow "wrong," and that this "wrongness" keeps them from being able to play in the park, sit on benches and

ride the carousel. They come to define themselves not only by their developing personalities, their likes, dislikes and hopes, but also by the number of "falsche Großeltern" they have:

Das hier ist Bibi. Vier falsche Großeltern und ein heller Lippenstift, auf den sie stolz ist. Sie will in die Tanzschule gehen... Kurt ... möchte wieder Fußball spielen...drei falsche Großeltern und er ist Tormann. Leon ist der Älteste. Übt mit uns Rettungsschwimmen, will Regisseur werden und weiß alle Griffe, vier falsche Großeltern... Herbert...ist der Allerjüngste... Dreieinhalb falsche Großeltern, die er alle sehr lieb hat, und einen roten Wasserball, den er uns manchmal borgt, nicht wahr, Kleiner? Er ist ein ernstes Kind... Ich bin Georg... Vier falsche Großeltern und eine Schmetterlings-sammlung. (Aichinger, *Hoffnung* 35, 36)

The Jewish children wait "am Kai" (which locates them geographically in the traditionally Jewish section of Vienna), planning to "earn" their way back into normal life by saving the life of a drowning (non-Jewish) baby. As Manfred Karnick describes this macabre "game," he highlights the fact that the children are the victims of a blind prejudice that leaves its victims powerless against it; it is a senseless hatred that gives as little credence to individual merits as it finds individual fault for racial "guilt":

[Ihnen] konnte keine Leistung, keine Anpassung, kein Wohlverhalten, statt dessen allenfalls ein Organisationsfehler oder ein Irrtum helfen. Selbst der Stolz, sein Schicksal gewählt zu haben...war den Rassenverfolgten entzogen. „Schuld ist, daß wir da sind," sagen die Kinder in Aichingers Buch. Sie warten am Fluß darauf, daß ein anderes Kind hineinfalle – damit sie es retten können – damit der Bürgermeister sie dafür belohne und das Todeszeichen der Aussonderung von ihnen nehme. Die Leiter der Hoffnungen ist hier zugleich eine Folge gestaffelter Versperrungen, wie wir sie von Kafka kennen. So unwahrscheinlich die ersehnte Vorbedingung,

so aussichtslos ist die erwartete Konsequenz. Individueller Verdienst zählt so wenig wie individuelle Schuld. (Karnick 371)

Ellen, who by law is classified as a *Mischling* in the first degree – having two Jewish grandparents – is seen by the other Jewish children as not being “wrong enough” (37), illustrating that Ellen was racially “doubly outside.” Though Ellen is “wrong” enough to be branded as such by the Nazis, she is not excluded from everyday life to the extent that the *volljüdische Kinder* are, as they adamantly argue when Ellen brings up the possibility that their “plan” may not succeed:

[Ellen]: “Und wenn kein Kind ins Wasser fällt?”
“Keines?” Entsetzen bemächtigte sich der Kinder.
“Was denkst du? Der Sommer dauert noch lang!”
“Weshalb fragst du so? Du gehörst nicht zu uns!”
“Mit zwei falschen Großeltern! Das ist zu wenig.”
“Du verstehst das nicht. Du hast es nicht nötig,
das Kind zu retten. Du darfst ohnehin auf allen
Bänken sitzen! Du darfst ohnehin Ringelspiel fahren!”
(37)

As a *Mischling*, Ellen had a Jewish mother (and thus two “wrong” grandparents) and a non-Jewish father (and thus two “right” grandparents) – a situation that one of the children, Georg, refers to as “ein unentschiedenes Spiel” (39). As the children enact their awaited rescue of the Aryan baby, Ellen’s response in the role of the “Bürgermeister” reflects the torture of her own “split self”:

[...] [E]s ist ein unnützes Kind. Seine Mutter ist ausgewandert und sein Vater ist eingerückt. Und wenn es den Vater trifft, darf es von der Mutter nicht reden. Halt – und da stimmt ja auch etwas mit den Großeltern nicht: Zwei sind richtig

und zwei sind falsch! Unentschieden, das ist das Ärgste,
das wird mir zuviel! ... Dieses Kind gehört nirgends hin,
es ist unnütz, weshalb habt ihr es gerettet? Nehmt es
euch, nehmt es euch nur wieder! Und wenn es mit euch
spielen will, dann laßt es, in Gottes Namen, laßt es!
(34)

As a half-Jew, Ellen is excluded from the "Aryan," Nazi sphere, represented by her father, who now serves the Nazis. Ruth Klüger points out Ellen's tragic dilemma, which has its source in her racially "split self." Ellen's father, Klüger argues, represents the force of anti-Semitism in the work and, thus, illustrates the desperation of the Jews' situation in a hostile non-Jewish environment – a plight that Ellen experiences on a very personal level, within herself. "Der Antisemit ist nicht mehr der Einheimische, der den Fremden verstößt, sondern der Vater, der sein Kind von sich stößt. Ellen gehört genau dorthin, wo sie unerwünscht ist..." (Klüger in Reiter, "Erfahrung" 241). After Ellen rescues the baby the Jewish children had been waiting for, the children all decide to sit on a forbidden park bench – the good deed had, after all, been done, and the children exercise a "privilege" they believe they deserve. A group of soldiers, including an officer, approach the children and ask them if they can prove their right to sit on the bench. The officer who asks Ellen, "[s]ind Sie Arier?" is her father; she recognizes his familiar voice and his movements before he admits to recognizing her. Ellen's thoughts about her father illustrate that he is an inseparable part of who she is, yet he has rejected her, his own daughter:

Das hier war der Mann, der Ellen gebeten hatte, ihn
zu vergessen. Aber kann das Wort den Mund vergessen,
der es gesprochen hat? Er hatte sich geweigert, einen

Gedanken zu Ende zu denken. (49)

Ellen chooses to assert her presence to her father, empowering the Jewish children who are sitting on the forbidden bench with her: "Mit einem Schlag waren sie in der Offensive, unbekannte Macht entströmte ihrer Machtlosigkeit" (49). As Ellen smiles and holds out her arms to her father, she forces him to publicly choose between her, his flesh and blood, and the ideology he has embraced. His decision to deny Ellen signifies his denial of his own conscience. When he asks her, "Wie kommst du hierher? Und in welcher Gesellschaft?", Ellen replies in a way that makes her own choice clear: "Oh, eine verhältnismäßig ganz gute" (50). Her concern is giving the other children time to escape a dangerous situation for them – throwing herself desperately around her father's neck to do so – yet Ellen still secretly yearns for the "grosse Hoffnung" of acceptance from her father: "Ellen wollte noch etwas sagen, wollte noch einmal sein Gesicht sehen, rührte sich aber nicht" (51). She is in the tragic position of not wanting to deny her father, but also of refusing to be defined by him or what he represents. His only thought is how he might explain the incident to his superiors, should it become necessary: "Höheren Orts konnte man das Ganze als Fieberphantasie darstellen" (51).

Ellen's non-Jewish "half" is also represented in the seventh chapter, "Der Tod der Großmutter." Ellen's Jewish grandmother, now her caretaker, fears her own imminent arrest and deportation and has paid a dear price in order to obtain poison, with which to take her own life on her own terms. Throughout the

chapter, Ellen tries to keep her grandmother and her hope alive, finally giving in in the face of her grandmother's fear. Upon her death, Ellen gives her grandmother a Christian "baptism" (183).

As a half-Aryan, Ellen never fully gains the acceptance and trust she so desperately seeks from her Jewish playmates.¹⁹ The Jewish "outsiders" also reject Ellen – her Jewish mother abandons her, emigrating to America without her; the other Jewish children, while allowing her into their circle, do not completely trust her. For instance, when Ellen is late for Georg's birthday party, some of the children suspect that she, like all the others who were not trapped into sharing their lot, has deserted them: "Vielleicht will sie nicht kommen."..."Vielleicht ist es nicht gut, mit uns zu verkehren"(106).

In the fifth chapter, entitled "Das große Spiel," we find further proof of Ellen's "outsider" status among the other racial outcasts. The Jewish children, aware that the net is rapidly closing in on them, are acting out a unique "Weihnachtsspiel,"²⁰ with roles not only for the traditional figures of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men, but also with parts that personify war, peace and the world itself. Afraid of the raid they know is imminent, the Jewish children have agreed upon a signal for friends to use when knocking on the door. Ellen knocks repeatedly on the door before the children open it:

"Weshalb habt ihr nicht aufgemacht?"

¹⁹ Ilse Aichinger herself experienced the enigmatic life of a "Mischling" (see introduction).

²⁰ The performance of a Christmas play by Jewish children is yet another reflection of Aichinger's attempt to avoid the tendencies of oversimplification and categorization that often color the treatment of the Holocaust. Aichinger's choice of a *Mischling* to present the central perspective of her novel reflects the same spirit.

"Du hast das Zeichen nicht gewußt!"
"Ihr habt es mir nicht gesagt."
"Weil du nicht zu uns gehörst."
"Laßt mich mitspielen!"
"Du gehörst nicht zu uns!"
"Und weshalb nicht?"
"Du wirst nicht geholt werden." (132)

Despite the fact that Ellen as a *Mischling* is "doubly outside" and is not required to share the fate of her friends, she consistently makes the choice to identify with the Jewish victims. In the second chapter of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, entitled "Der Kai," Ellen and the children meet the man from the shooting booth, who is one of the few adult figures in the novel who shows insight beyond the present circumstances and actively sympathizes with the Jewish children. Georg, introducing Ellen to the man, tells him that she has "zwei falsche Großeltern und zwei richtige"[...]; she is "ein unentschiedenes Spiel." The man laughs and replies, "[d]as sind wir alle" (39), pointing out the corruption by those in power of the terms "wrong" and "right" ("Warte, wenn du entdecken wirst, wie falsch das Richtige ist") (39). He thereby articulates Aichinger's view that every individual can choose freedom. Her definition of freedom, like her definition of hope, undergoes a change in the course of the novel; hope progresses from a "great" one, that of physical escape to physical safety, to a "greater" one, that of "eine innere seelische Befreiung" (Watt 239). Similarly, the freedom of *Die grössere Hoffnung* is not freedom from persecution, but rather the appropriation and subversion of it that proves the moral victory of the victim over his or her victimization. As Germanist and critic Dagmar Lorenz

states, Aichinger's freedom is an existential one that is defined by forging one's own path under the worst of constraints:

Freiheit besteht...nicht aus einer Überfülle von
Entscheidungsmöglichkeiten, sondern aus der
Entschlossenheit, selbst in der Beschränkung den
eigenen, auf die eigene Erfahrung basierten, Weg
zu finden, und aus dem Mut zur Neinsagung.
(in Bridges 73)

The figures of Julia and Anna, who appear in the fifth chapter, "Die Angst vor der Angst," illustrate the choice Ellen – and, by extension, the reader – faces. Julia, who was sixteen years old, had already obtained her visa for America. Ellen visits her despite the fact that the other Jewish children see such a visit as a betrayal; Julia, rather than wearing the required *Judenstern* in public, had chosen simply not to show herself in public until leaving for America. Julia symbolizes "die grosse Hoffnung" – the hope of physical escape and a new life in a free country. She had that possibility open to her, having support that Ellen and the other children did not (" 'Drei Personen haben für mich gebürgt.' 'Ja,' schrie Ellen erbittert, 'und für mich bürgt niemand!'" [115]).

Anna, however, makes a different choice. She enters the room just as Julia and Ellen have been fighting with each other; she comes to tell Julia goodbye, since she, also, is leaving. She is wearing the *Judenstern* with pride, having just washed it, and Ellen notices: " 'Ich glaube, Ihr Stern leuchtet!' 'Ich habe ihn gestern frisch gewaschen,'" Anna answers. " 'Wenn ich ihn schon trage, so soll er auch leuchten' " (116). Unlike Julia, who is departing for a new life in America, Anna has received a deportation notice and is being sent to

Poland – obviously in the direction opposite of physical safety and security for Jews. Yet, Anna has a different view of freedom: “ ‘Die Freiheit...ist dort, wo dein Stern steht’ ” (118). What to Julii had been such a shameful mark that she shut herself in rather than wear was to Anna a source of pride and – despite the ominous nature of her journey – hope. This hope does not mean the absence of danger and fear, but the transcendence and subversion of them; what Aichinger’s narrator characterizes with the word “*trotzdem*” – in spite of everything. “...der Glanz einer grösseren Hoffnung überflutete wieder die Angst in [Annas] Gesicht... ‘Ich habe immer alles erhofft. Weshalb sollte ich es gerade jetzt aufgeben?’ ”(119).

This same hope “in spite of everything” was also expressed in perhaps the single most widely-read Holocaust memoir, the diary of Anne Frank. In May 1944, almost two years after having gone into hiding with her family in Amsterdam, she recorded feelings strikingly similar to those of Anna in *Die grössere Hoffnung*. Without denying the fear and doubt that obviously hung over life at every moment, both girls intimate that maintaining the desire and hope to live was, in itself, somehow an act of defiance that denied the Nazis power over their inner selves – even if they held the power over their physical lives:

I’ve asked myself again and again whether it wouldn’t have been better if we hadn’t gone into hiding, if we were dead now and didn’t have to go through this misery, especially so that others could be spared the burden. But we all shrink from this thought. We still love life, we haven’t yet forgotten the voice of nature,

and we keep hoping for [...] everything. (Frank 307)

Ellen, like Anna, chooses to wear the star – whether or not the law requires it and whether or not her Jewish grandmother, with whom she is now living, allows it. For her, as for Anna, the Star has not taken on the intended significance of “Brandmal der Verfolgung,” but rather symbolizes “de[n] himmlische[n] Wegweiser für den eigensten Weg, dem man folgen oder nicht folgen kann... Die Emphase liegt auf der Freiheit in der Unfreiheit, der existentiellen Wahl in der Aphorie...der einzige Weg, noch Wahrheit zu finden” (Karnick 374-76). What Jean-Paul Sartre had to say about his own experiences living under Nazi rule in France confirms: “We were never more free than during the German occupation. [...] Because we were hunted down, every one of our gestures had the weight of a solemn commitment” (qtd. in Bridges 46).

As Ellen pins on the *Judenstern* and looks at herself in the mirror, it is clear that she takes on its identity in this positive light and sees it as inseparable from her own. Though the Star was actually intended to isolate and imprison those who were required to wear it, for Ellen, as for Anna, it is a symbol of liberation:

Wenn sie sich bewegte, bewegte sich auch der Stern im Spiegel. Wenn sie sprang, sprang der Stern und sie durfte sich etwas wünschen. Wenn sie zurückwich, wich der Stern mit ihr. Sie legte vor Glück die Hände an die Wangen und schloß die Augen. Der Stern blieb. Er war seit langem die geheimnisvolle Idee der Geheimen Polizei gewesen... Sie ließ sich das nicht verbieten, nicht von ihrer Großmutter und nicht von der geheimen Polizei. [...] Der Stern an ihrem Mantel beflügelte sie. (100-102)

Ellen then goes to a *Konditorei* to buy a birthday cake for Georg; as a *Mischling* who is not required to wear the star, Ellen is the only one in her Jewish circle of friends who is allowed to enter the bakery to buy it. Upon seeing the star on her coat, the clerk behind the counter refuses to sell it to her. Ellen does not immediately understand why she is being treated with such contempt; when she realizes that the *Judenstern* meant rejection by the non-Jewish sphere (along with the comfort and safety it afforded), her child's mind grasps her dilemma in strikingly simple terms: "Der Preis für die Torte war der Stern... Man hatte also zu wählen. Man hatte zu wählen zwischen seinem Stern und allen übrigen Dingen" (104). For Ellen, the value of the cake and what it represented ("In der halbhellen Auslage stand die Torte. Sie war der Friede selbst" [104])²¹ paled in comparison to the value of the Star – of knowing who she was, even if that meant living with fear, like her Jewish friends, whose feelings she had not really comprehended until that moment.

As a *Mischling*, Ellen, unlike her Jewish friends, has the choice of wearing and identifying with that sign of difference. Ellen's, therefore, is a voice from the Holocaust that defies oversimplification and categorization, which were trespasses committed by Nazis and Jews alike, and, Aichinger intimates, by the

²¹ A strikingly parallel real-life incident is described by Elisabeth Welt Trahan in her memoir, *Walking with Ghosts*. Technically a citizen of Romania, which was then a German ally, Trahan was not required by law to wear the Star, though she was a *Volljude*. She recounts an occasion on which a Jewish friend had left her star-marked coat at Elisabeth's apartment. Elisabeth put on the coat and went out, as she recalls, because "I wanted to know what it felt like." She experienced for the first time the nasty glances and the expressions of contempt reserved for those who wore the Star. "I stopped at a shop window," she writes, "[...] I was startled to see

post-Holocaust reader as well. The figure of the *Mischling* has the strange advantage of being outside and between both groups in what Hedi Kaiser terms a "Schwebezustand" (Kaiser 23), thus seeing both more clearly and acting as a mediating figure between the two.

"Otherness" of the Child

"The Gaze of the Child"

The child, in an adult society, is often seen as a "person in progress" rather than a separate, acting subject; society generally recognizes and gives credence to the "voice" of an individual after that individual has attained a degree of maturity and life experience. While adults are fascinated with what children "know" (Bridges 17), they are often far less interested in what they have to say. A significant issue in the narration of childhood experience is that it is often influenced by the linguistic and mental filter of adulthood, thus retroactively imposing other meanings. This is especially true as it pertains to memories of traumatic events like the Holocaust, which may be repressed for many years before they are articulated and experienced "*for the first time* [author's italics] through the prism of the delayed present" (Suleiman 571).

However, the perspective of the child "outsider" is useful in many respects. The language and understanding of children are unique in that they reduce complexities to simplicity, while quickly revealing inconsistencies and

my reflection wearing a star... Then I noticed a saleslady inside was motioning to me to move on. She had an angry, mean face" (Trahan 63, 64).

hypocrisies. In this way, childhood, to paraphrase Annette Bridges, can be seen as a location from which to critically examine the “norms” generally accepted by adults (Bridges 35), revealing new insights into how stable and viable those frequently artificial standards really are. “The gaze of the child,” like the feminine or minority gaze, “forces the reader to look at the narrated events with new eyes... [I]t is [this] gaze of the child that allows us to see in a new way what we think we already know” (Reiter, “Holocaust” 84).

To the adult, the child symbolizes purity, hope and promise; just as the child has not attained the status of an adult, neither has the child assimilated the adult viewpoint. Therefore, being not yet integrated into adult discourse, children are also not yet morally confused or corrupted by the ambiguities that the adult world has come to accept as fixed reality. The questions children often pose to their parents or other adult authority figures illustrate the sense they possess for revealing adults’ pretenses and seeking “the truth.” Children themselves do not even pretend to give definitive answers to these questions; they raise questions to which they may never receive answers. The adult, on the other hand, has largely stopped asking questions for their own sake, either obstructing the questions with a superficial, universally accepted answer, or no longer pondering these problems at all.

Faced with having to create a new starting point for German literature and having to come to terms with the recent past, it is understandable that writers like Ilse Aichinger would find this “gaze of the child” attractive. As Brigid Haines

states, "children [...] can articulate taboos and retain a sense of wholeness" (Haines 108). This was the very same goal for which Aichinger and many post-war German-speaking writers were striving: "die grössere Hoffnung" of expression in a language so beset by taboos and tragedies:

Die klare Sicht des Kindes in ihrer naiven Einfalt hat sich noch nicht getrübt oder sich in die gedankliche Zwangsjacke eines Erwachsenen einschnüren lassen, dessen Denk- und Wahrnehmungsvermögen weitgehend von abgedroschenen Begriffen beeinflußt wird; aus diesem Umstand ergibt sich die Tatsache, daß ein Kind den wesentlichen Kern einer Sachlage oft unmittelbar erfassen kann. (Watt 242)

Like the German language itself, the adult view was also somehow suspect; all the maturity of experience on national, cultural and even personal levels not only failed to stop the atrocity, but assisted in its perpetration. The adult perspective and its power discourse was recognized not only as impotent in the face of the cultural, moral and spiritual assault of the Holocaust (and, many felt, even complicit in its perpetration), but also as insufficient to deal with or even describe it. The gaze of the child that contributes to Aichinger's poetic language symbolizes an attempt at a new start from a point prior to knowledge – and, therefore, outside discursive corruption in a way that allowed the unthinkable to be expressed and even offered hope for a new *Weltanschauung* in the wake of the last one, the violent destruction of which left behind it both a philosophical and literal vacuum. From the child's perspective, critical questions can be raised and problems can be brought to light, even when the problem

cries out against a solution and the questions themselves defy answers (Haines 109).

This is precisely the problem encountered in dealing with the Holocaust and its aftermath. As author Imre Kertész said: "Only from the perspective of the natural naïveté of man can be told how Auschwitz was possible" (qtd. in Reiter, "Holocaust" 87). If the risk in attempting to approach the Holocaust through language is that its horror may be trivialized, then the "gaze of the child" alleviates this risk. Rather than imposing "reason" on what it sees, the child's mind, not yet guided by adult logic, takes "snapshots" of that experience (Reiter, "Holocaust" 83), simply holding it up as a mirror to the face of what mankind has become. Hedi Kaiser points out this "outsider advantage" in her discussion of Ilse Aichinger's *Die grössere Hoffnung*, alluding also to the notion that the *Kinderperspektive* is not only the way children themselves coped with the Holocaust, but it also provides a critical location from which modern readers and scholars can shed light on impenetrable darkness:

Sie müssen sich, um überleben zu können, einen imaginären Raum der Freiheit schaffen. Sie müssen im Dunkeln leben und lernen... Ihre Situation macht sie sehend, wo die andern blind sind. Die bedrohliche Realität bricht immer wieder in ihr Spiel ein, und sie konfrontieren sich selber damit. Es sind Kinder in einer äußersten Grenzsituation, zwischen Kindheit und Erwachsensein, zwischen Angst und Hoffnung, Himmel und Hölle. (Kaiser 26)

The normal struggles of childhood in themselves provide a basis for examining the child's perspective as something "other" and "outside" the

dominant discourse of adult power. Children have not yet mastered language or its uses of reasoning; they rely on their parents, teachers and other figures of authority in their lives to protect them and facilitate their maturity into adulthood. Even in a privileged social structure, growing up is a bittersweet struggle for definition of self and relationship to others – a struggle looked upon by many people as one of life’s most difficult phases. The memoirs of Ruth Klüger, Elisabeth Welt Trahan and Anne Frank deal specifically with the search to connect with and understand a parent – often a problematic relationship for many children. Klüger gives voice to a grievance universally voiced by children with respect to adults: “Warum nahm man meine Erfahrungen nicht ernst?” (Klüger 72).

Ruth Klüger articulates in her memoir, *weiter leben: Eine Jugend*, some of the grievances common to childhood. In a child’s world, which still revolves around the self and its definition, many actions and behaviors of adults are irrational; if the justification for an action is not concretely visible to the child, he or she has difficulty understanding that actions toward them which may cause momentary discomfort are, as adults claim, “for the child’s own good.” Klüger, who as a child felt closer to her nanny than her emotionally distant mother, remembers, among other things, the “lieb- und achtlos ausgewählten Kinderkleidung” that her mother selected for her, recalling how it restricted her, both physically and symbolically. In doing so, she notes: “Es gibt ganz frühe

Erinnerungen, die alle späteren Spannungen zwischen ihr und mir vorwegnehmen“:

Sie bestand auf unbequemen Kleidungsstücken, kratzender wollener Unterwäsche, weil das warm war, Kleidchen, die nicht schmutzig oder zerdrückt werden durften, weil sie hübsch waren. Und hohen schwarzen Schnürschuhen, die drückten und in denen die Füße schwitzten. (Klüger 85)

Children's sense of justice, like many of their other perceptions in the earlier stages of their development, usually centers upon themselves and the consequences that directly affect them. For all the good intentions of parents and other authority figures, children often feel "powerless" in a sphere in which everyone, by virtue of their life experience, "knows better." Children are without the kind of recourse that the adult world accepts as relevant, and thus attempt instead to respond to perceived injustice in their own way. Klüger recalls an incident in which, at the age of five, "self-justified anger" led her to take a pair of scissors, which she was not even allowed to touch, and cut her mother's handbag into pieces:

[Ich habe] die Handtasche zerschnitten, aus selbst-gerechtem Ärger; der Grund längst verwischt, versunken, ganz deutlich jedoch in der Erinnerung das Gefühl von Beleidigung, Empörung, gemischt mit dem vorweggenommenen Schuldgefühl... Ich wollte mich für irgend etwas rächen, und nach vollbrachter Tat kam sofort die Reue. Als meine Mutter die verunstaltete Tasche entdeckte, habe ich mich gleich zu der Schandtät bekannt. Es folgte keine Strafe, nur das Gefühl, Böses getan zu haben, und im Widerstreit dazu der nicht wegzudenkende Eindruck, auch mir sei Unrecht geschehen. (Klüger 85, 86)

Similarly, Elisabeth Welt Trahan recollects her strained – even acrimonious – relationship with her father. In the absence of her mother, who had died many years before, she had only a father, whose bachelor-like lifestyle took precedence over his relationship with his daughter. “Father refused to reveal any aspect of his life to me,” she remembers. Elisabeth’s relationship with her father was marked not only by a distant coldness, but often also by pure animosity. She recounts a conversation she overheard, not only indicating her father’s lack of feeling where children were concerned, but also expressing her frustration with his physical and emotional absence from her life:

“You are too strict with the child,” Magda had said to him, not realizing that I was in earshot. “She has a very sensitive soul.”
“Children have no soul,” he had replied... I found it difficult to talk to him and I didn’t know how to make him talk to me. (Trahan 93)

Anne Frank, whose problematic relationship with her mother is one of the most frequently recurring themes of her famous diary, also expressed feelings of powerlessness and her need to assert her individuality. Her diary entries reflect universal emotions that are common to adolescents in all cultures and in all walks of life. She longed, as does every young person, to have her perceptions and thoughts respected as valid and felt repressed by parental authority that did not seem to adapt to her growing maturity. Anne’s own words indicate that she sensed the discrepancy between the value placed on the views of a child and the relevance accorded the opinions of an adult:

Don’t get me wrong. I still love Father as much as

ever and Margot [Anne's sister] loves both Father and Mother, but when you're as old as we are, you want to make a few decisions for yourself, get out from under their thumb... We're treated like children when it comes to external matters, while, inwardly, we're much older than other girls our age. Even though I'm only fourteen, I know what I want, I know who's right and who's wrong, I have my own opinions, ideas and principles, and though it may sound odd coming from a teenager, *I feel I'm more of a person than a child...* [my italics].
(Frank 220-21)

If, even in a nurturing environment, the worth attached to a child's observations is less significant than the value placed on those of adults, the Holocaust widened that discrepancy. Not only did the children of the Holocaust struggle to "become," as any other child does, but they were forced to struggle simply to live from day to day. The process of growing up was not only violently disrupted, but, for the vast majority of children, was cut tragically and brutally short. Thus, the words and experiences of an Anne Frank – or countless others like her – take on a poignancy as immeasurable as the potential of that entire lost generation.

Common childhood responses to feelings of powerlessness typically involve play, dream and fantasy. Fantasy, as Rosemary Jackson argues, has long been both a human and a literary "coping mechanism." The "fantastic" protests against cultural constraints and subverts them. Fantasy traces the "unseen and unsaid," opening up to the imagination the realms that are "outside the law" and "outside the dominant value systems" (Jackson 3, 4). Fantasy involves a subversion of commonly accepted, often externally imposed norms

and therefore constitutes an avenue of defiance for the powerless – particularly for children, in whose mental, emotional, linguistic and creative development fantasy plays an invaluable role:

Die Kinderpsychologie und unsere eigene Beobachtung von jungen Kindern lehren uns, daß diese nicht imstande sind, subjective und objective Wirklichkeit von einander zu unterscheiden. (Watt 243)

“Kinder sehen die Welt nicht realistisch,” Hedi Kaiser explains, “sie sehen sie gespiegelt in Traum und Spiel. Aber sie sind hellichtig, ihr spielerischer und traumhafter Umgang mit der Welt eröffnet ihnen Einsichten, die den Erwachsenen verloren gehen” (Kaiser 29, 30). Their “gaze” often opens up to the adult mind the incongruities and injustices to which it has almost unquestioningly accustomed itself.

Ellen’s visit to the consul in *Die grössere Hoffnung* illustrates how her child’s perspective provided a clearer view of reality than that of adults, who, in resigning themselves to reality, lost perspective on it. After listening to Ellen’s vivid and fantastic narrative of the ship full of refugee children, the consul suggests to her the possibility that she had only been dreaming – which, indeed, is how the adult reader understands the passage. However, Ellen fervently defends the reality of her perception, revealing not only that the distinction between dream and reality is imperceptible to a child, but also subverting the consul’s criticism. All the logical rationalization of the consul, or any other adult, does not account for Ellen’s reality, which is – and must be recognized as – nightmarish madness rather than normal occurrence. “Innere und äußere

Realität gehen [...] ineinander über, Traum und Spiel sind ebenso Realität wie die Realität der Erwachsenen" (in Bridges 72). In defending her own truth, Ellen sees a moral and ethical truth that is beyond the grasp of those who have slowly become desensitized to injustice. Her gaze, hovering constantly between dream and reality, seeks out truth and reality, whereas that of the adult has denied, repressed and ignored it:

"Geträumt?" rief Ellen. "Keine Spur! Dann hätte ich ja auch geträumt, daß die Kinder im Hof nicht mit mir spielen wollen, dann hätte ich auch geträumt, daß meine Mutter ausgewiesen ist und ich allein bleiben muß, dann hätte ich geträumt, daß niemand für mich bürgt, dann hätte ich nur geträumt, daß [...] mein Visum verweigert ist!"
(16)

Throughout *Die grössere Hoffnung*, Aichinger portrays the *Kinderperspektive* not only as the inherent view of the physically young, but as a choice that can be made by any subject, regardless of age. Indeed, the only adult characters that appear in a positive light in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, Roderick Watt notes, are "diejenigen [...], die sich der Wirklichkeit des Kindes anpassen und gerade durch diese Teilnahme dem Kind selbst einigermaßen Hilfe, Trost und Sicherheit bieten können" (Watt 249).

Because of children's unique way of "seeing," adult discourse often looks to the *Kinderperspektive* for symbols of renewal and hope, even as that discourse frequently denies children a significant voice. As Annette Bridges asserts: "Children, who have the ability to see the multiplicities and ambiguities of reality, are endangered by the adult tendency toward monolithic and

compartmentalized thinking" (Bridges 67) – the very tendency that epitomized the anti-Semitic Nazi discourse. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the Nuremberg racial laws, which set out various degrees of existential guilt according to bloodlines. Children, including the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, have no internal concept of the racial rhetoric that has cast them out of their childhood and condemned them to death; they simply have "die falschen Großeltern." In choosing to articulate the inexplicable tragedy of the Holocaust from a child's standpoint, Aichinger defies the rhetoric of the Nazi years, with its affixation of labels and names to people and to ideas. She does not use any of the expected names or terms that would evoke what has already become familiar about the Holocaust. Instead, she draws the reader in to the thought processes of children, who do not clearly distinguish between fantasy and reality, forcing us to "re-view" what we have assumed to already know. Whereas adults differentiate clearly between dream and reality, most often dismissing that which is deemed "unreal," the fantasy and imagination of the child's perspective subverts the assumed stability and viability of what is perceived as "real" on this side of the looking glass" (Jackson 88). Aichinger's *Kinderperspektive* lifts the barrier between fact and fantasy, placing the adult reader in the position to see – at least symbolically – what these children see as everyday reality.

While a more detailed discussion of children's use of fantasy and play as a form of resistance and self-affirmation during the Holocaust will be addressed in a later chapter, it is important to point out here that Ilse Aichinger's use of

elements of the fantastic and the absurd in *Die grössere Hoffnung* also have a theoretical and literary significance. In addition to seeking a rebirth for language and discourse, Roderick Watt states that the use of the *Kindheitsperspektive*, or any other "view from the margins," is a way of making the ordinary "strange," thereby preventing an event like the Holocaust from becoming so familiar that its horror is ever allowed to pale in the human consciousness. The child's gaze shows the adult reader "die Schrecken einer Lage, die einem Erwachsenen...so bekannt vorkommt, daß ihm ihr eigentliches Pathos und ihre Schärfe nicht mehr bewußt sind" (Watt 243). As Andrea Reiter writes, this child's gaze becomes a means to cast a fresh light on the suffering in the camps during the Holocaust. Certain images – such as the piles of corpses which were filmed [...], the shoes, suitcases and other artifacts [...] have, despite their horror, lost their effect because we have become used to them" (Reiter, "Holocaust" 88). The *Kinderperspektive* can be used, as by Aichinger in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, as a defamiliarization technique, forcing us to look at the Holocaust beyond the sentimental and habituated reflexes with which it has become customary to react to its horror.

The Child in the Holocaust

The very design and progression of the "Final Solution" targeted the young generation of European Jews, not only forcing them to the extreme margins of society due to their racial background, but also aiming specifically to

extinguish Jewish youngsters who, seemingly "harmless" now, may grow up to destroy the Aryan race. It was not only a denial of place, but of being itself. In his infamous speech at Poznan in October of 1943, the head of the S.S., Heinrich Himmler, defended the mass murder of Jewish children to his own subordinates:

We...were faced with the question, "What about the women and children?" And I decided, here too, to find an unequivocal solution. For I did not think that I was justified in exterminating – meaning kill or order to have killed – the men, but to leave their children to grow up and take revenge on our sons and grandchildren. The hard decision had to be taken to have this people disappear from the face of the earth. (qtd. in Sereny, *Speer* 391)

In the early years of the Third Reich, before the physical extermination of the Jews was actively pursued, the Nazi policies targeted "undesirables" – those who, because of their political sympathies or their physical and mental qualities (or those of their parents), were deemed unworthy of life in Hitler's new regime. These "unworthy elements" were imprisoned in concentration camps, the first of which was opened only a few months after Hitler became Chancellor; the incarcerated would be sentenced to heavy labor in order either to "cure" them of their undesirable tendencies or to work them to death. In addition, forced sterilization, made legal the year Hitler came to power, was enacted the following year, 1934. In the ten years that followed, "over 200,000 people were forcibly sterilized in a widely publicized program administered by physicians and supervised by the courts" (Berenbaum 31). In this way, the Nazis already began to exert their influence over which children would even be born into the Reich.

As legal measures and physical restrictions against the Jews increased, the apparatus of state-sponsored mass murder was already being established. The euthanasia program, based on the pretext of granting mercy death to end their physical suffering, constituted in fact the prelude to the Final Solution. Men, women and children who were mentally or physically disabled or emotionally disturbed were deemed unworthy of life were collected and transported to six killing centers throughout the Greater Reich.²² They were systematically starved and neglected, given lethal doses of sedatives and other medications, and, eventually, gassed to death in special chambers under the supervision of chemists and physicians and under the orders of S.S. personnel who would later form the core of supervisory authority over the death camps in the East, thus putting their knowledge and experience from the euthanasia program to horrifically efficient use. Deborah Dwork points out in her study of Jewish children:

Only eleven percent of Jewish children alive at the beginning of the war survived to its conclusion... The very fact that they survived at all makes them exceptions to the general rule of death. There is absolutely no evidence to indicate that survival was due to anything more – or anything less – than luck and fortuitous circumstances. (in Suleiman 569)

²² These six centers for the killing of the disabled were Hartheim, Sonnenstein, Grafeneck, Bernburg, Hadamar and Brandenburg. By 1941, many influential people – most notably Graf von Galen, Bishop of Münster – were publicly protesting the program as morally wrong. Though the killings seemed to have stopped, the operation actually went underground. By that time, the attack on the Soviet Union was well underway, and the Nazis moved the center of their extermination operations to occupied Poland. Though the disabled were still targeted as "*Dasein ohne Leben*," the Jews – the vast majority of whom already lived in Poland and occupied Russia

The conditions under which Jews were forced to live under the Nazis took their toll on the children as well as the adults. The restriction and subsequent confiscation of ration cards, the starvation diet in the ghettos and camps, the widespread disease and physical confinement all took their toll – not least of all on the children, still in their developmental years. This toll was not only physical; the insidious decrees that denied Jewish children access to schools and public parks, the constant fear of raids and deportations and the loss of parents and other family members all robbed the children of a sense of stability and forced them to mature, at least on a certain level, before their time. Their young eyes saw atrocities that adults could not comprehend, yet they had not yet developed adult mechanisms that enabled them to distance themselves from the horror; as Andrea Reiter points out, “children not only notice details which escape the adult but interpret them in a way which makes them seem even more horrific” (“Holocaust” 85).

As I turn in the next chapter to a more detailed look at the world of the child in the Holocaust, I discuss both the story of Ellen and the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* and real-life experiences of other Jewish children. I show how the view of the Holocaust through the eyes of children forces us beyond the constraints of adult rationalization and explanation, past bare historical analysis, bringing us face to face with its experience.

– were now the primary goal for the extermination program (Berenbaum 64, 65). Unfortunately, no public protest deterred the Nazis from this undertaking.

Chapter Two

The Fate of the Child in the Holocaust

The stories of children in the Holocaust convey a particular tragedy – not because the lives of the young had a greater worth than those of adults, but because of the children’s symbolic significance and their ultimate defenselessness in the face of adult-instigated violence. Andrea Reiter cautions:

When a child suffers, the reader sympathizes more readily. A tortured child mobilizes our instincts to protect, to care for, to save. Showing the impact of the persecution of the Jews, or effects of internment and war on the children, thus facilitates a stronger statement. The innocence of the children makes the brutality of the Nazi regime not only more obvious but also more irrational. The sentimental representation, however, distracts from the fact that the child’s suffering is not intrinsically different from that of the adult and secondly seems to suggest that adult suffering is somehow justified. (“Holocaust” 89)

Therefore, in examining both the experiences of the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* and those of actual children in the Holocaust, the reader must take care to avoid the brand of sentimentality that may mitigate the suffering of any of the victims or lead to “closure,” which, in the face of the brutality and magnitude of the Holocaust, would constitute an almost profane trivialization. One device that allows for a face-to-face confrontation with the searing pain of the Shoah, while avoiding, as Birgid Haines phrases it, “the twin dangers of sensationalism and despair” (107), is defamiliarization. When the modern reader is confronted with the Holocaust experience, the temptation to identify

sentimentally with the victims and somehow vicariously to take part in their plight is great, yet it runs the risk of mitigating evil through false catharsis.

Ilse Aichinger, in her novel *Die grössere Hoffnung*, seeks to show her readers the world of the child in the Holocaust, but in language and perceptions that defy the reader's expectations. Similarly, many eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust are, indeed, "stranger than fiction." Through the eyes of children who lived through the increasing restrictions of the early years of the Third Reich, who attempted to survive in cities, in ghettos, or in the camps, and still tenaciously – even defiantly – clung to life despite the vehemence and violence with which life was denied them, we see a world that is anything but logical and understandable.

Life Before Hitler

Prior to the appointment of Adolf Hitler as German Chancellor at the end of January 1933, life for children was "normal" – as normal as it could be, given the instability of the political and economic situation. Children's memories of the years before the Third Reich cast its shadow over them are characterized by nostalgia, as are most typical childhood recollections. Children's journals and diaries depicted in this time dreams and feelings that are universal to all children. Anne Frank's first diary entries, for example, describe in detail her thirteenth birthday, on which she received her first blank journal from her father as a gift. Anne records:

On Friday, June 12, I was awake at six o'clock, which isn't surprising, since it was my birthday. But I'm not allowed to get up at that hour, so I had to control my curiosity until quarter to seven... A little after seven I went to Daddy and Mama and then to the living room to open my presents... I had my birthday party on Sunday afternoon. The Rin Tin Tin movie was a big hit with my classmates. I got two brooches, a bookmark and two books. (Frank 1-3)

Like Anne Frank, whose German-born father managed a company that manufactured products for making jam, some Jewish children grew up in relative financial security. Ursula Rosenfeld, from the small northern German town of Quakenbrück, remembers her family's generosity to others who were struggling to feed their families. Her grandmother peeled her potatoes very thickly, since she knew the people who collected them ostensibly to feed their animals were actually going hungry themselves. Rosenfeld recalls that even this generosity brought to light the anti-Jewish sentiments that many Germans felt in those years:

My mother always packed several extra rolls or sandwiches to take to school and she told me which children to give them to because, she said, 'I'm sure they've come to school without breakfast.' I found it quite embarrassing to do so at the age of six or seven. Strangely enough, a boy to whom I regularly had to take a sandwich eventually became the greatest Nazi in the town. I can understand his feelings of resentment. We stood out as Jews – we had enough to eat, but his family didn't. It was sobering, eventually, to find so much resentment towards people who were doing all right from people who had nothing. It was fertile ground for National Socialism and for Hitler to sow his diabolical creed. (qtd. in Harris and Oppenheimer 26)

There were other Jewish children, however, who did not fit the stereotype of the disproportionately well-to-do Jew that was so frequently cited by the Nazis. These were children of families who were struggling as much as non-Jewish families in the difficult interwar years. Robert Sugar of Vienna writes: "We were not exactly a fun family. We were not wealthy at all. I didn't know that because we had everything we needed" (qtd. in Harris and Oppenheimer 51).

This was particularly true of Jewish children who lived in Poland and other areas in Eastern Europe in *shtetls*, where, in contrast to the trend in Western Europe, Jews emphasized a sense of community and placed a priority on religious education over secular success. Unlike Jews in western Europe, who resided in nations that had encouraged assimilation, Jews in eastern Europe had not been afforded such an opportunity;²³ they were forced to build their own culture apart from the non-Jewish one. Most Jews in these smaller eastern communities, for many reasons (including their traditional alienation from the predominant culture), did not attain middle-class status, and often many family members, men and women alike, would help with the family business out of economic necessity (Ofer and Weizmann 4). Elie Wiesel's childhood in the small

²³ At a time when western governments, including Germany, were contemplating Jewish emancipation, Russian Empress Catherine the Great (1762-96) confined Jews to what was termed the "Pale of Jewish Settlement." The poorer Jewish population was tied to the *shtetls* of the Pale; only the well-to-do, those who were willing to convert, and the educated were able to relocate and build lives elsewhere in Russia. As quotas were established for Jews at institutions of higher learning in the Russian empire, Jews in the Pale had little social mobility and were vulnerable to pogroms for hundreds of years (Riasanovsky 395).

Hungarian town of Sighet was typical for many Jewish children in the eastern regions:

I continued to devote myself to my studies. By day, the Talmud, at night, the cabbala. My father was occupied with his business and the doings of the community. My grandfather had come to celebrate the New Year with us, so that he could attend the services of the famous rabbi of Borsche. (Wiesel 5)

Overt anti-Semitism was an unfortunate part of life in Poland even prior to the Holocaust. Growing up in Buczacz, as Alicia Appleman-Jurman remembers, had its share of trouble; as she writes: "Part of being Jewish in Poland was learning to live with anti-Semitism" (Appleman-Jurman 2). She relates the first incident of hatred that happened to her family – namely, to her brother Zachary, who was on his way to the Lvov conservatory where he studied music. "[A] gang of five Polish boys began following him," she writes. They mocked him with racial epithets, demanding that he play them a song. Unwilling to fight with them, Zachary pleaded with them to let him go in peace; instead, they threw him against a wall, took his violin case and smashed the violin against the pavement:

That was when the boys fell upon him, kicking and punching. They held him by the hair and slammed his head against the pavement. They kicked him in the ribs, took turns holding his arms so the others could beat him, and finally left him there in the street, his broken violin a few feet away. (Appleman-Jurman 3)

In fact, many Jews had left Poland for Germany over the years to escape such acts of hatred and prejudice, which were all too common. Germany had, after all, granted Jews legal equality and acceptance as a part of the economy

and culture. Until Hitler came to power, and even afterward, many Jews were still convinced that "it could not happen here." Some did sense the potential for real catastrophe in the Hitler regime, which had made no effort to keep its hatred of Jews secret. Leslie Frankel, from the small village of Biblis, near Worms, was ten years old when the Nazis assumed power in Germany and recalls: "I had been skating that day... [W]hen I got home, we heard that Hitler had become Chancellor. Everybody shook. As kids of ten we shook" (qtd. in Gilbert 31).

How individuals faced the coming years of devastation and destruction was largely determined by their moral orientation. As Gabriel Motola states, "[c]hildren [...], depending on how young they were and, therefore, on their moral development when swept into the 'concentrationary universe,'²⁴ recalled an existence through a morally-charged memory different from that of [their parents]" (Motola 210-11). Adults and those children who were old enough to remember what it was like in the years before Hitler had some basis by which to judge "normalcy"; they had been exposed to certain moral and ethical principles and thus were aware that as mad as the world became under the Nazis, it would someday have to end.

Anne Frank, who went into hiding with her family at the age of thirteen, had the chance to build a moral foundation based on home life and a normal

²⁴ The term "*L'Univers Concentrationnaire*" was coined by scholar David Rousset; he argues that those who lived in the "concentrationary universe" (referring to the system of concentration and death camps instituted by the Nazis) "are set apart from the rest of the world by an experience impossible to communicate" (qtd. in Langer, *Holocaust* 33).

environment in the years before the war. "Shielded from the reality of the horror by being closed in the attic with her family, Frank continues to believe in the permanence of the world that was and longs for the dreaded aberration to pass so the world can resume its past" (Motola 214). Anne confirms these very hopes in her diary, even as she admits to the darkness that constantly hung over their lives in the "Secret Annex." In telling of the hardship of youth in the Holocaust, Anne holds on to her moral center, "in spite of everything":

We're much too young to deal with these problems, but they keep thrusting themselves on us until, finally, we're forced to think up a solution, though most of the time our solutions crumble when faced with the facts. It's difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart. It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them! (Frank 332)

Even when she and her family were betrayed and sent to Auschwitz and other camps, Anne's moral center remained intact, though daily assailed by the horror of losing those dear to her and being immersed in unimaginable suffering.

However, for younger children who had no memory of the years before the Holocaust, that horror was the standard. They did not have the opportunity to form ideals for themselves, and the normal development of their character

was suddenly and violently cut off: "Ihre Ich-Identität war ja erst im Aufbau begriffen" (Bauer 66). Whereas Anne Frank, even in the miserable years of life in hiding, still had her family structure intact, countless other children did not. As Barbara Bauer states: "Ghetto und Lager sind Störfaktoren, welche den Aufbau eines ethischen Normensystems bei Kindern und Jugendlichen retardieren oder sogar ganz unmöglich machen" (Bauer 63). For them, the inferno – with its own moral code based on necessary lies and actions that would be considered wrong in a "normal" society – was the only reality they had ever known. They had, as Gabriel Motola states, "no way to independently measure or maintain a morally social structure since, by and large, such a structure had ceased to exist before they were able to be integrated into it" (Motola 222).

Changes with Hitler's Coming to Power

The year 1933 marked the beginning of the road to destruction for Germany's Jews. Barely a month after Hitler was appointed Chancellor, the German Reichstag was set on fire, allegedly by a Dutch Communist. Hitler used this incident not only as an excuse to ban the Communist Party (the largest political party in Germany at the time and the Nazis' political arch-enemy), but also to enact a series of emergency decrees that enabled him to assume control of every facet of life in Germany, ostensibly in the interests of security for "the German people" (Dawidowicz 50). Over the coming months and years, Hitler's

government then used its full force to shut Jews out from German life – and, eventually, from life itself.

The day-to-day ramifications of increasingly harsher anti-Jewish legislation were not only felt by adults, who were driven out of their professions, prevented from making a livelihood and robbed of the rights of citizenship to which every German adult had been entitled under the Weimar constitution, regardless of race or creed. Children, too, saw their carefree childhood hemmed in by Nazi racial measures. Signs saying "*Juden unerwünscht*" appeared on public facilities everywhere – on streetcars, on shops and theaters, even in public parks and on park benches. Children's ability to explore their world, to play in a park, even to walk on the street without fear of being taunted or assaulted was impeded, as was their access to knowledge and information about what was happening to them and their families and why. Lore Segal, as she recalls her reaction to the upheaval of *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, expresses feelings that were all too common for children:

I remember the sense of everything turned upside down, everything wrong, no one where they were supposed to be, including me. This was the first time in all this period where I remember sitting down and howling, but nobody had much time or paid attention to this one howling child. (qtd. in Harris and Oppenheimer 59)

Many children's accounts of life under the Third Reich tell of the pain of the exclusion they experienced. Jewish children spent their formative years in a charged atmosphere of hatred, in which they were constantly being told that

they were unwanted and being equated with vermin.²⁵ The very years in which they were learning about the world around them – the years in which they most needed to be nurtured – were years in which the world around them rejected them. Ruth Klüger attests to this, indicating what life was like for younger children who did not have memories of “normal” life:

Was alle älteren Kinder in der Verwandtschaft und Bekanntschaft gelernt und getan hatten, als sie in meinem Alter waren, konnte ich nicht lernen und tun, so im Dianabad schwimmen, mit Freundinnen ins Urania-Kino gehen oder Schlittschuh laufen. [...] An judenfeidlichen Schildern hab ich die ersten Lesekenntnisse und die ersten Überlegenheitsgefühle geübt. [...] Alle, die nur ein paar Jahre älter waren, haben ein anderes Wien erlebt als ich, die schon mit sieben auf keiner Parkbank sitzen und sich dafür zum auserwählten Volk zählen durfte. (Klüger 26)

The children portrayed in *Die grössere Hoffnung* are victims of the same exclusion and – although Aichinger never explicitly articulates the name of the city – also live in Vienna, where the author herself spent those frightful years. When Ellen first meets the group of Jewish children, they are on the bank of the river, waiting for a child to fall into the river so that they might rescue it. This heroic service is intended as an act of redemption: the children hope to be reinstated as equal human beings and be forgiven the racial “sins” of which they have been accused (represented by their “*Großeltern*”) and on the basis of which they have been excluded. The children place all their hopes on the inevitability

²⁵ Perhaps the most egregious example of this type of racist propaganda was the 1940 film by Fritz Hippler, “*Der Ewige Jude*.” Scenes of rats were juxtaposed onto scenes of Jews filmed in the imposed squalor of the Warsaw ghetto. The film claimed that both Jews and rats were

of an incident that has not yet occurred, and they reason that they can counter the negative perception about them and prove themselves not through their ancestry but through their good deeds and their value to society. They share their plan for rescuing the child with Ellen:

“[...] Wir trocknen es ab und bringen es dem Bürgermeister.
Und der Bürgermeister sagt: Brav, sehr brav! Von
morgen ab dürft ihr wieder auf allen Bänken sitzen. Eure
Großeltern sind euch vergessen. Vielen Dank, Herr
Bürgermeister!” (33)

Unfortunately, the world has gone mad and does not adhere to logic; here, it is not the children who are “wrong,” but the social system that has cast them out. The children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* understand the nature of the “guilt” for which they are blamed:

Unsere Großeltern bürgen nicht für uns. Unsere Großeltern
sind uns zur Schuld geworden. Schuld ist, daß wir da sind,
Schuld ist, daß wir wachsen von Nacht zu Nacht. Vergebt
uns diese Schuld! [...] Wo geht sie zu Ende, diese Straße der
Schuld, wo hört sie auf? (52)

The reader clearly sees the absurdity of condemning children for the identity of their grandparents (a clear reference to the Reich Citizenship Law); yet the dominant discourse of the time was founded upon that very absurdity. Ruth Klüger echoes Aichinger’s words as she recalls her childhood understanding of Nazi racial thinking, revealing its moral bankruptcy: “ Das heißt, obwohl du geboren bist, darfst du eigentlich nirgendwo leben” (Klüger 44).

carriers of diseases, “money-mad bits of filth devoid of all higher values, corruptors of the world” (Gilbert 134).

Nowhere is the ridiculous nature of Nazi racial ideology more blatantly illustrated than in the anti-Semitic propaganda of the time, some of it made expressly for children, whose loyalty was of prime importance to Hitler. For instance, Julius Streicher's weekly *Der Stürmer* was widely used as text in the elementary schools, and he also published an entire library of anti-Semitic literature specifically for children. This overt propaganda, with its barefaced falsifications and irrational hatreds, sought to win the impressionable minds of the young (Eisenberg 2, 3). On one occasion, *Der Stürmer* published a composition by a nine-year old student, Helga Gerbling, that indicates the extent to which this Nazi campaign for the minds of German youth was tragically successful. She entitles her piece "The Cuckoo and the Jew":

In school the other day we were talking about the Cuckoo. He is the Jew among birds; for in looks, deeds and behavior he resembles him very much. His curved beak reminds us of the Jew's hooked nose. His feet are small, that's why he can't run very well. This is very much like a Jew, who also can't walk gracefully. [...] Both Jews, the one among the birds and the one among the humans, are parasites, which means to say that they want to become rich and fat at the expense of others. The female Cuckoo lays her eggs in the nests of other birds [...] and she wants them to brood them and bring up the little ones. [...] As soon as the Cuckoo comes out of the egg he gets impudent. He snaps for the best morsels and always wants to have everything. [...] When there is no longer room enough in the bird's nest, then he tries to push the young birds out of their own home, [...] just like the Jew wanted to do with us Germans. He came, an alien, into our 'nest' and tried to drive us out. But we humans are not as stupid as the birds. We don't let them do that to us and we throw the cheeky 'Cuckoo' out of our land. (qtd. in Eisenberg 4)

Accordingly, some of the most painful memories Jewish children have of those early years were of their treatment at school by non-Jewish children. Ursula Rosenfeld recalls how she dreaded going to school, remembering how the other children would throw ink on her work, how her gym teacher would purposely step aside instead of catching her as she jumped the vault horse and how the other children would constantly taunt her. Like other Jewish children, she was subjected to a barrage of racial ideology; though she was not allowed to participate in these lessons, but had to stand out in the corridor, she was subjected to humiliation in the classroom. However, she recounts one incident in which she passively proved that the racial stereotype did not hold true:

I remember once the teacher had been teaching the children to measure skulls. There was a typical Germanic type of skull and I think the Jews were supposed to have very low, reclining foreheads. [...] The teacher made the children all measure each other, and when I came in at the end of the lesson he said, 'Now you go and measure Ursula.' I didn't dare to say anything, and the teacher was very disappointed because I didn't measure up to his expectations. I can't remember how he explained this, but on top of that, I didn't have dark hair, I had blonde hair... and I didn't really conform to the caricature of what the Germans thought the Jews should look like. Perhaps only my nose. (qtd. in Harris and Oppenheimer 28, 29)

The exclusion from the classroom during lessons in racism was, for Ruth Klüger, a bittersweet advantage. She remembers that after the *Anschluss*, when the *Direktor* came into her classroom and explained to the children the correct way to salute with "*Heil Hitler*," which was now the law in Austria (now "Ostmark"), only the Jewish children were exempted from this requirement.

Klüger also describes the "Handarbeitsstunde," in which the Jewish children were allowed more room for creativity precisely because of their exclusion. Still, the feelings of freedom did not last long:

In der Handarbeitsstunde lernten die Klassenkameraden nun Hakenkreuze aus buntem Papier zusammenkleben, wir vier bis sechs Jüdinnen durften kleben, was wir wollten, was eigentlich gemütlich war, wenn es nicht wieder ungemütlich gewesen wäre. Gelegentlich kamen die arischen Mädchen und ließen uns bewundern, was sie da Schönes gebastelt hatten. Wir durften kritisieren und vergleichen. Daß es so auf der Dauer nicht weiterging, mußte der Obrigkeit einleuchten. Wir wurden aus den öffentlichen Schulen ausgeschlossen und bekamen unsere eigene Schule. (Klüger 59)

Over the next four years, Klüger attended a series of eight different schools; the number of schools they were allowed to attend was continually reduced as Jews either emigrated or were deported. Klüger recalls the trauma of simply getting to school in a world that had no use for children like her:

Je weniger Schulen es für uns gab, desto länger wurde der Schulweg, man mußte die Straßenbahn und die Stadtbahn nehmen, in denen man keinen Sitzplatz einnehmen durfte. Je länger der Weg, desto geringer war die Chance, gehässigen Blicken und Begegnungen zu entgehen. Man trat auf die Straße und war in Feindesland. Daß nicht alle Passanten feindselig waren, konnte einen nicht über diese Unannehmlichkeiten hinwegtrösten. (Klüger 21)

Alicia Appleman-Jurman remembers being banned from school as one of the most painful insults of the early months of German occupation of her Polish home town of Buczacz.²⁶ The German occupiers had first rounded up six

²⁶ According to the German-Soviet nonaggression pact of August 1939, Poland was partitioned – Buczacz was located in the designated Soviet zone of occupation. Unlike the western and central

hundred of the most influential men of the Jewish community, Appleman-Jurman's father among them, and shot them, after which the remaining Jews were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to the designated ghetto area. The Nazis would routinely pick people up on the streets for forced labor. Appleman-Jurman recalls how, one afternoon, she was caught and made to wash the floors at her old school, which she was forbidden to enter as a student, as the non-Jewish children did. She remembers being unable to stay away from the school, one day even climbing a tree and looking in to the window during the lesson:

I stayed up in that tree for quite a while, listening to the lesson, trying to memorize what was being said. It was so frustrating, so utterly maddening, I couldn't stand it. [...] So when the teacher asked the next question, a dozen hands shot up, including mine. Zip! I was out of that tree and flat on my back among the leaves on the ground, the breath completely knocked out of me. [...] The teacher rubbed my back until I could breathe normally, then she said, "Alicia, you know you can't come back here anymore." I looked up at her forlornly. "But I don't mind the tree," I said. [...] "It is dangerous, Alicia, and I don't mean the tree. Do you understand?" She wiped the dirt from my sweater, and, in doing so, her fingers brushed over the yellow Star of David on my armband. (Appleman-Jurman 26, 27)

The Jewish children of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, too, are forbidden to attend school with non-Jewish children. Still, they take English lessons from the old man, Noah, who emphasizes to them the importance of learning, even though their possibilities of escape have been dashed as the coming of war closed the

regions of Poland, which came under German control with the Nazi invasion in September 1939, Buczacz was not occupied by the Germans until after Hitler broke his pact with the Soviet Union and initiated an eastern offensive, known as Operation Barbarossa, in June of 1941.

borders. When asked the reason for learning English, even though the chance of finding a new life in America was now but a dream, the old man answers:

“Weshalb decke ich meinen Tisch, auch wenn ich ganz allein bin?” (99). With the Taimudic logic of answering a question by asking yet another question, Noah broadens the children’s view beyond the “great hope,” teaching them by example to live “nicht um der Dinge willen, die knapp vor uns sind,” (99) but to have their gaze fixed on something beyond the present pain, beyond the reach of the persecutors and even beyond their own immediate understanding.

Children responded to this socially sanctioned persecution with remarkable resilience – a fact that is still more incredible as that persecution worsened.

Lorraine Allard, who lived with her family in the Bavarian town of Fürth, maintained a degree of optimism, even as hopes of better times grew dim:

I had to leave the German school in 1934. I had already been through the experience of not being allowed to go to a theatre, to a cinema, or a swimming pool, or anything where we might have come in contact with German children, in case, I suppose, we contaminated them with Jewish blood. At the beginning it was very painful that we were excluded, but you came to accept it in time. Although I may have felt left out of certain things, I wasn’t on my own. All the other Jewish children were going through the same thing. [...] It wasn’t the end of the world. (qtd. in Harris and Oppenheimer 22)

Though the segregation of schools was mandated by law, and Jewish schools were ultimately under government control, the Jewish community centers did what they could to establish Jewish centers for learning as well as cultural and athletic activities, which were forbidden to Jews in the public sphere.

Adults did all that was within their power to maintain some sense of normalcy and direction for children and adolescents, even as the Nazis were making their hatred for Jews ever clearer.

Yet, while the Nazis enforced restrictions on everyday life, other adult authority figures, including parents, in their attempts to preserve the innocence and optimism of children, often shut children out from the knowledge of reality. Almost universally, adults seek to protect children from ugly realities to which they should not have to be exposed. Parents in the Holocaust, for the most part, saw it as their duty to shield their children as effectively and as long as possible from the unthinkable. Ruth Klüger remembers trying to listen in on adult conversation in order to get answers that no one would give her:

Der Tod, nicht Sex war das Geheimnis, worüber die Erwachsenen tuschelten, wovon man gern mehr gehört hätte. Ich gab vor, nicht schlafen zu können, bettelte, daß man mich auf dem Sofa im Wohnzimmer [...] einschlafen ließe, schlief dann natürlich nicht ein, hatte den Kopf unter der Decke und hoffte, etwas von den Schreckensnachrichten aufzufangen, die man am Tisch zum besten gab [...]. Geheimnis der Erwachsenen, die den Kindertod den Kindern verschweigen und ihnen weismachen wollen, daß es nur den Erwachsenenentod gebe, daß nur sie, die Überlegenen, dem Tod gewachsen sind, und daher auch nur sie ihn erleiden. Alles Lügen.
(Klüger 11, 13)

Children, however, are more perceptive than adults often realize; they listen to adult conversations and observe adult behaviors, detecting fear and worry even when adults believe they are hiding these emotions from their

children. Alicia Appleman-Jurman writes of her thoughts as she learns more about what is happening in the world around her:

I realized suddenly that there was a lot going on that we children did not know and that I, at the age of eight, was too young to understand, Yet [...] I kept asking questions, and the answers I got frightened me. (Appleman-Jurman 4)

For all their good intentions, adults may have done children a disservice by keeping them in the dark concerning their fate; they simply believed that as long as they were there to protect their children, they could still remain children. Parents struggled over how much to tell their children and how to prepare them for what was no longer in their power to hide. Though the overwhelming majority of parents believed they were acting in the best interest of their children in sheltering them from the truth, children often fail to see the reasoning and motivation behind their exclusion from that hidden knowledge. Scholar Hanna Papanek, herself exiled from Germany with her family as a child wonders

[...] whether adults do not also blind *themselves* by the very act of blocking the children's view, reaffirming the adults' sense of impotence in the face of powerful social pressures: they cannot bear to acknowledge situations they cannot change. (Papanek 222)

When visible reality and everyday circumstances began to overwhelm parents' assurances, children could see the truth for themselves; though parents may have been able to delay the inevitable, they could not prevent the events that would rob children of their childhood forever. Papanek notes that those children who were taken in to their parents' confidence were better equipped to

deal with what was happening to them, whereas those children whose parents attempted to “shield them from bitter reality ‘for their own good’” were, in a sense, kept powerless and often felt abandoned by their parents (Papanek 221).

Ruth Klüger asserts that even as a young girl she was well aware of what was going on around her, even if the adults did not tell her the truth. Echoing Papanek, Klüger feels that the fact that adults kept children in the dark amounted to a “Verdrängungsbedarf der Erwachsenen”: “Das Kind war jedoch alt genug, um zu wissen, was mit ihm geschah, und war weder blind noch taub” (Klüger 110). Though children had a different way of dealing with the tragedy around them, they were often more willing to face it than were the adults who were trying to protect them from it.

The children of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, unlike most of the adult figures in the novel, have no illusions about reality; they live under the daily threat of deportation or of their family members being deported. When Ellen brings the children to visit Anna, who is being deported to Poland, the children are hungry for the truth that is not forthcoming from the adults in their lives. They gather around her, eager to finally have their questions answered. Anna explains to them that the acts of hatred toward them are not their fault; she lets them know that despite the fact that the “Geheime Polizei” is a stronger force than the children are, their very existence – as unarmed innocents – leaves the aggressor no rest. The children have heard their parents whisper about the Star meaning death – which, as Anna’s own fear earlier in the scene bears out, she cannot

deny. However, Anna emphasizes to the children that it is not physical death, but spiritual apathy that is the greater danger. Anna embodies the spiritual comfort and moral guidance that the children need; many of their parents are either no longer with them or have become so fixed on clinging to physical life that they have lost sight of something even more important. She points out to them that they as children have insight, where adults are often blinded:

“Laßt euch nicht irreführen,” sagte Anna ruhig, “das ist alles, was ich euch raten kann: Geht dem Stern nach! Fragt nicht die Erwachsenen, sie täuschen euch, wie Herodes die drei Könige täuschen wollte. Fragt euch selbst, fragt eure Engel.” (122-23)

When the “*grosse Hoffnung*” of physical escape or even physical survival dims, the children see a *grössere Hoffnung* – that of denying their persecutors the ultimate victory over their souls. As critic Chris Weedon notes, “it is more important to [them] not to capitulate to the ideas and war-mongering of Nazism than it is to stay physically alive” (Weedon 266). Events were worsening to the point at which denying them was no longer possible, neither for the children, nor for the adults who perhaps naively hoped the young would be spared.

**“Old too Soon”:
Life in Cities, in Hiding, in the Ghettos
and in the Camps**

Some parents were able to “spare” their children. Circumstances even in the early years of Nazi rule were anything but conducive to happy childhood for Jewish children, and as parents saw the situation worsen, many felt it more

important to secure their children's safety than to keep the family unit together. Few, at best, sensed the true precariousness of their situation, and even fewer could sense the magnitude of the horror that was to come. Those fortunate few were able to realize the *grosse Hoffnung* of physical rescue for their children, before emigration was no longer possible.

Among these were the children of the *Kindertransport*, an effort to rescue children from Nazi Germany and its territories. Sponsored by the British government in the wake of the widely publicized *Kristallnacht* pogrom, the *Kindertransport* effort collected children whose parents were willing and able to send them and placed them in foster care in Great Britain. As the British parliament passed legislation that would only allow unaccompanied children under the age of seventeen,²⁷ parents had to make the difficult decision to send their children away from their care, hoping to be able to join them later. Only months afterward, the German invasion of Poland and the outbreak of the Second World War cut off this possibility.

Despite the relief of escaping a society so charged with hatred toward them, leaving was not easy for the children themselves. Children who recall their experiences from the *Kindertransport* often express feelings of abandonment; though they may have been able abstractly to grasp their parents'

²⁷ "A plan to allow refugee children into the United States – where quotas for immigration from Germany and Austria were already filled – came to Congress in early 1939. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Robert Wagner and Rep. Edith Nourse Rogers, was resisted by the powerful anti-immigration lobby which depicted the entry of unaccompanied children as the 'thin end of the wedge.' The bill died in committee" (Harris and Oppenheimer 10).

reasons for sending them away, children still suffered from being separated from them. Hedy Epstein writes of her departure from Frankfurt:

As the train started to pull out of the station, my parents ran alongside the train on the platform, and I remember, sort of in my head, I heard that refrain, 'You're leaving. You're leaving.' I watched their faces, and tears were streaming down their cheeks. And I knew then: these people really love me. This is why they're sending me away. Many years later I realized that by sending me away, my parents gave me the gift of life a second time. I had some writing paper with me, and I immediately started to write to my parents. I apologized for what I had said to them, that they were trying to get rid of me. (qtd. in Harris and Oppenheimer 111)

Others, like Lore Segal, recall feelings of guilt at being allowed the opportunity to escape when so many others were not. She admits to wondering even now: "Is there someone who did not get on the *Kindertransport* because I did?" (qtd. in Harris and Oppenheimer 82). She also remembers the feelings of responsibility for rescuing her family once her safety in England was secure, revealing the major role reversal that took place in the lives of many children in the Holocaust, both those who escaped to freedom and those who remained behind:

When I got to Dovercourt Camp, I remembered very promptly that it was my job to save my parents, and my grandparents, and my aunt and the twins. I think I had a sense that when I was lying in bed I was wasting time, that while I was playing, for instance, or while I was laughing, that might be the moment in which I could have and should have been doing something about this demand on me that I should bring my parents out. So whenever I saw an English grown-up, I would say, "Could you bring my parents out?" (qtd. in Harris and Oppenheimer 171)

In *Die grössere Hoffnung*, Aichinger touches on the heartrending difficulty for those who were left behind, who tried to feel joy for those who escaped, all the while watching the "*grosse Hoffnung*" slip through their own fingers:

Hatten sie nicht schon ihr letztes Geld ausgegeben, um sich Perronkarten zu kaufen, sooft ein Kindertransport in ein fremdes Land gegangen war, und hatten sie nicht ihr letztes Lächeln ausgegeben, um ihren glücklicheren Freunden noch mehr Glück und alles Gute für die Reise zu wünschen? Und hatten sie nicht große Übung darin, mit großen Tüchern zu winken und in dem flackernden Licht blauer, abgedunkelter Bahnhofslampen zurückzubleiben?
(59)

Ellen herself, the central figure of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, experiences this leave-taking in reverse; her Jewish mother is allowed to enter the United States, but she is forced to remain behind in the care of her "wrong" (Jewish) grandmother. Ellen tries desperately to persuade the American Consul to grant her a visa so that she may accompany her mother, to whom her own identity is still bound: "Nach Hause, das ist immer dort, wo meine Mutter ist" (17). The language with which Ellen constructs this argument reveals her feelings of responsibility for her mother:

"Meine Mutter kann nicht allein über das Meer fahren. Wem soll sie das Haar bürsten und die Socken waschen? Wem soll sie abends ein Märchen erzählen, wenn sie allein ist? Wem soll sie einen Apfel schälen, wenn ich nicht mitfahren kann? Und wem sollte sie eine Ohrfeige geben, wenn es ihr plötzlich zu viel wird? Ich kann meine Mutter nicht allein fahren lassen, Herr Konsul! Und meine Mutter ist ausgewiesen." (15)

The Consul responds to Ellen's unwillingness to accept the departure of her mother without her by persuading her to sign her own visa, thereby choosing

her own spiritual freedom even if he cannot grant her physical escape: "Nur wer sich selbst das Visum gibt, wird frei" (20). He instructs Ellen that by signing her own visa (which to a customs official is worthless, but symbolizes a personal commitment), she is agreeing to display a maturity beyond her years:

"Du mußt unterschreiben,[...] und diese Unterschrift bedeutet ein Versprechen, das du dir gibst: Du wirst nicht weinen, wenn du von deiner Mutter Abschied nimmst, ganz im Gegenteil: du wirst deine Großmutter trösten, die wird das nötig haben. Du wirst auf keinen Fall mehr Apfel stehlen. Und was auch geschieht, du wirst immer daran glauben, daß irgendwo alles blau wird! Was auch immer geschieht." (20)

The departure of her mother, more than any other trauma in her young life so far, leaves Ellen disoriented; her world has been permanently and irrevocably changed. This is plainly visible as she wakes up from a bad dream, only to discover that she is living a nightmare and is forced to grow up overnight:

Ellen zog die Füße unter die Decke zurück. Sie waren eiskalt und schienen nicht ganz dazuzugehören. Sie streckte sich. Sie mußte gewachsen sein. Sie wuchs meistens über Nacht. Aber irgend etwas war nicht in Ordnung mit diesem Frühlingmorgen. Vielleicht – vielleicht war es Herbst. Und vielleicht ging es gegen Abend. (23)

The Holocaust years forced children, both those who were able to physically escape the Third Reich and those who were not, to grow up prematurely in many ways. Those who left, often without their parents, had to develop an independence from them that they would otherwise not have displayed at such an early age. Those who remained behind faced an even

greater struggle; they suffered a violent interruption of their childhood from which they would, assuming they even survived, never fully recover. They were, according to critic Walter Jens,

Kinder, die man nicht Kinder sein läßt [...] eine Generation von Menschen, die man zwingt, viel zu früh erwachsen zu sein – mit 6 Jahren mußten jüdische Kinder den Stern tragen wie Erwachsene und wurden in Lager und Tod getrieben – und die deshalb, vor der Zeit gereift, auch viel zu lange Kinder sind: Kinder mit der Erfahrung von Männern, Erwachsene mit kindlichen Träumen. (qtd. in Kaiser 26)

As conditions worsened, children were forced to deal with increasing instability in their lives. From the beginning, with the demonstrations, the propaganda and the segregation of schools and public facilities, children lived with constant upheaval. They saw their parents – their primary caretakers, who had always provided for them – lose their positions, their businesses and their pride. They saw their parents, older siblings and other authority figures humiliated and beaten in the streets. They witnessed their families forced out of their own homes, moved to other buildings and even other towns and cities. Ellen of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, as a Mischling, does not have the threat of deportation hanging over her, but as her family abandons her and her friends are taken one by one, her circle of friendship and support erodes until she is left alone.

Children who spent the war years in hiding in the cities faced relentless boredom and loneliness. Isolated from the company of other children their own age, they were forced to think of other ways to pass time that would not

compromise their safety. Anne Frank, who hid in an attic above the Amsterdam factory her father had once managed, invented an imaginary friend, Kitty, to whom she addressed her diary entries: "I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support" (Frank 1).

The years spent in hiding – during which many, such as Anne Frank and her family, rarely came into direct contact with the outside world – placed extraordinary strain on life, not least of all on family relationships. Anne's diary documents, for example, few disagreements with her mother prior to the family's going into hiding, yet such conflicts become a running theme of discussion in the "Secret Annex." Anne writes after more than a year in hiding with her family and the others who had joined them: "Relationships here in the Annex are getting worse all the time. We don't dare open our mouths at mealtime (except to slip in a bite of food), because no matter what we say, someone is bound to resent it or take it the wrong way" (Frank 137). Further, Anne records her thoughts on the strain of living in confinement, far removed from the standard of living they had known before:

When I think about our lives here, I usually come to the conclusion that we live in a paradise compared to the Jews who aren't in hiding. All the same, later on, when everything has returned to normal, I'll probably wonder how we, who always lived in such comfortable circumstances, could have 'sunk' so low... These are all things that can be overcome, but I sometimes wonder: how can we, whose every possession... is so old and worn, ever hope to regain the position we had before the war? (Frank 102-3)

As time passes, however, Anne's diary reflects her increasing awareness of the terror outside, in constant fear of which they live in their hiding place. When a middle-aged dentist, whom Anne calls "Dr. Dussel," joins the group in the "Secret Annex," he brings news that, though sadly only a mild version of the horrible truth, jars Anne's perspective on her own suffering:

Countless friends and acquaintances have been taken off to a dreadful fate. Night after night, green and gray military vehicles cruise the streets. They knock on every door, asking whether Jews live there. If so, the whole family is immediately taken away [...]. It's impossible to escape their clutches unless you go into hiding [...]. In the evenings when it's dark, I often see long lines of good, innocent people, accompanied by crying children, walking on and on, ordered about by a handful of men who bully and beat them until they nearly drop. No one is spared. The sick, the elderly, children, babies and pregnant women – all are marched to their death. We're so fortunate here, away from the turmoil [...]. I feel wicked sleeping in a warm bed, while somewhere out there my dearest friends are dropping from exhaustion or being knocked to the ground. (Frank 73)

Similarly, Ellen, who survives the war as a *Mischling* in Vienna only to be killed in the pre-dawn of peace, has an experience different from those of her deported Jewish friends – one that she could not share in her life and glimpses only at her death. Despite what the Jewish children sense about the nature of their journey, none really know the extent of the hatred against them until they witness it with their own eyes and were physically consumed by it. Life in hiding was fraught with perils, yet these paled in comparison to the ominous fate of those who were sent "to the east," as Ellen's Jewish friends and, later, Anne Frank and her family experienced firsthand.

As Jews began to be deported to ghettos in the east, the living conditions in these areas grew increasingly desperate. Several families were crowded in single-family living quarters, and squalor, disease and malnutrition became the norm. As refugees from other areas piled in to the ghettos, they were housed in makeshift dwellings without sanitary facilities, water or heat. George Eisen notes that, in addition, the ghettos (with the exception of Theresienstadt²⁸) were deliberately placed in ugly sections of the cities, near landfills or industrial areas (Eisen 27).

Historians record that the Warsaw ghetto, the largest of the ghettos in Nazi Europe, was an area of 3.5 square miles (two percent of Warsaw's city area) containing half a million Jewish inhabitants, many of whom were deported there from other locations; over a third of these were under the age of fifteen (Eisen 19). The average ghetto room housed at least six or seven people; those who could not manage to find a room lived in halls and stairwells. The crowded conditions made fertile ground for lice and diseases such as typhus, and starvation was rampant; approximately ten percent of the population died of

²⁸ Theresienstadt (Terezin), forty miles north of Prague, often called the "Paradise Ghetto," was set up as a model ghetto in November 1941. Not only did it serve as a transit camp for "privileged" Jews from western Europe, but it was also a "Potemkin village" that was shown to diplomats and humanitarian observers from neutral countries as proof that the Jews were not being poorly treated under the Nazi regime. The ghetto area was originally built as a military garrison in the eighteenth century; the Czech population who lived there (approximately 7,000) were vacated, and some 90,000 Jews were forced to occupy the same space. The thin veneer of privileged status did little to ameliorate the very real conditions of suffering that defined ghetto existence anywhere under the Nazis. Despite the horrific conditions and the threat of deportation that hung over the head of each ghetto resident, Theresienstadt, astonishingly, pulsed with a vibrant cultural life. After a very "successful" (i.e., sufficiently deceptive) Red Cross inspection of Theresienstadt and the filming of a documentary, the deportations to Auschwitz – which included nearly all of the children of the ghetto – intensified (Berenbaum 87, 88).

disease or starvation in the first year of the ghetto's existence alone (Hogan 207).

When the ghetto was permanently sealed off in November 1940, food became increasingly scarce. As the Nazi administration allotted each ghetto resident only 200 calories a day (which would be reduced even further in the months to come), many resorted to begging or illegal smuggling of food from the Polish inhabitants beyond the ghetto walls. Though the punishment for smuggling was death, it was a risk many were willing to take to avoid slow death by starvation. Many of these smugglers were children, who not only could scramble over walls and through tunnels more easily, but who also, it was reasoned, would be more likely to elicit sympathy from the ghetto guards if caught. During the cold winters when the sewage pipes in the ghetto froze, excrement was dumped into the streets; without medical care, clean drinking water, heat or sufficient food and shelter, the mortality rate in the ghetto was astronomical (Hogan 207). The same misery and suffering reigned in every ghetto across Nazi-occupied Europe.

In addition, the constant fear of deportation hung over Jewish families; any of them could be picked up without warning and sent to forced labor or, though no one wanted to believe it, even worse. Even children eight or nine years of age volunteered for labor companies and ghetto workshops to avoid being deported; in the ghetto of Lodz in the summer of 1943, over 13,000 children under the age of 17 were thus employed (Eisen 23). These conditions,

argues Halina Birenbaum, ended childhood innocence for those who endured them:

Vor allem in der Zeit der brutalen Deportationen gab es im Ghetto keine Kinder im eigentlichen Sinn. Alle waren schon so gereift, alle bangten um ihr Leben und kämpften wie besessen, um es, sei es auch nur eine Stunde länger, zu behalten. Das begriffen auch die Allerjüngsten unter uns. (qtd. in Bauer 59)

Stanislaus Rozycki, like many other ghetto residents, kept a diary in which he chronicled his observations of daily life, hoping to someday give the outside world documentation of the unbelievable suffering Jews of all ages endured.

Concerning the plight of the children of the Warsaw ghetto, he recorded:

The streets resound with the futile screams of children dying of hunger. They whine, beg, sing, lament and tremble in the cold, without underwear, without clothes, without shoes. [...] Children swollen from hunger, deformed, semi-conscious; children who are perfectly adults, somber and tired of living at age five. (qtd. in Eisen 5)

While the rampant hunger and illness in the ghetto retarded children's physical growth, the constant fear, pain and bleakness took its toll on their emotional and spiritual health. A chronicler of the Lodz ghetto recorded that there were children who never saw a garden throughout their short lives: "The Ghetto, with its approximately 85,000 inhabitants, is probably the only city in the world without any, or almost any flowers" (qtd. in Eisen 20). Pavel Friedman expresses the feelings of children in ghettos across Europe in his poem, "I Never Saw Another Butterfly":

For seven weeks, I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto,

But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

[...]
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto. (qtd. in Eisenberg vi)

Children, like everyone else in the ghettos, lived from day to day.

Katarzyna Meloch records that she adapted herself as hardship necessitated, leaving her not with one biography, but with several fragmented life histories: "During the occupation, I learned to 'lie in order to live.' I learned to change my skin to suit the needs of the moment" (in Sliwowska 118). Alicia Appleman-Jurman's story displays the same characteristics. In attempting to survive the Holocaust by moving from village to village in Poland and the Ukraine, Alicia invented multiple identities for herself. Among the Polish peasants, she was "Helka," the Polish Catholic; among the particularly anti-Semitic Ukrainians, she called herself "Slavka" (Appleman-Jurman 159). She describes the way in which she and her mother, the only two members of their family who were still alive, subsisted from day to day:

We agreed that she would hide in the wheat fields or in the ravine during the day, and I would bring food for her after my work was through. When I thought of my mother hiding day in and day out in the wheat – trembling at every sound, wondering if I would come back or if I had been found out and caught,[...] totally dependent on her child for survival – my heart ached for her. But this was how it had to be if we were to remain alive. For myself, I was not too worried about being discovered. I had learned to approach people carefully and to live with constant fear. I felt a cold hand lodged inside me, twisting my insides

whenever danger was present. I learned to control the fear to a certain extent by ignoring it. (Appleman-Jurman 135)

Even the youngest children formed "survival strategies." Eliezer Yerushalmi was the director of a clandestine school in the Shavli ghetto in Lithuania and wrote portraits of the children he observed, most of whom were sent to the extermination camps. He writes of a three-year-old boy named Meierl, whose father had been deported and whose mother was forced to work, leaving him to fend for himself in the ghetto for most of the day. Despite his young age, Meierl knew how to get food from his neighbors, observing their mealtimes with hungry eyes until they took pity on him and shared their meager rations:

He performed tricks with knives and forks. He knew that everyone at the table smiled when they watched him, and used this to get another morsel. He did his tricks with a serious face, and did not allow the laughter of his hosts to alter his serious expression [...]. His entire being, and all his actions, radiated serenity. He talked very little [...] only his closest neighbors sometimes heard him speak and admired the clear, short, but logical sentences with which he came to an understanding with his environment. (qtd. in Eisenberg 46, 47)

One day a "Children's Action" – dreaded in all ghettos – swept through Shavli, and Meierl was caught. Yerushalmi describes the last moments he saw Meierl:

He skipped between the two soldiers, trying to keep up with their stride [...]. Although the soldiers were drunk, those innocent child's eyes sobered them and slowed their steps. In one of them a human emotion flickered and he said to his companion, "He's a Jew, but still he's a child." He looked at Meierl sympathetically, took his hand and lifted him into

the wagon among the desperately sobbing sacrifices. He stood quietly among the crying children and looked around with his large, naïve eyes, until the cart started to move. (qtd. in Eisenberg 47)

Miserable as the ghetto existence was, hushed whispers circulated concerning the fate of those who were deported. Fearing these kinds of roundups in the ghettos, adults built secret bunkers and devised elaborate plans for hiding themselves and their families. Many were afraid that children, in moments of extreme tension, might cry out and give away the hiding places. Tragic stories abound of adults who unwittingly strangled or suffocated babies in these bunkers, attempting to muffle their cries so they would not be discovered in hiding (Berenbaum 197). Children well understood the dangers of being caught in these raids. Historian Martin Gilbert records a heartrending story of three children in the ghetto of Stolpce, as recounted by eyewitness Eliezer Melamed. During a German *Aktion*, the small family followed him and his girlfriend into a house where they hoped to hide – the children in one corner, their mother in another:

The Germans entered the room and discovered the children. One of the children, a young boy, began to scream, "Mama! Mama!" as the Germans dragged the children away. But another of them, aged four, shouted to his brother in Yiddish, "Zog nit 'Mameh.' Men vet ir oich zunemen." "Don't say 'Mama,' they'll take her too." The boy stopped screaming. The mother remained silent. Her children were dragged away. The mother was saved. I will always hear that [...] especially at night: "Zog nit Mameh." "Don't say Mama." And I will always remember the sight of the mother as she watched her children being dragged away by the Germans. She was hitting her head against the wall, as if to punish herself for remaining silent, for

wanting to live. (qtd. in Gilbert 465)

Jews of all ages faced what critic Lawrence Langer calls "choiceless choices";²⁹ often the choice to remain alive meant doing so at the expense of the lives of others, even loved ones. Aichinger's *Die grössere Hoffnung* opens as Ellen's Jewish mother, offered a chance to escape to freedom in America, abandons her own child. Ellen, like untold numbers of other children, had to cope with issues of abandonment on an unimaginable scale; at this stage of their lives, children's sense of identity and security was intertwined with their parents. In their absence and in a hostile environment, virtually every anchor that held children to their childhood was lifted. The resulting feelings of desperation are palpable in the description of Ellen's nightmare, on the very night she has returned from the consulate and her mother has left her:

Niemand machte den Versuch, sie aufzuhalten. Nirgends war ein Stern, um sich daran zu klammern. Ellen fiel durch die Arme aller ihrer Puppen und aller ihrer Teddybären. Wie ein Ball durch den Reifen fiel sie durch den Kreis der Kinder im Hof, die sie nicht mitspielen ließen. Ellen fiel durch die Arme ihrer Mutter. (22)

The violent breakup of the nuclear family unit was perhaps the single greatest factor that forced children to mature beyond their years. One by one, the protective walls around them crumbled. Nazi policies tore friends and families apart, leaving children not only without supervision, but also without a

²⁹ Langer asserts that such choices do not "reflect options between life and death, but between one form of 'abnormal' response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim's own choosing" (qtd. in Hogan 411).

foundation of love and nurturing and a sense of permanency that is so fundamental to their security.

Children's sense of stability was further shaken as they saw adults give up hope. After the last of Ellen's friends have been caught and deported (a fate Ellen begs to share but is denied, as she is not "Jewish enough" [161]), her grandmother, who expects to be picked up in a raid at any time, sells her fur coat in order to buy poison. Ellen, frightened by this intention of suicide, hides it from her grandmother and tries to distract her by recounting a fairy tale – something her grandmother is no longer emotionally capable of doing. Her very personal version of the story of "*Rotkäppchen*" reveals her continued longing and concern for her mother in America. She weaves a dream for herself, imagining that her mother sends her a package containing a cake (alluding to the symbolism of the cake as discussed in the previous chapter) and a hand-knit cap. Imagining herself in the role of *Rotkäppchen*, who wraps up the cake and a little bottle and visits her grandmother, Ellen's story is interrupted by the sound of knocking at the door. Believing her grandmother is about to be taken, Ellen, at the urging and with the instruction of her grandmother, mixes the poison and feeds it to her with her own hands, "wie ein Spatz sein Junges" (177). Ellen is torn between wanting to go along with her grandmother and her Jewish friends and clinging to life ("man stirbt nicht, wenn man nicht will" [180]). As her grandmother slips away, the half-Jewish, half-Christian Ellen, in an act of redemption and affirmation, baptizes her Jewish grandmother (183).

As family members died in the ghetto or were deported, the number of children without any parental or adult supervision increased. Chaim Kaplan of the Warsaw ghetto writes: "Every morning you will see their little bodies frozen to death in the ghetto streets." Tragically, "it has become a customary sight" (qtd. in Eisen 20).

A Jewish official of the Lodz ghetto notes that the children "are excluded from homes, because of the crowding, from the schools, because of the edicts, and only the streets provide them with free space" (qtd. in Eisen 21). Though adults attempted to organize activities and even clandestine schools for these children, they had varying degrees of success. Not only did the well-founded fear exist that any school or playground would serve as an easy collection point for a *Kinderaktion*,³⁰ but many children who had to work or smuggle to support the family could not attend. Street children formed gangs, and juvenile delinquency became a concern; at one point, there were forty children in the Vilna ghetto jail, between the ages of five and fifteen (Eisen 51). Emmanuel Ringelblum, whose diary of the Warsaw ghetto provides some of the most poignant glimpses into ghetto life, recorded: "The children are speedily becoming demoralized [...]. Illustrative of this tendency are the pitched battles between children's gangs, in which prisoners are taken" (qtd. in Eisen 78).

³⁰ The *Kinderaktionen* are well-documented, and adults in the ghettos were justifiably afraid of "provoking" one. Regardless of any action the adults took, all of them, including the children, were marked for liquidation in any case. For instance, in the fall of 1942, the police surrounded the children's day camp that had been set up in the Lodz ghetto and took all present to the extermination camp at Chelmno, where all were gassed. The police also raided kindergartens,

The phenomenon of "gangs" of children is echoed in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, as the Jewish children spend their days together on the bank of the Donau (part of Vienna's traditionally "Jewish" section). These children find comfort with each other, as the non-Jewish children – indeed, the entire non-Jewish sphere – rejected them. They play together and share their thoughts and fears, bound by their common fate and seeking to forge a basis for hope in spite of it. They are all subconsciously aware that "der Stern bedeutet den Tod" (110), but they all choose also to face that fate, whatever comes, with their hopes and their dignity intact.

There is, however, some tension within the group, between Georg, who symbolizes "*die grössere Hoffnung*" and acts as the positive force in the group, and Kurt, who frequently gives in to gloom and at one time even suggests the children all commit suicide:

"Wenn wir jetzt springen würden," sagte Kurt heiser, "einer nach dem andern! Einen Augenblick lang und wir hätten keine Angst mehr. Keine Angst. Stellt euch das vor!" Die Kinder schlossen die Augen, sie sahen deutlich, eines nach dem andern. Schwarz und schnell und gerade, als sprängen sie ins Wasser. "Ist es nicht gut?" sagte Kurt. "Wenn sie uns dann finden, lang und reglos. Es gibt Leute, die sagen: die Toten lachen. So lachen wir sie aus!" "Nein," schrie Herbert. "nein, man darf es nicht!" "Die Mama erlaubt's nicht!" spottete Kurt. "Das muß jeder selbst wissen," sagte Ruth ruhig [...] "Was man zum Geburtstag geschenkt bekommt, das wirft man nicht weg." "Und heute ist mein Geburtstag," wiederholte Georg, "ihr seid unhöflich." Mit allen Mitteln versuchte er, die andern vom Fenster wegzulocken. "Wer weiß, ob wir im nächsten Jahr noch beisammen sind. Vielleicht ist es unser letztes Fest!" (111-12)

private homes and orphanages, leaving virtually no one under the age of ten in Lodz (Eisen 37, 38).

Georg, as opposed to Kurt and the adults, in view of the urgency of their situation, feels the desperate necessity of cling to life and hope rather than capitulate to death. Ruth Klüger voiced a similar compelling urge; she was twelve years old when her mother suggested to her on the night they arrived at Auschwitz that they commit suicide together by throwing themselves on the electrified barbed wire. As a child, she did not understand her mother's attitude; she wanted to live despite circumstances: "Ich frage mich, ob ich ihr diesen schlimmsten Abend meines Lebens je verziehen habe" (Klüger 173).

George Eisen points out that, in contrast to the adult population, there were virtually no recorded suicides among children. He attributes this, in part, to the tenacity of children's imaginations and their use of play and fantasy to make sense of the world around them, even in its senseless brutality (Eisen 81). Rather than shielding them from this horror, childhood responses of play and imagination intensified it and brought it in to a sort of twisted concentrationary normalcy.

This is not at all to say, however, that children did not become demoralized in tragic ways unique to their experience and developmental level. In response to the trauma to which they had been subjected, many children in the Holocaust regressed to infantile behavior. In the Dutch transit camp of Westerbork, where there were initially no separate care facilities for children, they were housed with the adults, and as one survivor remembers, "running amok." They displayed regressive responses to their traumatization, such as

bedwetting, hypertension and assorted nervous disorders (Eisen 51). A survivor of both Westerbork and Theresienstadt recalls that children displayed a marked emotional deterioration virtually inversely proportional to their forced maturity in other respects: they "regressed to infantile habits in the camp and they regressed also in the sense of soiling their pants. They did not seem to care about it and laughed about it as they did it in the sandbox" (in Eisen 104).

To combat the demoralization of the children, some adults, such as Dr. Janusz Korczak³¹ of Warsaw, a pediatrician, educator and author, devoted themselves to providing a modicum of security and restoring some sense of hope and purpose to traumatized orphaned ghetto children. His orphanage became a cultural center for the Warsaw ghetto, where religious, musical and theatrical events took place for the children and the entire community. When the liquidation of the ghetto began on 6 August 1942, two hundred of the children in Korczak's orphanage were among the first to be deported. Refusing to save his own life, Korczak accompanied them to the nearby death camp at Treblinka and died with them there at the age of seventy-five; despite the consequences, he would not abandon them (Sereny, *Darkness* 256).

Similar stories of adults' courage and commitment to the lives and well-being of the children are told of Theresienstadt, the "Paradise Ghetto." Because

³¹ Janusz Korczak was the pen name of Dr. Henryk Goldszmidt, who gave up a lucrative practice in pediatric medicine to devote his life to the care of children in the Warsaw Jewish orphanage (Sereny, *Darkness* 256). He is reported to have made an experiment before the war in which he took a child from an orphanage and brought him, without saying a word, through the busy streets into a crowded lecture hall filled with students, placing the child in front of an X-ray machine. As the child trembled with fear behind the X-ray screen, Korczak turned to his

of Theresienstadt's intended propaganda value, Nazi authorities focused on creating the appearance of healthy, happy children – at least for a time, in preparation for the visit of neutral observers from the Red Cross in the summer of 1944. While education of Jewish children was forbidden, the Theresienstadt Jewish community managed to continue children's education in the form of games and creative activities. Children's homes were set up, not only in an attempt to curb the spread of infectious diseases that ravaged the ghetto population, but also to give them some measure of care and nurturing in the company of other children.

Ruth Klüger, who was deported to Theresienstadt with her mother, remembers living in the *Kinderheim*, noting how common hardship brought the children together, turning their "*Zwangsgemeinschaft*" into a kind of "youth movement":

Wir waren dreißig gleichaltrige Mädchen in einem Raum, wo es sich zwei oder drei hätten gemütlich machen können. Das war kein Schlafrum, das war unser Wohnort, der einzige. Auch als Waschräum diente er. Das kalte Wasser zum Waschen holte man in Schüsseln vom Gang [...]. Wenn es kalt war, klapperte man lautstark mit den Zähnen [...]. Wir schliefen in Stockbetten, auf Strohsäcken, einzeln oder zu zweit. Es waren die ersten Hungerwochen [...]. Man kann wenig über chronischen Hunger sagen; er ist immer da [...]. Wir taten uns nicht leid, wir lachten viel, wir tobten und machten Krawall, wir meinten, stärker zu sein als "verwöhnte" Kinder "draußen." (Klüger 131)

Because these children not only were Jewish, but were also too young to be of significant economic use to the Third Reich, they were considered doubly

audience and said, "[d]o not ever forget this picture. Before you raise your hand against a child,

useless and were specifically targeted for extermination. As we have seen in the story of the Jewish orphans of Warsaw, children were among the first targets in the liquidation of the ghettos. A twelve-year-old boy in the Lodz ghetto described the scene outside a maternity ward during an "Aktion," thus not only bearing witness to acts of brutality that he saw with his own eyes, but providing a glimpse of the unimaginable trauma to which he, himself still a child, was subjected:

Suddenly, two Germans appeared in an upper story window and pushed it open. Seconds later a naked baby was pushed over the ledge and dropped to its death directly into the truck below. We were in such shock that at first few of us believed it was actually a live, newborn baby [...]. The SS seemed to enjoy this bloody episode [...]. The young SS butcher rolled up his rifle sleeve and caught the very next infant on his bayonet. The blood of the infant flowed down the knife onto the murderer's arm. (qtd. in Eisen 17, 18)

At the selection ramp in the notorious extermination complex Auschwitz-Birkenau,³² officers determining who would live and who would die automatically sent those under the age of fourteen to the gas chambers. All children were ordered to remain with the women, and women with young children were automatically selected for death. The prisoners of the *Sonderkommando*, hoping to save a few lives, often tried to take children from the arms of younger

before you punish him, recall how his frightened heart beats" (qtd. in Eisenberg xii).

³² The most well-known of the death camps, Birkenau was established by order of *Reichsführer SS* Heinrich Himmler in March 1941. Birkenau, approximately 1.5 miles from the main camp, Auschwitz I, functioned as the most gruesomely efficient and productive killing center in Nazi Europe (Hogan 412). Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek also provided slave labor to German industries, so it was possible for those who were strong and healthy to be selected for work as opposed to immediate extermination. The other extermination facilities (Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, all in Poland) were established solely for killing; an estimated two million

mothers and give them to older women, who, like pregnant women, would likely be selected for death regardless (Ofer and Weitzmann 10). Toby Stern recounts her arrival at Auschwitz with her baby and recalls the "choiceless choice" that saved her own life:

Everybody wanted to be with the families, we shouldn't lose each other. We should be together. And a man [...] ran to me. He said, "Give away the child (to) an older lady." So I asked him why. I told my brother, "Booda, go and ask why I should give away the baby." [...] He disappeared [...]. Then a second guy came. And he said, "Give away the baby." [...] I used to live with my mother, so I gave the baby to my mother. And I hear right now how he cried, "Mommy, I want to go with you. I don't want to stay with Bubby." (qtd. in Berenbaum 125, 127)

Elie Wiesel, in his critically acclaimed memoir *Night*, vividly recalls that fateful night when his family stood at the selection. Having been told to lie about his age (not yet fifteen at the time), he and his father were sent to the camp; his mother and younger sister were sent to the gas chambers. Wiesel records an image that haunted him forever:

Not far from us, flames were leaping up from a ditch, gigantic flames. They were burning something. A lorry drew up at the pit and delivered its load – little children. Babies! Yes, I saw it – saw it with my own eyes... those children in the flames. (Is it surprising that I could not sleep after that? Sleep had fled from my eyes.) (Wiesel 30)

Some children were "spared." Some, particularly twins, were selected for sadistic medical experiments; they were provided with excellent food and shelter in a special barracks under the direction of Dr. Josef Mengele, who kept them

people were killed in these four facilities alone, and less than two hundred people survived them (Berenbaum 123, 124).

alive in order to perform bizarre pseudo-scientific tests on them. Very few survived their ordeal.

Some young boys were selected as orderlies for service as underlings – and often sexual servants – to the camp’s prisoner personnel. In exchange for extra rations and protection from selections for the gas chambers, they were often forced to torture others. One of these “*Piepels*” in the camp at Majdanek was taken aside by the commandant and given a “choiceless choice”: in exchange for a promise that he would be allowed to live, he was commanded to hang his own parents:

The boy’s hands trembled as he tied the noose around his parents’ necks. The father stood rigid and pale. The mother sobbed quietly. As she exhaled her last breath, she motioned as if she were thrusting away someone, something, with her dying hands [...]. At Majdanek this boy was the chief degenerate [...]. He would walk about with his wooden club in his hand and break heads capriciously. It seemed as if the halo of patricide and matricide, the murder of his father and mother, accompanied him. He looked older than his age. (qtd. in Eisenberg 148)

In a particularly cruel hoax, the S.S. set up a so-called “Family Camp” in Auschwitz-Birkenau in the fall of 1943, where some 4,000 Czech Jews from Theresienstadt were housed. They were initially extremely well-treated and were allowed to establish programs for education and recreation. Children were, during this time, allowed – even encouraged – to play. Auschwitz prisoner Rudolf Vrba recalls: “I watched in wonder across the wire as they organized their new and temporary lives. [...] I saw them set aside a barrack for the children, a nursery, no less, in the shadow of the crematorium” (qtd. in Eisen 47). The

camp authorities, under the auspices of Adolf Eichmann,³³ even commissioned a prisoner artist to paint the inside of the children's barracks with figures from Walt Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (Eisen 47). After six months, all 3,800 of those who had survived from the last transport to the Family Camp³⁴ were gassed in one night, without any selection (Ofer and Weitzmann 323).

Other children who were remarkably spared and survived were forced to accommodate a reality inconceivable to the human mind. Simon Srebnik, one of only two prisoners to survive the Chelmno extermination camp, was selected at the age of thirteen to be a member of the work detail that loaded the gas vans with victims and cleared the bodies out afterward; the members of this crew loaded the corpses into the cremation ovens with their own hands. He reveals on a visit to the site of the extermination camp, perhaps unwittingly, to filmmaker Claude Lanzmann the effects of extreme trauma on children's psyches:

When I saw all that, it didn't affect me [...]. I was only thirteen, and all I'd ever seen until then were dead bodies. Maybe I didn't understand. Maybe if I'd been older, I'd have understood, but the fact is, I didn't. I'd never seen anything else. In the ghetto in Lodz I saw that as soon as anyone took a step, he fell dead. I thought that's the way things had to be, that was normal. I'd walk the streets of Lodz, maybe one hundred yards, and there'd be two hundred bodies. (qtd. in Motola 209)

³³ Adolf Eichmann is widely regarded as the "desk perpetrator" of the Final Solution. He was responsible for heading the Bureau IV.B.4 of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, which was set up to deal with the "Jewish Question." Eichmann escaped to Argentina after the war, but was captured by Israeli Mossad agents and brought to Israel for trial in 1961. He was found guilty and hanged (Berenbaum 203).

³⁴ Approximately twenty percent had already died in Auschwitz due to hunger, disease or cold (Ofer and Weitzmann 323).

To be spared once, however, was no guarantee that one would be spared again. Even once integrated into the camp system, prisoners lived in an environment designed to exploit their labor to a maximum degree, while it also exacted high mortality rates from exhaustion, starvation and disease. They were subject to *Selektion* at any time, never knowing with certainty whether this meant transport to a work camp or to the gas chambers. In the meantime, prisoners had to take care not to slip into apathy, becoming a "*Musselmann*," one of the walking dead who lost the will to survive. Elie Wiesel recounts a prisoner's advice to his father after their arrival in Auschwitz:

"Take care of your son. He's very weak and dried up. Look after him well, to avoid the selection. Eat! It doesn't matter where or when. Eat everything you can. The weak don't hang about for long here..." And he was so thin himself, so dried up, so weak... (Wiesel 42)

Fritzie Fritshall describes the fear and terrifying uncertainty of the *Selektion* that dominated the consciousness of all camp inmates:

[...W]e needed to run – not walk – in from of SS officers. We needed to show that we still had enough strength left [...]. I recall some women, as the hair grew back, they were beginning to get gray hair. And they would take a little piece of coal from one of the pot-bellied stoves that was in a barrack. And they would use coal to color their hair with, so that they would look a little younger. One grayed at the age of maybe eighteen or nineteen under those conditions [...]. If one had a scar, a pimple, if one didn't run fast enough, if one didn't look for whatever reason to the particular person who was doing the selection... They would stand there with a stick [...] (to the right or to the left) as you ran by them. One never knew if they were in the good line or the bad line. One line would go to the gas chambers. The other line would go back to the camp and to the barracks, to live another day. [...] We never knew when

our turn would come next. So one always lived in fear and one always tried to get through these selections for one more day. (qtd. in Berenbaum 127)

Ruth Klüger writes of a friend, Liesel, whom she had known in Vienna and whose father was in the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz-Birkenau. These squads of prisoners were given the task of receiving the incoming transports of victims, readying them for the gas chamber and cleaning up the bodies and their belongings afterward. Because of the atrocities to which these prisoners daily bore witness, prisoners (almost exclusively men) on the *Sonderkommando* were periodically liquidated. Liesel knew this and refused to leave him:

Liesel ist ihrem Vater treu geblieben. Der konnte nicht raus, wie sie mir erklärte, weil er zu viel gewußt hat. Daher könne sie sich nicht zum Arbeitstransport melden, obwohl man sie viel eher als mich hätte nehmen müssen, denn sie war ein paar Jahre älter. Sie hat es nicht einmal versucht, sie wollte bei ihm bleiben, sie ist mit ihm vergast worden. (Klüger 204)

As the war drew to a close, the retreating Nazis forced the remaining prisoners on death marches into the Reich, bound for concentration camps within Germany and Austria proper. Elie Wiesel and his father endured one of these marches through Poland to Gleiwitz, then boarded a train of cattle cars destined for the concentration camp Buchenwald. They had been given no food or clean water, but had lived on snow. Wiesel recalls that a German workman threw a piece of bread into the wagon in which Wiesel sat, amused at the spectacle of the starving men fighting each other for even a crumb of food. The heartbreaking scene that followed illustrates the depth of the damage the Holocaust inflicted on the human psyche:

Not far away I noticed an old man dragging himself along on all fours. He was trying to disengage himself from the struggle. He held one hand to his heart. I thought at first he had received a blow in the chest. Then I understood; he had a piece of bread under his shirt. With remarkable speed he drew it out and put it to his mouth. His eyes gleamed; a smile, like a grimace, lit up his dead face [...]. A shadow had just loomed up near him. The shadow threw itself upon him. Felled to the ground, stunned with blows, the old man cried: 'Meir. Meir my boy! Don't you recognize me? I'm your father [...] you're hurting me [...] you're killing your father! I've got some bread [...] for you too [...].' He collapsed. His fist was still clenched around a small piece [...] he [...] died amid the general indifference. His son searched him, took the bread, and began to devour it. He was not able to get very far. Two men had seen and hurled themselves upon him. Others joined in. When they withdrew, next to me were two corpses, side by side, the father and the son. I was fifteen years old. (Wiesel 96)

Toward the end of the war, those very few Jews who had managed to avoid deportation to the east endured the bombing raids of cities, along with the non-Jewish population. Though it was thus clear that the war was soon to come to an end, this reassurance did not make the bombardments any less harrowing. After the deportation of all of her Jewish friends, Ellen works in a factory and experiences the bewilderment of those last days of the war. The closing chapters of *Die grössere Hoffnung* see the Red Army and the Allies closing in on Vienna, and the twilight days of Nazi rule are reflected through Ellen's eyes. At the sound of the air raid alarm, Ellen takes refuge in the nearest cellar – which is actually a storeroom full of suitcases, rather than the designated air raid shelter. Trapped in the underground storeroom with two bandits who are pillaging the belongings, ostensibly those of the dead ("Koffer und Bündel, Koffer und Bündel.

Ihr Letztes, oh ihr Allerletztes, aber läßt sich das Letzte mit Riemen verschnüren?
Läßt es sich haben und halten? Läßt es sich bewachen und verschließen wie ein
ungerechtes Erbteil?" [218]), Ellen experiences random acts that both destroy
the innocent and save her own life:

Beschwörend starrte der kleine Hof über dem Stollen
in den blassen Himmel. Und ehe irgend jemand es fassen
konnte, entstand in der Luft ein Heulen und Johlen, Häuser
stürzten tief und fraglos in sich, als sanken sie auf die Knie,
die Teufel sangen Kanon und die Mauern barsten, um den
Durchblick freizugeben [...]. Verwüstet starrte der kleine Hof
in den blauen Himmel. Schwarze Papierfetzen trieben
ausgelassen darüber hinweg. Die große graue Fabrik war
in die Knie gebrochen, noch immer stürzten Balken und
Trümmer. Und wo das Lagerhaus gestanden war, das
Lagerhaus, unter dem alle andern Schutz gesucht hatten,
gähnte ein riesiger Trichter verwundert hinauf. (222)

As the end of the war is in sight, the chaos that reigned in the streets of
Vienna is evidenced in the novel by the storming of the wine cellars and
slaughterhouses of the city. While the adults riot and clamor to claim a share of
the last provisions in the city, Ellen stands amid the chaos, and cries not only for
the suffering around her, but also for the depths to which desperate humanity
can sink: "Ellen begann zu weinen. 'He, warum weinst du?' 'Über euch,' schrie
Ellen, 'und über mich'" (241).

Elisabeth Welt Trahan remembers the last days of the Second World War
in Vienna in her memoir, *Walking with Ghosts*. She recalls how Jews – of whom
there were very few left in Vienna at that stage – were relegated to the upper
level of the two-tier public bomb shelter, while those who did not wear the star
hid in greater safety on the lower level (Trahan 225). Daily life was chaotic,

punctuated by frequent air raids by the Russian and Allied forces; increasingly, people began to spend days as well as nights in cellars:

During those final weeks everything came to a halt. There was no longer any public transport, and the few private cars that managed to "organize" any gasoline were barely able to navigate the glass- and debris-strewn streets which were pitted with bomb craters and blocked by cave-ins. Few telephone lines worked and if you wanted to know whether your friends had survived the most recent bomb attack, you had to make your way to them on foot. Even then you might find their building in ruins and would not know if they were underneath or safe. Water was hard to come by, we had no coal – and that April was especially cold – and for long intervals there was no gas and electricity [...]. The long lines for the few groceries still on the shelves dispersed in a flash when the sirens began to howl. Did I say I survived without nightmares? The siren of a police car or ambulance and the droning of a low flying plane still send shivers down my spine. (Trahan 227)

According to Trahan, life for any Jews left in the city was hazardous until the very end: "A few hours before the Russians marched down our street, the SS dragged all Jews they could lay their hands on out into the street and shot them, the sounds of their machine guns and hand grenades drowned out by the noise of the shelling" (Trahan 228). The Germans announced their intention to defend Vienna rather than declaring it an open city and sparing it the coming destruction and mined the bridges across the Danube Canal (Trahan 230).

It is one of these bridges that Ellen, having lost all those dear to her and having long since set her gaze on a better world to come, attempts to cross with a message for the Russian command on the other side. On the threshold of death, Ellen sees the face of her deported Jewish friend, Georg, on the "other side," and finally realizes the *grössere Hoffnung*.

Noch einmal hörte Ellen das grelle erschrockene Schreien der fremden Soldaten, sie sah Georgs Gesicht über sich heller und durchsichtiger, als es jemals gewesen war. "Georg, die Brücke steht nicht mehr!" "Wir bauen sie neu!" "Wie soll sie heißen?" "Die größere Hoffnung, unsere Hoffnung!" "Georg, Georg, ich sehe den Stern!" Die brennenden Augen auf den zersplitterten Rest der Brücke gerichtet, sprang Ellen über eine aus dem Boden gerissene, emporklaffende Straßenbahnschiene und wurde, noch ehe die Schwerkraft sie wieder zur Erde zog, von einer explodierenden Granate in Stücke gerissen. Über den umkämpften Brücken stand der Morgenstern. (269)

Life "After": The Ashes of Childhood in the Aftermath of the Shoah

Children who, by some miracle, survived, make up the lowest percentage of any age group that came through the Holocaust (Eisen 4); approximately one third of all those who were exterminated in the death camps of Poland were children (Sereny, *Darkness* 100). Those who did survive did not escape the haunting memories of their tortured lives. Developmentally, emotionally and spiritually, the scars of the Holocaust would remain with them for a lifetime. As Gabriel Motola states:

When people are subjected to violence that they cannot combat or escape, over which they have no control, they relive the memory of such violence, no matter how much time has passed, as if it has just occurred. (Motola 212)

Faced with the task of building a new life in the wake of this trauma, many chose simply to try and repress what had happened to them, talking little about it and trying simply to rebuild a life for themselves as best they could. Only later did many see the need to bear witness, as Ruth Klüger did decades

after the end of the war, when, after a 1988 road accident in Göttingen that nearly took her life, she finally came to terms with the experiences of her youth and wrote her critically-acclaimed memoir, *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (Reiter, "Holocaust" 90).

The physical harm that resulted from their Holocaust experiences was most visible and was, therefore, the least complicated to treat. Years of starvation rations, exposure to various diseases and atrocious sanitary conditions devastated children's physical health and slowed their physical development. A chronicler of the Lodz ghetto testifies that "due to undernourishment, young children learned late walking and speaking, and older ones stopped growing" (Eisen 41). One little boy who was hidden in a cupboard and under a bed for four years still could not walk at the age of six (Eisen 64). Wilhelm Zienowicz writes that between the malnutrition and the trauma of those years, he had gastrointestinal diseases and wet the bed virtually every night (qtd. in Sliwowska 314). Once in physical safety, with medical care and nourishing food, many of these symptoms could be remedied.

Still greater and more complex than the obstacles to physical development, however, were the psychological scars that indelibly marked children who experienced the Holocaust. They had borne witness to atrocities that confound the imagination, and this left many of them incapable of trusting again. Many children who did survive would never return to life as it had been before the war; physical liberation could not free the children from the reality

that in most cases, their loved ones would not return. Bronka Niedźwieka recalls the time after her liberation from the Gross-Rosen camp at the age of thirteen as anything but joyful:

I was extremely ill and was not able to enjoy the freedom. For a certain time still, I remained in the camp infirmary. And then, in my one and only little dress, without a cent to my name, I traveled to where Mama, Dorota, and the rest of the family were sent to the ghetto. Here, after arriving at my destination, I lived through the worst moment of my life. I did not find anybody, not a single blessed soul. Today, I visualize myself as I trudged, tiny, emaciated (I then weighed 33 kg), over the cobblestones as if in some terrible state of horror. The street is long. I don't see anyone. I only knew that I survived to no avail, because I ended up alone in this dreadful cold world. I cry aloud, without interruption. I sob as never before and never afterward. (qtd. in Śliwowska 232, 233)

Just when children who had survived the Holocaust most needed the care and guidance of their families, particularly their parents, the lack of these figures in their lives left a gaping wound that could never be completely healed. This loss, in many ways, made any return to an interrupted childhood impossible. Separation from family was part and parcel of the Holocaust experience for most children who survived; when the Nazis were defeated, many children's souls were invaded by the terrible knowledge that their hope of reunion with their parents – a hope that helped many retain the will to survive – was never to be fulfilled. One girl who lost her entire family in the Holocaust describes the numb emptiness that she felt after the war:

I was ten years old when they were deported; I think it's my mother's absence that has marked me most, even more than the deportation... I feel that I have struggled

so much during my life, and now I don't even understand the meaning of that struggle. It's as though there is an immense vacuum around me, a vacuum, which, in spite of all my efforts, I cannot fill. (qtd. in Suleiman 569)

There were a fortunate few who were reunited with their families after the war. One of these was Ditta Cohen, who was living in a rest camp for Jewish children in Italy after the liberation. While performing at one of the camp's graduation ceremonies (which parents were encouraged to attend), Ditta was granted an unlikely reunion with family that might be described as miraculous:

In the audience sat a couple whom nobody knew and whom no one had seen before. They sat apart from each other, riveted to their seats, their eyes fixed on the stage. They did not move when Ditta, whose name had not been announced, sang a solo. But after the tumultuous applause, as the master of ceremonies called out her name, both strangers catapulted from their seats, speared through the crowd, and enveloped Ditta with hugs and kisses, crying, "Ditta mine, Ditta mine." They shook with deep sobs. The audience too broke into tears. All sensed that these were her parents. It came out later that Ditta's parents had fled from Hungary to Italy. The Gestapo and the Italian Fascists caught them and sent them to the death camps. Ditta was saved by hiding in the convent. Both parents survived and returned to Italy separately, seeking their daughter. By chance they learned about our camp celebration. They had not abandoned hope of finding her, nor did they overlook any possibility of discovering her whereabouts. They had not recognized her at first, for she had grown and matured. Only when they heard her name did they identify her. (qtd. in Eisenberg 328)

Even when children found family members again, their experiences and those of their parents remained burdens they would bear for the rest of their lives. A superficial return to normalcy could not obscure the fact that the horror to which they were subjected left survivors irrevocably changed and indelibly

scarred. On the one hand, because they had survived, they felt the need to carry on with their lives; on the other, because of the trauma they had suffered, they could not.

Child survivors often continued to think of everyday life in terms of the twisted moral code of the Holocaust, even longing to return to the horror of their lives under the Nazis, as it was the only world they had ever known or understood. After hiding in the sewers of Lvov with her younger brother, one young girl remembered:

Neither I nor my brother looked like normal children... I could not have enough of the bright sunshine, of the flowers and of everything out in the open. But my brother Pavel cried, he was fearful and dragged us back to the sewer because he was not used to the normal world. (qtd. in Eisen 120)

Children also suffered from problems of identity, particularly those who spent the war in hiding, trying to pass as Aryans. Necessity required many changes of names and appearances; by war's end, many children displayed profound existential confusion. Jana Levi's feelings were sadly typical for children who lived through the Holocaust, and they imply the harrowing nature of what these children endured within themselves:

I didn't remember anymore what my real name was. I only dreamt about it at night. When I woke up in the morning, I wouldn't remember it again. I knew I had a different name, but it was so important for me to forget it that I actually did completely forget. I knew that if my parents didn't know my name they couldn't find me [...]. Nobody would know who I was. I had completely become someone else and the real person, no one would know

who it was, and they didn't know who I was either.
(in Berenbaum 198)

Drastic measures had often been necessary to hide children in safety; yet these measures in themselves, while they saved lives, also caused many children to experience intense self-doubt. For instance, many Jewish boys who lived through the war in hiding experienced a psychologically painful identity crisis, for a common way to smuggle boys out of danger and hide them in non-Jewish society was to give them girls' identities and dress them as such (Berenbaum 198-99).

Other children were raised as Aryans, often made to adopt another culture as their own in order to authenticate the dangerous ruse of their falsified identities. Alicia Appleman-Jurman, who opened a home for Jewish orphans in Lvov after the war, recounts the story of a fifteen-year-old girl, Dina, who had found her ten-year-old sister in a convent and brought her to stay at the orphanage. The ten-year-old, whose given name was Ruth, had spent her formative years in hiding with Catholic nuns who had changed her name and raised her according to their religious beliefs:

At the convent, the sisters had changed her name from Ruth to Maria, and when Dina called her Ruth, she refused to answer [...]. It was very painful for Dina to see her sister constantly crossing herself and kneeling down to say her prayers before going to sleep, and often I would hear crying coming from that room. I felt a lot of sympathy for Ruth-Maria. She only vaguely remembered her parents and her home; she knew only the nuns and the convent where she had been hidden during the war years. (Appleman-Jurman 336)

The children for whom Appleman-Jurman, herself only fifteen at the time, cared in her orphans' home were indelibly marked by the frightful ordeals they had suffered. They were all tormented by nightmares, and had difficulty adjusting to normal life:

We had enough food and clothing; we had people who cared about us, we had all the physical comforts; but what we didn't have was peace of mind. Each day was fully occupied by activities [...]. But when night came, everything changed. All the horrors we had lived through under the German occupation were coming back in the form of terrible nightmares [...]. [S]ome of the children were hiding food. I couldn't really blame them, remembering how hungry I used to be [...]. I never brought up this problem, although [...] I searched the house every day because rats had started coming in to the apartment, and that terrified me. Since the time I had been in prisons I was terrified of rats.
(Appleman-Jurman 334)

Perhaps the most painful, though, was coming to terms with the loss of family members who, the children came to realize, would never return.

Appleman-Jurman comments that as the group of orphans began to celebrate the Sabbath again, they were reminded again of what they had lost:

To us children, the lighting of the Sabbath candles brought back images of our families, especially of our mothers. It brought back a time in our lives that was still painful to remember and too hard to forget. We couldn't accept our losses yet, and our longing for our families was so great that anything reminding us of them was unbearable.
(Appleman-Jurman 337)

Many felt guilt for their survival, knowing that in many instances, family members had been killed. Ruth Klüger uses the phrase "unübersteigbarer Stacheldraht" (Klüger 146) in reference to the barrier between the dead of the

Holocaust and those who survived it. She asserts the rights of the living to pursue life: "Ich kann nicht eure Gräber mit euch schaufeln. Wer nicht mit euch starb, muß anders und zu einem anderen Zeitpunkt sterben" (Klüger 148).

Despite the random and almost accidental nature of survival, many of those who lived through the Holocaust felt a profound guilt at having survived, as Dr.

Moshe Avital expresses:

Those of us who did not die shortly after the liberation gathered strength little by little, but our tragedy did not come to an end. It deepened, because only then did we realize how great our losses were. We also suffered a tremendous feeling of guilt. How is it that I am the one who survived? Am I more worthy to live than our dear ones who were annihilated? (in Eisenberg 303)

Liberation was, therefore, a bittersweet event in the lives of all survivors, who had endured irrevocable physical, emotional, spiritual and personal loss; children who grew up in the shadow of death against all odds were no exception. One story that emerged from the concentration camp of Buchenwald at the liberation concerned an eight-year-old boy, Israel Lau, whose nineteen-year-old brother Naftali had kept him hidden from the infamous death marches. When American liberation forces arrived in the camp three days later, an American chaplain, Rabbi Herschel Schechter, pulled the small boy from a pile of corpses. The conversation between the two of them illustrates the distance between the normal world and the "concentrationary universe" in which the children of the Holocaust had grown up:

The rabbi burst into tears and then, hoping to reassure the boy, began to laugh. "How old are you?" he asked

Israel Lau, in Yiddish.

"Older than you."

"How can you say that?" asked the rabbi, fearing the child was deranged.

"You cry and laugh like a little boy," Lau replied, "but I haven't laughed for years and I don't even cry anymore. So tell me, who is older?" (qtd. in Gilbert 792)

Chapter Three

Children's Resistance in the Holocaust

The unfathomable horror of the Holocaust stands in acute opposition to the concepts of childhood innocence and human decency; it defied logic, perverted human relationships and made a mockery of life. However, in the face of this appalling suffering, children still held tenaciously to life as long as it remained to them. They sought to survive by any means at their disposal; they even played in the shadow of death. Lawrence Langer points out that the particular tragedy of children in the Holocaust "offends the sensibilities and the imagination" perhaps more than any other:

If man's fate in war is to die and woman's is to mourn, a child's fate – as always – is to live and rejoice in his youth and innocence while they last; and the mind has special difficulty adjusting to any situation that reverses this "normal" trend. (Langer, *Holocaust* 124)

Since there was no designated space for play, for education or for childhood itself in the world of the Holocaust, children had to be resourceful. Since public parks, swimming pools, amusement parks and the like were forbidden to Jewish children, they played wherever they could. When formal education of Jewish children was restricted and, later, prohibited, they took part in clandestine schools and lessons. In a world intent on their obliteration, children still managed to create and imagine. Though physical resistance on the part of children was very rare (and, when it occurred, ultimately futile in view of the power the Nazis held over their lives), any life-affirming act – including

normal rites of childhood and humanity, expressed against all sense in a perverse world– also constituted a form of defiance.

The children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* voice this refusal to allow the Nazis complete power over their inner selves; in asserting their right to play, to hope and to be children in spite of the gruesome circumstances that will eventually annihilate them, they – like children who actually experienced the Shoah, whose stories are discussed in this chapter – defy subjugation:

Wenn ihr uns verboten habt, im Stadtpark zu spielen, so spielen wir auf dem Friedhof. Wenn ihr uns verboten habt, auf den Bänken zu rasten, so rasten wir auf den Gräbern. Und wenn ihr uns verboten habt, das Kommende zu erwarten: Wir erwarten es doch! (53)

Physical Resistance

One of the most heartbreaking aspects of the Holocaust experience was the tragic lack of effective physical resistance to the diabolical deeds of the Nazis. Among the many complex issues faced by historians and other scholars of the Holocaust are not only the questions of why the perpetrators so calculatingly executed such a monstrous crime and why so relatively few bystanders defended the rights of their fellow human beings, but also the haunting question of why so few victims effectively fought their victimization. Why did so few Jews have the foresight to escape while it was still possible? Why did so many go to their unjust deaths “like lambs to the slaughter,”³⁵ seemingly without protest?

³⁵ This phrase, which appears in the Torah and other Scriptures, is frequently referred to in discussions of Jewish resistance – or the seeming lack thereof – in the Holocaust. The image of “lambs going to the slaughter,” like the term “Holocaust” itself (see footnote on page 3),

Physical (including armed) resistance, by virtue of its immediate visibility, appears to us as post-Holocaust readers to be the most appropriate response to the violence of the Holocaust, and certainly the most psychologically satisfying to our wounded sense of justice and thirst for redemption. There are, indeed, a few outstanding and well-documented examples of heroic acts of Jewish resistance to the Nazis, including the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (19 April – 16 May 1942), the organized escapes from the death camps at Treblinka and Sobibor³⁶ and the destruction of the crematoria at Auschwitz, organized by the *Sonderkommando* and the prisoners' resistance movement within Auschwitz.³⁷

However, Raul Hilberg argues that outright physical resistance was historically only very rarely a response of the Jewish community to persecution (Hilberg 19). In addition, the Nazi apparatus severely restricted any means by which Jews might undertake such opposition to the "Final Solution." In his chronicle of the Warsaw ghetto, Emanuel Ringelblum called attention to the way

connotes some sort of ritual sacrifice and, consequently, hints at redemption. Extreme care must be taken in assigning any sort of redemptive moral value to the systematic murder of millions of human beings. This horrific crime has no justification.

It is interesting to note here that the 1942 proclamation issued by poet and resistance activist Abba Kovner in the Vilna ghetto specifically exhorted: "Let's not allow ourselves to be led like sheep to the slaughter" (qtd. in Dawidowicz 314). Equally noteworthy is the fact that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, perhaps now the most famous instance of organized, armed Jewish resistance, began on the second night of Passover. The "sacrifice" the SS had intended for that Passover was the liquidation of the ghetto within three days; the Jews of Warsaw held off the Germans for almost a month (Berenbaum 110).

³⁶ The uprising in Sobibor occurred on 14 October 1943; several hundred prisoners instigated an armed rebellion and, after battling the camp guards, escaped (Sereny, *Darkness* 115). Only a small percentage of these prisoners survived until the end of the war (Berenbaum 180). A similar rebellion took place in Treblinka on 2 August 1943; as many as two hundred prisoners escaped; about half of these survived the war (Berenbaum 180).

³⁷ On 7 October 1944, the *Sonderkommando*, supplied with explosives by an elaborate underground network within the camp, blew up one of the four crematoria in Auschwitz-Birkenau. A mass escape of roughly six hundred prisoners followed this act of sabotage, for

in which the Nazis precluded effective physical resistance on the part of the Jews:

[...] [E]veryone knows that resistance, and particularly if even one single German is killed, its outcome may lead to a slaughter of a whole community, or even of many communities. The first who are sent to slaughter are the old, the sick, the children, those who are not able to resist. The strong ones, the workers, are left meanwhile to be, because they are needed for the time being. The evacuations are carried out in such a way that it is not always and not to everyone clear that a massacre is taking place. So strong is the instinct of life of workers, of the fortunate owners of work permits, that it overcomes the will to fight, the urge to defend the whole community, with no thought of consequences. [Ringelblum now refers to particular Jewish communities which had been falsely reported to have resisted.] [...] They went passively to death and they did it, so that the remnants of the people would be left to live, because every Jew knew that lifting a hand against a German would endanger his brothers from a different town or maybe from a different country. That is the reason why three hundred prisoners of war let the Germans kill them on the way from Lublin to Biala; and these soldiers were known to have distinguished themselves in the fight for Poland's freedom. Not to act, not to lift a hand against Germans, has since then become the quiet, passive heroism of the common Jew. This was perhaps the mute life instinct of the masses [...]. (qtd. in Gilbert 369)

In light of imminent physical doom, the only resistance left to many Jews was to cling stubbornly to life as long as possible, which, in the face of an enemy unshakably committed to their destruction, was a defiant stance in and of itself. In the Warsaw Ghetto, Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum reportedly uttered the following words, which provide historical perspective and shed new light on the goal of resistance to the Nazis:

which four young women (accused of supplying the explosives) were hanged in the presence of the remaining inmates (Berenbaum 180).

Now is the time for the sanctification of life (*kiddush ha-hayim*) and not for the Sanctification of the Name (*kiddush ha-shem*) through death. Once when our enemies demanded our soul, the Jew martyred his body for kiddush ha-shem.³⁸ Today when the enemy demands the body, it is the Jew's obligation to defend himself, to preserve his life. (qtd. in Dawidowicz 216)

George Eisen, who focuses specifically on children's resistance in his study, *Children and Play in the Holocaust: Games Among the Shadows* (1988), points out that in the light of the Holocaust and its unprecedented horror, the definition of what constitutes resistance, defiance and opposition (like the definition of so many normative concepts that the obscenity of the Holocaust has forced human philosophy to reevaluate) is highly problematic. The human spirit is capable of forms of resistance to evil that transcend normative expectations:

One would like to see a powerful resistance against an evil of such magnitude as the Holocaust; one wishes for heroic figures who stand with avenging swords in their hands and fallen enemies strewn at their feet. But whereas this has been the customary image of heroic resistance through history, this picture – connoting “armed resistance” – presents only one of many options of human reaction to annihilation. It restricts our understanding of a wide range of actions that can occur in opposing one's physical and mental oppression or demise. The essence of opposition, which includes resistance, defiance, and protest, encompasses more than armed action. The definition must include a wealth of human responses, especially when the means of and ability to respond are severely limited. A simple comment of the survivor Genia Silkes exemplifies well the problem of specifically defining resistance. An educator and one of the heroines of the Warsaw Ghetto, she observed that “to live one more day is resistance. Amidst the dysentery and typhus, the

³⁸ Rabbi Nissenbaum is most likely referring here to the religious persecutions of Jews that took place through the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, including during the Inquisition, which demanded that Jews either convert to Catholicism (thus denying their own religion) or be killed (see Introduction).

starvation, is resistance. To teach and to learn is resistance.”
(Eisen 83)

Children in the Holocaust used these responses, more than physical resistance, to defy subjugation and deny their oppressors total victory. As opposed to stories of armed uprising, which are generally more satisfying to the human thirst for vengeance that an atrocity of this magnitude provokes, the accounts of children resisting through play and fantasy, through creativity and imagination, through education and through language – even through laughter and hope – both disappoint and exceed our expectations. Rather than providing an illusive (and, in view of the ultimate senselessness and pervasive evil of the Holocaust, profane) sense of resolution, stories of children’s affirmation of life in the shadow of death resonate with a poignant dissonance that works against trivialization and condemns evil in a voice that can only be described as a deafening whisper:

[...] [A] child’s action offers a much more delicate heroism because it springs from inequality, powerlessness, and innocence and demonstrates the strength that can be derived from living by ideals that contradict the executioner’s intended design. (Eisen 86)

Resistance Through Play

The concept of childhood play in the Holocaust seems blasphemous at first glance; after all, many feel, “a graveyard is no place for entertainment” (Eisen 55). Any discussion of frivolity or even normalcy within the context of this incomprehensible suffering, sadistic torture and calculated brutality must be

approached with moral trepidation and an unwavering faithfulness to the preservation and defense of unmasterable historical facts of state-sponsored and popularly condoned mass murder – knowledge that rebels against human comprehension.³⁹ The barren landscape of the Shoah is undeniably hostile to merriment; mature reasoning and documented evidence shrink in revulsion from the notion of play in the midst of ubiquitous death, unable to reconcile the playground with the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Yet, the unfathomable malevolence of the Holocaust also dwarfs adult attempts to reduce it to logical systems of rationality and belief. An attempt must be made to see children's reactions not from the traditional adult perspective (the sentimentality and symbolism of which appears to be hollow at best, in light of the irrevocable damage the Holocaust has wrought on the structure of moral rationalism), but from the vantage point of the children themselves. Ilse Aichinger, in compelling the readers of *Die grössere Hoffnung* to view the nightmarish universe of the Shoah through the eyes of children, affords us the opportunity to assume precisely that stance.

In contrast to adults' forms of "play," children's play functions, in many respects, as a tool with which they come to terms with reality, rather than changing it or even really transcending it (Eisen 109). Children's play rarely displayed the hedonistic, escapist and frivolous qualities that commonly characterized that of adults; rather, children used the act of play to make some

³⁹ Charlotte Delbo, whose writings on her experiences in Auschwitz (including *Auschwitz and After* and *None of Us Will Return*) have been critically acclaimed and are considered part of the canon

sort of sense of their surroundings – an ability most adults lacked. Bernd Zabel, in an article for the *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, agrees: “Doch im Unterschied zu den verfolgten Erwachsenen, die alles tun, um dieses Bewußtsein abzuschütteln, fliehen [die Kinder] die Realität nicht, sondern nehmen sie in ihr Spiel hinein” (qtd. in Bartsch and Meltzer 178).

As contrary to adult logic as it may seem, the ghastliness of the Shoah could not completely extinguish the children’s life force, particularly as it was expressed through play. Hanna Levy-Haas recorded her observations of the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, where her commitment to youth involved her in seeing to their welfare. She notes that the children’s yearning for play was instinctual and could not be quelled even by the misery and fear that surrounded them all: “I feel it is an urge that springs from the soul of the children themselves, for they follow my lead in their excitement, they show their desire to live, to play, a desire stronger than they are themselves” (qtd. in Eisen 60, 61).

The children of the Holocaust, like the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, had to face death as a part of their daily reality, and this is reflected in the content of the games children played. In the world of the Holocaust, misery and death became the overwhelming reality, and while the children continued to play, their games necessarily reflected what was going on around them, often with unflinching and heartrending realism.

of Holocaust literature, termed this “Useless Knowledge” and wrote a book by that title.

The stories of children's play in the ghettos and camps reflect both remarkable resourcefulness and gruesome reality. Since children rarely had access to toys or books, they invented new toys, games and even musical instruments with any implements at hand. Oskar Rosenfeld recorded that in the Lodz ghetto, children collected scrap wood and cigarette boxes, out of which they would fashion toys of their own:

Outside the ghetto, children receive beautiful and appropriate playthings as presents. [...] The children of the ghetto, however, are not blessed with such good fortune. They have to create their toys themselves. Still, the Jewish child is talented enough to do without the fantasies of the toy manufacturer. Our children collect empty cigarette boxes. They remove the colorful tops and stack them in a pile, until they have a whole deck of [...] playing cards. [...] They play games they invent for themselves, they devise systems, they let their imaginations take over. (qtd. in Eisen 70)

The children's games, however, were not far removed from the inescapable reality, which became the "normal" way of life for children who had never known anything else. The sorrows of daily life in the Holocaust, including hunger, separation from family, raids, deportations and death were assimilated into children's play. As Aichinger points out in *Die grössere Hoffnung*: "[...] was mit uns gespielt wird, verwandelt sich nur unter Schmerzen in das, was wir spielen" (146). This observation is strongly confirmed by stories of children's games in the death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the ever-present symbols of death became part of the children's play. While the children of the Lodz ghetto fashioned toys from cigarette boxes and scraps of wood, the lifeless limbs and wispy hair of the corpses were the objects of children's play in

Auschwitz (Eisen 90). A nurse in one of the children's blocks of Birkenau reported:

They played "Lageraeltester" and "Blockaeltester," "Roll Call," shouting "Caps off!" They took on the roles of the sick who fainted during roll call and were beaten for it, or they played "Doctor" – a doctor who would take away food rations from the sick and refuse them all help if they had nothing to bribe him with... Once they even played "Gas Chamber." They made a hole in the ground and threw in stones one after the other. Those were supposed to be people put in the crematoria, and they imitated their screams. They wanted me to show them how to set up the chimney. (qtd. in Eisen 80, 81)

The adult mind is repulsed and shocked by the image of innocent children enacting such gruesome scenes in their play, as if this were normal. As Gabriel Motola affirms:

[T]hose [children] most vulnerable socially, not to mention physically, were exposed to and had embedded in their memories a world inconceivable in even their worst nightmare. [...] [T]he adult reader, unlike the child victim, has a moral center which assesses and assigns blame, which demands justice as it laments its absence, which recoils from the unspeakable horror that the [children viewed] as normal" (Motola 222, 224).

As adults struggle to comprehend human catastrophes like the Holocaust, they often overlook or even dismiss the child's "other" ways of dealing with the trauma with which adults attempted to cope through logical, religious or philosophical means. Indeed, adults may gain unique insight into the tragedy of the Holocaust by allowing themselves to "re-view" children's responses. Ruth Klüger, writing from her own Holocaust experience, agrees:

Kindern, die Pogromen und anderen Katastrophen entkommen sind, hat man oft untersagt, diese Erfahrungen zu verarbeiten

und sie dazu angehalten, sich wie "normale" Kinder zu benehmen. Man tut das zum Besten der Kinder, die nicht über "diese Dinge" sprechen sollen. Die verarbeiten ihre Traumata oft in erfundenen Spielen, die sie vor den Erwachsenen geheimhalten. (Klüger 109, 110)

From the adult's perspective, the child is a vital symbol of humanity and innocence that must be preserved as a sort of psychological refuge from phenomena such as the Holocaust and from the consequent devastation of our moral landscape. Yet, children in the Holocaust witnessed everything that adults witnessed (Eisen 116); rather than sentimentalizing the Holocaust, their perceptions illuminate the depths of its perversity and injustice. Even as the children's games reflect the evils that defined ghetto and camp existence, they also provide poignant contrast to the environment in which they lived and died.

As Emmanuel Ringelblum wrote in his diary of the Warsaw ghetto, death was a central theme in the life in the Holocaust for adults and children alike: "Death lies in every street. The children are no longer afraid of death. In one courtyard, the children played a game tickling a corpse" (qtd. in Gilbert 151). Dr. Aharon Peretz observed similar true-to-life games in the Vilna ghetto:

I often observed children's games in the courtyards. They would enact an "action," dividing their roles as Jews and Germans. The "Germans" shrieked and bellowed, dissembling as brutes and abusing the "Jew." [...] Occasionally, they played "labor brigades." The unspeakable Jewish tragedy was reflected in the children's games. (qtd. in Eisenberg 48)

For Ellen and her Jewish friends, as well as for children of the Shoah in general, these "Kinderspiele [...] stellen [...] ein paradigmatisches Verhalten im

Umgang mit der eigenen Verfolgung dar" (Rosenberger 121). Through such games that enacted the atrocities that were being committed against them, children learned to accommodate themselves to the insanity and horror in which their everyday lives were immersed. Play, as Eisen argues, came to provide a reflective mirror of all the "sorrows, dramas and absurdities of the children's brief existence" (Eisen 77).

However, games also afforded a chance for children to take back their childhood, subverting, even for a moment, their own victimization. Eisen emphasizes that children did not merely copy the acts of violence they witnessed; rather, "they imposed on reality their own constructions and interpretations" (Eisen 114). In the Lodz ghetto, at the height of the children's deportations in 1942, children were seen to play "deportation," with different children acting in the roles of the Germans, the anguished parents and the frightened children. A defiant nine-year-old boy is said to have stepped out and protested his assigned role: "I don't want to be a German because the Germans take away little children from their mothers... and they kill them! [...] I don't want to be a German and I don't want to catch children!" (qtd. in Eisen 88). The children were, in essence, performing a dress rehearsal for a tragedy they inevitably faced; yet, being cognizant of their fate, one of the organizers of one of these games took on the role of "protector," empowering himself and the other children through their game as they never would be empowered in reality:

"The Germans will come to take you away, I won't let them, and you'll have to cry..." (Eisen 88).

Aichinger powerfully illustrates this appropriation of suffering through play in the sixth chapter of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, entitled "Das große Spiel." Their discovery and deportation imminent, the Jewish children enact a Christmas play that recounts not the traditional story of Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus in flight from King Herod, but superimposes it onto the children's own plight. The two stories – the Biblical, in which Joseph, Mary and Jesus found refuge (the "great hope") in Egypt, and the children's own reality, from which there was no longer any escape – mingle in the children's play: "Vor Ägypten wird gekämpft!" "Dann eben nach Polen." "Und der König der Juden?" "Fährt mit" (126).

This Christmas play, while presented by the traditional figures, also includes roles for peace, war and the world. Though in reality the world is torn by war and the children sense that their physical lives will end brutally and prematurely, they envision an alternate reality in their little drama. Ellen, in the role of the world, must choose between "War" and the figure of the Christ child (symbolic here not only of moral integrity, but also of the outcast minority). Ellen's decision determines "the World's" fate⁴⁰ (and, consequently, that of the

⁴⁰ Ellen's racial status of *Mischling* is worthy of reiteration in regard to the decision she faces as she plays her role. Her "self" is racially split; therefore, she is not born into one role or the other, but must decide for herself, of her own will, what her fate will be. In her own life, she consistently chooses to identify with her Jewish self and her outcast Jewish friends. In the role of the world, she makes a similar decision, reflecting Aichinger's message that every person faces a similar choice.

people who inhabit her); she thus assumes through play the power to transform the world into a better one than she or the other children will ever know:

Die Welt streckte die Arme aus dem Tuch nach dem Kind aus. "Ich habe mich entschieden, für dich!" Der Krieg riß den Heim vom Kopf. "Wie freu ich mich, ich bin der Frieden!" Jubelnd warf er den Soldatenmantel zurück in die Finsternis.
(148)

The irony of Jewish children performing a Christmas play poignantly conveys their subconscious need to belong in a vehemently anti-Jewish world, even as its strangeness contributes to the surrealistic tone of Aichinger's novel. The need for normalcy that is evident in the Jewish children's play implies their urge to adopt a tradition other than their own – both (subconsciously) to attempt to belong in a society that had cast them out and to show the moral bankruptcy of that society, which held to the Christian tradition while simultaneously condoning and perpetrating heinous crimes against humanity. Thus, the children not only highlight the tragedy of their situation, but they also subvert the story of the Christ-child, depicting him as a Jewish refugee and, like themselves, a victim of hatred and persecution. Aichinger's blurring of the distinctions between the Jewish and Christian traditions – evident not only in this scene, but also in numerous others throughout the novel⁴¹ – not only reflects her own background as a *Mischling*, but also underscores similarities between the two religions in a time and place in which the differences were exploited for diabolical purposes.

⁴¹ In the chapter entitled, "Der Tod der Grossmutter," for example, Ellen adopts the Christian ritual when she baptizes her grandmother following the old woman's suicide.

While the children cling to some vestige of childhood normalcy in performing a Christmas play, their drama is pervaded by the fear that has interrupted their young lives. Just after their play takes this happy turn, the children open the door to the man from next door, who has come to betray them to the secret police. The man is intrigued by and pulled into their play: "Er spielte im Namen aller unheiligen Könige, eine große stumme Rolle" (152). Though he temporarily forgets his sinister purpose for being with the children (154), he finally remains faithful to his "Herod/Judas" role in real life and, in drawing the curtain on their play, sets the stage for the final act of the children's physical lives.

In addition to considering the content of children's play, it is also important to address the issue of place. Because Jewish children did not have access to parks and playgrounds, they played in the only space allotted to them – which was often in the streets or in other places that were never designed for or even conducive to recreation. For example, Vienna's *Jüdische Kultusgemeinde* opened the Jewish cemetery to the young, not only to enlist their help in tending the community garden planted there to supplement meager rations, but also to give them a place to meet and to recreate. Ruth Klüger remembers playing in this very Jewish cemetery herself: "Die jüdische Kultusgemeinde stellte uns, den letzten jüdischen Kindern in Wien, Lese- und Freizeiträume zur Verfügung, und der jüdische Friedhof war unser Park und Spielplatz" (Klüger 88). Elisabeth Welt Trahan recalls:

Gate Four [of Vienna's Central Cemetery] became our home in the country, our summer resort. It was green, had trees and, right by the entrance, long before the first row of graves, there was a wide open space for sunbathing and ball playing. And no warnings or interventions of any kind: Gate Four extended its welcome to all Jews, living and dead. At first, picnicking, singing, playing cards, games or volleyball on a cemetery felt weird [...]. Then it occurred to me that the dead could hardly object to our presence. If anything, they might welcome the company of the living. An unanticipated feeling of solidarity and of belonging rose up inside me, and I began to feel at home on the cemetery. (Trahan 128)

In her first published work, the short story "*Das vierte Tor*" (1945), which formed the basis for the third chapter of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, titled "Das heilige Land," Ilse Aichinger describes the only playground that remained to Vienna's Jewish children in a more philosophical way. Aichinger's short story invites the reader to converse with the children who play in that graveyard, forsaken by the rest of the world. In answer to the "reader's" question (as articulated by the narrator), "[...] habt ihr denn gar keine Angst vor den Toten?" a young boy gives a reply that condemns the hatred and the indifference of the living: "Die *Toten* tun uns nichts [my italics]" (Aichinger, "Tor" 272).

Amid the gravestones of the dead, Jewish children found a sort of refuge from the living. When Aichinger expanded on this notion in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, she emphasized the relationship between the dead and the living; while the Nazis declare Jewish ancestry "wrong" and use it as cause for persecution, the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* find that their departed ancestors, in a figurative sense, hold the key to their identity. In the midst of this unsettling proximity to death, both as they play among the graves of the

dead and as they themselves live daily in death's widening shadow, is precisely the place in which the children find freedom, hope and a sense of self, despite their circumstances. The children not only play "*Versteckerl*" with each other amid the neglected gravestones, but they also play "hide and seek" with the dead, to whom their own fate is bound:

"[...] Unsere Großeltern sind verächtlich, unsere Großeltern bürgen nicht für uns." "Sie weigern sich." "Sie sind von weither gekommen und sind weit weggegangen." "Sie sind gehetzt wie wir." "Sie sind unruhig." [...] "Sie liegen nicht still unter den Steinen!" "Man beschimpft sie!" "Man haßt sie!" "Man verfolgt sie!" "Es sieht aus, als ob unsere Toten nicht tot wären," sagte Leon. Die Kinder packten sich an den Händen. Im Kreis sprangen sie um das fremde Grab. "Jetzt haben wir's, jetzt haben wir's, die Toten sind nicht tot!" [...] "Unsere Toten sind nicht tot." "Sie haben sich nur versteckt." "Sie spielen mit uns Verstecken!" "Wir wollen sie suchen gehen," sagte Leon. (55, 56)

Children found place for play where it seemed play could not exist. As discussed in the previous chapter, historical accounts confirm that the environment of disease, squalor and fear was far from conducive to childhood games. Before the ghettos were sealed off from the outside world, Jews were forbidden to enter public parks; afterward, such areas were almost always outside the ghetto walls. As one mother in the Warsaw ghetto complained: "With intentional foresight, not one park, not one playground or public garden was included in the area (picked for the ghetto)" (qtd. in Eisen 20); indeed, parks within the territory earmarked for the ghetto were either closed off or eliminated from the ghetto. Private yards in the ghetto were used to grow

vegetables to supplement the meager ghetto diet, or were rented out by their enterprising owners to those who could pay.⁴²

The official chronicle of the Lodz ghetto records that in 1942 an amusement park was set up just beyond the outer fence of the ghetto, taunting the ghetto children with the proximity of "normal" life:

The main attraction, the only one visible, is a suspension-type merry-go-around. Every day the children of the ghetto make a pilgrimage to this corner and gaze longingly at the activities on the other side of the fence. It is mostly children too on the other side, who are romping about and climbing into the small hanging boats of the merry-go-around. A radio amplifier broadcasts phonograph music. The ghetto children have never seen a carousel and have seldom heard music. They listen and peer at a curious, alien world, where children live in a sort of never-never land. A merry-go-around, almost within reach, only the barbed wire keeps them away. Children are children on either side of the barbed wire – and yet they are not the same. (qtd. in Eisen 32)

The Jewish children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* have a very similar experience. They spend their days on the *Kai*, close to an amusement park, yet they are forbidden to enjoy the carousel. That carousel becomes an object of the children's fantasies of freedom and normalcy:

"Gehst du ein Stück weiter gegen die Berge zu, so kommst du an das Ringelspiel mit den fliegenden Schaukeln." "Die fliegenden Schaukeln sind schön, da packt man sich und läßt sich wieder los-" "Und dann fliegt man weit auseinander!" "Man macht die

⁴² Chaim Kaplan records in his Warsaw Ghetto Diary: "Desolate, lonely lots, surrounded by high walls at the backs of courtyards or planted in the space between the houses of the wall have been turned into 'parks.' Mothers and children fill them. For space for a baby's cradle they pay 50 zloty a month, and if any member of the family besides the mother accompanies or comes to visit the child, he must pay an additional admission charge. Old people and invalids who want to relax and enjoy 'the beauties of nature' pay two zloty a day. The unemployed young people play games there, and fill the garden with gaiety and lightheartedness" (qtd. in Eisen 35).

Augen zu!“ “Und wenn man Glück hat, dann reißen die Ketten. Die Musik ist modern und der Schwung reicht bis Manhattan, sagt der Mann in der Schießbude. Wenn die Ketten reißen! Aber wer hat schon dieses Glück?“ (36)

The man in the shooting booth empathizes with the outcast children and, since his supervisor is away and there is no one else in the park, he allows the Jewish children to ride on the carousel – an act of defiance both on his part, in that he protests the children’s exclusion and violates the Nazi statute in order to bring the children a rare moment of joy, and on the part of the children, who, if only for a moment, fly to a world beyond the reach of their oppressors:

Die Kinder flogen. Sie flogen gegen das Gesetz ihrer schweren Schuhe und gegen das Gesetz der geheimen Polizei. Sie flogen nach dem Gesetz der Kraft aus der Mitte. Alles Graugrün blieb weit unter ihnen. Die Farben verschmolzen. Rein und grell flirrte das Licht zum Lob des Unbekannten. Das Bild ergab sich dem Sinn. Tief unten stand mit verschränkten Armen der Budenbesitzer. Er schloß die Augen. In dieser Sekunde hatte er seine Schießbude gegen die ganze Welt vertauscht. Die Kinder schrien [...] Der Glanz des fernsten Sterns hatte sie erreicht. (43)

Only with considerable effort on the part of the Jewish councils were playgrounds established in the ghettos. The President of the Jewish Council of the Warsaw Ghetto, Adam Czerniaków,⁴³ realized the need for organized youth

⁴³ Adam Czerniaków, like other members of the *Judenrat* in the ghettos, was a controversial figure. Part of Czerniaków’s function as Chairman was the organization of the deportations to Treblinka and other death camps, though it is not clear exactly how much the Jewish Councils knew about the true purpose and destination of these transports. In a diabolical twist on the crime of the Final Solution, the Nazis used these Jewish Councils (like the Jewish Ghetto Police) to implement their orders in exchange for special privileges (including the promise of exemption from deportation for themselves and their families), though they, like all other Jews in Nazi hands, were marked for eventual death after they had outlasted their usefulness. Still, many of the members of the *Judenrate* sought to use their position to improve the lot of the ghetto residents and even save lives. When in July of 1943 Czerniaków was not able to secure the safety of Warsaw’s orphans from deportation, he committed suicide. In his suicide note, he

welfare. Moved by the plight of the ghetto youth, Czerniaków records in his diary in 1942:

They are living skeletons from the ranks of the street beggars... They talked with me like grown-ups – those eight-year-old citizens. I am ashamed to admit it, but I wept as I have not wept for a long time. (qtd. in Eisen 43)

In addition to mounting a campaign to raise charity funds for the ghetto's children, Czerniaków also launched an effort to establish parks and playgrounds in the ghetto.⁴⁴ The three playground complexes that resulted from this effort not only provided much-needed space for the children to play, but they, along with other programs organized to feed, clothe, house and educate youth,⁴⁵ also symbolized a collaborative effort and commitment on the part of the ghetto community to the children – an act of faith that the next generation would survive. George Eisen argues that this investment despite the bleakness of their future was, in its own way, a form of life-affirming defiance for adults:

"Providing play opportunities was a conscious escape mechanism through which the adult population attempted to transcend in spirit both the physical walls of the ghetto and the mental walls of terror" (Eisen 49). Seeing children at play,

wrote: "I am powerless. My heart trembles in sorrow and compassion. I can no longer bear all this. My act will prove to everyone what is the right thing to do" (qtd. in Dawidowicz 301).

Chaim Kaplan, who was one of Czerniaków's most vocal critics, paid him the following tribute: "He perpetuated his name by his death more than by his life" (qtd. in Dawidowicz 301).

⁴⁴ The Nazi supervisors of the ghettos allowed these playgrounds to be established and permitted certain cultural activities primarily because of the calming effect they had on the ghetto population. The German Kommissar of Warsaw, Heinz Auerwald, confirmed this reasoning in a memo: "[...] All these measures have produced a certain reassurance which is necessary if [the Jews'] economic capacity is to be exploited for our purposes" (qtd. in Eisen 40).

⁴⁵ Among the grass-roots organizations dedicated to children's welfare were CENTOS (Central Shelter for Children and Orphans), ZOT (Society for the Preservation of Health), YYGA (Jewish Social Self-Aid Society) and ZTOS (Jewish Society for Social Welfare) (Eisen 36).

despite the fleeting pleasure of it, gave the older ghetto residents a glimpse of a world beyond the daily reality over which they had no control (Eisen 46), enabling them to envision their survival as a people beyond the Nazi nightmare.

Resistance Through Fantasy

Fantasy, like play, fulfilled a vital function in the lives of the young in the Shoah, providing them both with the means to cope with reality and with access to a world beyond that reality. Younger children do not yet clearly differentiate between fantasy and reality; for them, both are equally real: "Innere und äußere Realität gehen für sie ineinander über. Traum und Spiel sind ebenso Realität wie die Realität der Erwachsenen" (Kaiser 25). An examination of children's intuitive responses in the Holocaust reveals this intermingling of raw experience and fantastic constructs of imagination – a synthesis that not only enabled children to somehow cope with the horror of their oppression, but also, in a sense, empowered them to challenge it.

As Rosemary Jackson argues in her study, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, fantasy is never completely free from the cultural constraints against which it protests; indeed, fantasy is often the product of these constraints (Jackson 3). The power of fantasy to subvert reality lies precisely in its "uneasy positioning [...] between this world and the next" (Jackson 180). Jackson maintains that withdrawal into a world of fantasy can have the function not merely of an escape from tangible circumstances, but also of "protest against a

life-denying reality (my italics) " (Jackson 127) – a phrase that may certainly be applied to the Holocaust.

As the world around them became more nightmarish with every passing day, children often attempted to compensate by creating for themselves a reality outside that which could be dictated by the Nazis. In doing so, children could access a frame of reference beyond the present pain, in which they could find a sense of security and normalcy that was otherwise denied them.

Dreams and imagination are indeed the mainstay of childhood innocence and offer priceless insights into the human psyche in general. However, in a society that denied individuals an identity and undertook their physical alienation and annihilation based on externally defined racial criteria, this realm of the fantastic could become an outlet for the defiant expression of a forbidden self, especially for children. Those young people whose childhood was interrupted by the Nazi madness were denied the normal process of self-discovery during which the individual typically develops a moral center and an existential anchor. In the absence of this possibility, children in the Holocaust frequently turned to the realm of the imagination.

As suggested earlier, forced separation from friends and family was one of the shocks that the Shoah forced children to absorb. Some children invented imaginary friends to replace those from whom they had been torn when their families went into hiding or were deported. As we see in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, after Ellen's circle of friends is deported and she is alone, she often sees their

faces (particularly that of Georg, with whom she had a special bond) and converses with them. Though Ellen senses her friends have been sent to their deaths, she continues to relate to them through her imagination, until she is finally united with them in her own death (269). While it is not uncommon for a child in any time and place to have an imaginary playmate, George Eisen describes this creation of fantasy as a tool children commonly used to cope with their dismal situation:

It was natural that a child wished to be surrounded by a magic circle, a circle of friends, in which one could live another life, a life somewhat unconnected with the misery of the ghetto. These imagined friendships were not to facilitate an escape from reality, but to help adjust to, or assist in rationalizing, a completely irrational universe. (Eisen 73)

From the time Anne Frank and her family went into hiding in July 1942, Anne and the others in the "Secret Annex" were almost completely isolated from the world outside, from nature and, with the exception of the non-Jews who cared for them in hiding, from human contact outside their small group. Anne, the social extrovert, was thirteen years old when she entered the "Secret Annex," and she, perhaps more than the others, suffered from the lack of social intercourse with young people her own age. In addressing her diary entries to a friend of her own invention, Anne created for herself an outlet for this need. When talking to "Kitty," Anne was able to openly express herself as she had not been able to with her real-life friends, even before going into hiding. In her first entries, Anne writes:

[...] [O]n the surface I seem to have everything, except my one true friend. All I think about when I'm with friends is having a good time. I can't bring myself to talk about anything but ordinary everyday things. We don't seem to be able to get any closer, and that's the problem. Maybe it's my fault that we don't confide in each other. In any case, that's just how things are, and unfortunately they're not liable to change. This is why I've started the diary. To enhance the image of the long-awaited friend in my imagination, I don't want to jot down the facts in this diary the way most people do, but I want the diary to be my friend, and I'm going to call this friend *Kitty*. [...] I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support. (Frank 1, 5, 6)

During her time in hiding, Anne's relationship with "Kitty" facilitated her process of coming to terms not only with the normal changes and pains of growing up (thereby standing in for real-life girlhood confidantes from whom Anne was isolated), but also with the horror outside and the upheaval it had wrought in her young life. Anne shared with "Kitty" her most intimate thoughts, her frustrations with the others in the hiding place, her hopes, her doubts and her worst fears. Rather than serving as an escape, "Kitty" helped Anne deal with the grim reality that was ever-present in the "Secret Annex" and with the threat of a worse fate that hung over them at every moment:

Not being able to go outside upsets me more than I can say, and I'm terrified our hiding place will be discovered and that we'll all be shot. [...] Our many Jewish friends and acquaintances are being taken away in droves. The Gestapo is treating them very roughly and transporting them in cattle cars to Westerbork [...] It must be terrible[...] If it's that bad in Holland, what must it be like in those faraway and uncivilized places where the Germans are sending them? We assume that most of them are being murdered. The English radio says they're being gassed. (Frank 28, 54)

Imagination also served to carry children to a world beyond the gruesome present over which they had no control. In dreams and in fantasy, children could impose their own interpretations of their universe or even create a new one. In *The Third Reich of Dreams*, Charlotte Baradt indicates that dreams were an outlet for those whose wishes could not be fulfilled in the horrific reality in which their conscious lives were immersed (Langer, *Holocaust* 136). Yitshok Rudashevski, a young boy in the Vilna ghetto, remarked on the psychological respite that dreams offered: "I run through the cold sad little ghetto street ... to fall asleep as soon as possible, because in sleep you dream and have sweeter hopes than when awake" (qtd. in Eisen 27).

However, dreams were accessible to children not only through sleep, but through their use of imagination and fantasy in daily life. Through make-believe, children managed symbolically to escape their physical prison. Gabriele Stiltner shows how a typical childhood fantasy took on a particular significance in light of the dismal circumstances in which she lived as a ten-year-old girl. She recalls how she and her younger friend Hans would stand in the archways of the rat-infested attics in Theresienstadt "and pretend that we could fly... The flying fantasy was lovely, though, because if we could fly, then we could fly away" (qtd. in Eisen 73).

For Ellen and the other children in *Die grössere Hoffnung*, their fantasy world often seems more meaningful and more significant than the bleak reality that opposes it. In the third chapter of the novel, "Das heilige Land," the

children are urgently seeking to cross the border into safety just as war has made such a crossing physically impossible. In their desperate play in the Jewish cemetery, they form a funeral procession behind the coffin of a dead stranger, somehow subconsciously realizing that death was not only the destination at which their own physical journey would end, but also the point at which their inner selves could finally be validated and their questions finally answered:

Schweigend standen die Kinder vor der aufgeworfenen Erde. Es schien ihnen plötzlich, als wäre es der letzte Ausweg, der hier zu Ende ging, der letzte Weg, um über die Grenze zu kommen, der letzte Weg, um irgendeinen Nachweis zu erlangen. Als die Träger das Grab zuzuschaukeln begannen, wandten sie sich zögernd zum Gehen. (66)

The children encounter the driver of a hearse, who has overheard them speak of their longing for refuge in "das heilige Land" – here both a literal reference to Palestine, which symbolized the hopes of Jews everywhere for their own homeland, and a figurative allusion to the more abstract concepts of existential and spiritual freedom. The driver calls this to the children's attention:

"Das heilige Land ist zu weit, hört ihr?" Er neigte den Kopf tiefer zu den Kindern. "Es gibt eine Grenze ganz in der Nähe, ganz einfach, da hinüber zu kommen! Und von dort müßt ihr gar nicht mehr weiter. Da gibt es Spielzeug in Hülle und Fülle, da bekommt ihr alles zurück – " (67)

Still focused on a literal interpretation of the driver's offer to bring them over the border, the children promise to meet him in the cemetery and to pay him the sum he demands for his services. They depart in a *Trauerkutsche*, a fitting vehicle for a journey that will inevitably end where it began, depositing the children back in the cemetery – an omen signifying their inevitable physical

doom. The children suspect that they are being driven in circles and have been deceived (which, in the end, is exactly what occurs); yet the driver assures them that he can bring them over the border. The boundary to which he refers, as Ellen and the other children soon discover, is not one that divides a fanatical dictatorship from a democratic haven or separates danger from safety in the commonly assumed sense. Rather, the driver describes this border as that place, "wo die Linie zwischen Himmel und Erde läuft" (72) – it is the existential barrier that holds the spheres of perceived reality and unseen fantasy apart within the human spirit. Ilse Aichinger's concept of freedom and resistance are clearly visible in this sequence. True freedom, according to her philosophy, is dependent not upon external circumstances, but rather upon the individual's refusal to be defined by them. Meaningful resistance in this sense is not that which takes up arms and punishes the perpetrator, but rather that which rebels against the shackling of the spirit and the conquest of the soul.

Fantasy and reality merge in Aichinger's tale during the carriage ride just as they do in the childhood psyche; three legendary personalities join them on what the children believe is their escape. Each of these figures that accompany the children in this surreal carriage ride imparts a particular symbolic significance. Lieber Augustin⁴⁶ with his bagpipe, Columbus with his globe and

⁴⁶ Marx Augustin was a bagpipe player who performed his typically bawdy songs in Vienna's taverns in the late seventeenth century. The Black Death struck that city in 1679, killing almost a sixth of the population before it had run its course. One night, the habitually drunk Augustin stumbled into an open mass grave and slept all night in a heap of corpses. He climbed out of the pit the next morning and continued in his usual lifestyle until his death twenty-five years later. His story passed into Viennese legend through a folk song with which children were widely

King David with his slingshot are voices from legend, from the adventurous past and from religious tradition – figures whose fantastic dimensions represent different facets of the children’s longing. Augustin, who urges the children in the *Leichenwagen*: “[S]ingt das Lied in der Pestgrube [...]. Nur das Lied, das ihr singt, weist euch nach” (78), symbolizes their yearnings for the laughter and lightheartedness of the normal childhood that the Nazis stole from them.

Columbus, the explorer and dreamer, embodies the children’s unfulfilled longing for place and their search for a world other than that in which they are trapped.⁴⁷ “Entdeckt die Welt von Neuem,” Columbus advises, as he inverts their preconceived notions of freedom and belonging:

“Die aber sind, sind immer, und die nicht sind, sind nie.
Die aber sind, sind überall, und die nicht sind, sind nirgends.
Bleibt und horcht, liebt und leuchtet! Laßt euch verachten
und badet in Tränen, Tränen machen die Augen hell.
Durchdringt den Nebel und entdeckt die Welt! Sein – das
ist der Paß für die Ewigkeit!” (78)

The figure of King David, perhaps, carries special meaning; his victory as a small Jewish shepherd boy over an overwhelmingly powerful and ostensibly unbeatable opponent bears striking parallels to the situation the Jewish children

familiar (“O du lieber Augustin / Alles ist hin!”) (Paul Hofmann, *The Viennese: Splendor, Twilight and Exile* [New York: Doubleday, 1988] 18, 56). The Augustin legend has traditionally signified maintaining an indomitable – even sometimes irrational – zest for life that is independent of circumstances. Aichinger’s choice to utilize this legend in connection with life in the Holocaust casts this image in a new light, emphasizing tenacity and survival rather than the traditional hedonistic representation of Augustin.

⁴⁷ An interesting footnote to Aichinger’s use of the figure of Christopher Columbus in this sequence may be added by Simon Wiesenthal, the Holocaust survivor who is renowned for his work in bringing Nazi war criminals to justice. In his book, *Sails of Hope*, Wiesenthal explores the notion that Columbus’ voyage coincided with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain at the height of the Inquisition. Using Columbus’ own journals and other historical documentation as evidence,

face against the might of the Nazis to control every facet of their lives and to order their deaths at will. David is presented by Aichinger not as the powerful ruler he became as an adult, but rather as the young boy he was when he confronted Goliath ("Da sprang ein Knabe von innen her über die Mauern. Er trug ein kurzes, helles Kleid und eine Schleuder in der Rechten" [75]).

Though David is portrayed as a Messianic figure (as evidenced in the scene in which he is being tormented by the non-Jewish children in the street; he takes an old dog that the children had been ruthlessly torturing and offers it as a sacrifice for their sins), he promises no deliverance. The boy David offers the wounded, broken body of the dog (the symbol of an innocent scapegoat), not the flawless firstborn lamb required by the ancient Judaic tradition and reflected in Christian theology. As there is no fitting sacrifice to be made to atone for senseless evil, he offers up that very iniquity for which the human psyche demands an impossible redemption: "Wir wollen Gott von euren Sünden ein Brandopfer bringen. Kommt und schenkt ihm eure Sünden, weil ihr nichts anderes habt" (75).⁴⁸

The figure of David is also an embodiment of the "Otherness" that the Jewish children feel and that is used to justify the cruelty daily perpetrated against them. In confrontation with the young hoodlums in the street, David

Wiesenthal argues that Columbus himself was a converted Jew who may have been utilizing his commission as an explorer to bring Jews out of danger.

⁴⁸ Lawrence Langer comments on the futility of attempting to assign some sort of redemptive value to the Holocaust. In his essay, "Preempting the Holocaust," he warns against selectively "using – and perhaps abusing" the "grim details" of the Holocaust to support a return to normalcy that the very event of the Holocaust renders impossible. Langer quotes the historian

subverts the words of hatred that are being hurled at him. The children thus project their own argument onto this figure and find a voice in the construct of their imaginations:

“Bin ich ein Fremder, weil mein Haar Schwarz und gekraust ist, oder seid ihr Fremde, weil eure Hände kalt und hart sind? Wer ist fremder, ihr oder ich? Der haßt, ist fremder, als der gehaßt wird, und die Fremdesten sind, die sich am meisten zu Hause fühlen.” (76)

The figure of David reflects the Jewish children’s desire to stand face to face with their oppressors and prove that right can indeed triumph over might. However, King David admonishes the children: “Erschlagt den Goliath *in euren Herzen* [my italics]” (78). By the end of the carriage ride, as the driver admits he has indeed led them in circles and leaves the children in the exact physical location from which their strange journey started, it is clear to them that defiance and victory are battles they must fight and win within themselves, regardless of whether they succeed in changing their physical circumstances. As Lawrence Langer writes: “[N]othing changes in the midst of desires to alter everything until the *wish* becomes a more vital necessity for existence than actual events” (Langer, *Holocaust* 152). Though in reality the children have been cruelly deceived by the driver of the hearse, the children’s journey brought them to this critically important existential destination. Though in reality war and human indifference had closed national borders and avenues for physical escape,

Raul Hilberg, in his response to the question of whether there were any meaning to be derived from the Holocaust. Hilberg said, “I hope not” (qtd. in Langer, *Preempting* xvi).

the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* make a crossing of another kind, in which they discover how to create a solace for themselves even where there was none:

“Springt ab!” schrie der Kutscher zornig und rüttelte die schlafenden Kinder. “Springt ab, springt ab! Überall sind Posten, wir sind im Kreis gefahren. Schaut, daß ihr weiterkommt!” Die Kinder schlugen die Augen auf und hoben benommen die Köpfe. “Zeit, daß ihr aufwacht!” schrie der Kutscher. “Alles war vergeblich. Alles ist verloren, wir kommen nicht mehr über die Grenze!” “Wir sind schon darüber,” riefen die Kinder. Sie sprangen ab und rannten, ohne sich noch einmal umzusehen, in das Dunkel zurück. (80)

Fantasy and reality are so intertwined in this surrealistic sequence that they are often indistinguishable from one another. It is unclear to the reader whether the carriage ride actually occurred, or whether it was a dream constructed by children who were living a nightmare. Aichinger here succeeds in positioning the reader to take the perspective of the child, for whom reality and the realm of imagination are equally genuine and significant. The figure of Columbus articulates the significance of the imaginary realm and the power it held out to the children in light of their undeniably desperate situation: “Träume sind wachsamer als Taten und Ereignisse, Träume bewachen die Welt vor dem Untergang, Träume, nichts als Träume!” (75).

Ellen utilizes this same power of imagination as a tool of resistance in the eighth chapter of the novel, “Flügeltraum,” which is characterized by the imposition of fantasy onto reality. Her friends all deported and her grandmother dead, Ellen finds herself alone. The chapter opens with a wish-fulfillment dream (Reiter, “Holocaust” 90) that is undoubtedly connected to the grief of final and

irrevocable physical separation from her friends. The image of the train calls up images of the infamous transports to the East and the tragedy of their final destination: "Drei Minuten vor Abfahrt des Zuges vergaß der Lokomotivführer das Ziel der Fahrt" (184). This envisioned reprieve hints at Ellen's desire to imagine her friends out of danger and to compel humanity to resist moral subjugation. She involves herself in the conflict between the stationmaster, who demands that the train depart as scheduled, and the operator of the train, who represents the struggle of conscience that Ellen attempts to will in a right direction. The engineer's doubts mirror the morality to which the children had been clinging all along; when the stationmaster threatens, "...das kostet Sie den Kopf!", the engineer feels that that there were consequences that were still worse ("[...] als könne es ruhig den Kopf kosten, wenn es nur nicht das Herz kostete" [186]).

From behind the train on the other side of the tracks, Ellen cries out to the *Lokomotivführer*, pleading with him – and, by extension, with all in the station and with the reader – not to become an unwitting accomplice; to resist and to heed the dictates of conscience which were numbed with such shameful effectiveness in those years: "[E]s gibt Lokomotivführer, die nicht wissen, wohin die Reise geht! Ein versiegeltes Kuvert, das ist alles. Gebt euch nicht zufrieden! Fahr nicht, fahr nicht, solange du es nicht weißt!" (189). It is an appeal that the reader, with the benefit of hindsight, wishes to make in a desperate retrospective interrogation of a confounding and troubling past that cannot now be changed.

It is an appeal that is silenced by fear and blind duty – forces which are shown to emerge victorious over empathy and conscience in the minds of most of the adults portrayed in *Die grössere Hoffnung*. At the command of the stationmaster (“Steigen Sie jetzt ein und fahren Sie. Und denken Sie nie mehr über das Ziel nach. Übrigens, die Sache wird ihre Folgen haben” [189]), the engineer numbly climbs into the train, and it speeds away to “the front.”

A chase ensues, with the station police pursuing Ellen. Interestingly, though, a strange transformation occurs during the chase, which at times resembles the children’s game of “hide and seek” in the cemetery:

Lauf, Ellen, lauf, einer führt an. Längst ist ausgezählt.
Der verfolgt wird, führt an. Eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf,
sechs, sieben, du darfst das Opfer sein. Reiß sie mit,
reiß sie mit, die Kette der Verfolger! Quer hinüber,
Betreten verboten, quer hinüber über euch selbst. [...]
Arme Verfolger. Reiß sie mit, dahinter, ins Ziel. (192)

Ellen allows herself to be caught – in fact, she catches her pursuer and allows herself to be brought to the police station (198). By the authority of her ability to transcend the prison (in both the literal and the figurative sense) in which the police attempt to trap her, Ellen subverts their power, confounds their simplistic biases and blurs the distinction between victim and oppressor (“Ellen lief, sie lief wie ein versprengter, geschlagener König, blindes Gefolge im Rücken: diese Armen, die wie alle Verfolger zum Gefolge der Verfolgten wurden” [191]).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ This reversal of the roles of victim and oppressor is also visible in the fourth chapter of this novel, “Im Dienst einer fremden Macht.” As the children are gathered at their English lesson, they are being watched by (though Aichinger does not avail herself of the label, it is evident in the daggers the children carry and the uniforms they wear) a group of children from the Hitler Youth. As they hear the words of the old man who is teaching the lesson, they begin to think

Ellen feels a strange sympathy for her tormenters, because it was *they* who had lost a sense of direction and had exchanged inner truth for a perverted lie, their humanity for inhumanity ("Warum habt ihr eure Flügel gegen Stiefel vertauscht?" [206]). Even as the police drag the bloodied and terrified Bibi (who had escaped from the camp with Georg's help) into the station from her hiding place, Ellen tries to convince her to see the perpetrators with new eyes. In doing so, Ellen endeavors with gentle defiance to rob them of some of their power to possess their victims' souls. *The oppressors*, Ellen maintains, are, in fact, victims themselves, locked in a prison of their own making by hatred and indifference:

"[A]rme Gefangene. Sie können sich nicht finden, ihr Todfeind hält sie besetzt, eingenommen sind sie von sich selbst. Mit dem Teufel sind sie im Bund, aber sie haben keine Ahnung davon, ihre Flügel sind zerbrochen. [...] Wir müssen ihnen helfen, [...] wir werden sie befreien." (206)

The police chief who questions Ellen grows increasingly exasperated with her use of paradox in answering questions that strike the adult reader as routine in that setting. Aichinger succeeds here not only in allowing Ellen to interrogate her persecutors, but also in compelling her readers to examine themselves, to take a critical position and to re-view meaning that is often taken for granted:

"Geboren?" "Ja," sagte Ellen. Einer der Männer gab ihr eine Ohrfeige. [...] "Wie heißt du, wo wohnst du, wie alt bist du und warum antwortest du nicht?" "Sie fragen falsch," sagte Ellen. [...] "Wo bist du zu Hause?" [...] "Wo ich gewohnt habe," sagte Ellen, "war ich noch nie zu Hause." "Wo bist du dann zu Hause?"

beyond the propaganda with which they have been indoctrinated. They begin to feel, to fear and even to laugh – human actions that "arrest" their simplistic presumptions. "Wir wollten sie verhaften," says one of the children in Uniform, "[j]etzt verhaften sie uns" (93).

wiederholte der Polizist. "Wo Sie zu Hause sind," sagte Ellen.
"Aber wo sind wir zu Hause?" schrie der Oberst außer sich.
"Sie fragen jetzt richtig," sagte Ellen leise. (201, 203)

By the force of her imaginative outlook, Ellen infuses Bibi with a new strength to face her fate; rather than being hauled off to the train against her will, Bibi now leads the policeman – a sign that she has appropriated her own suffering. Bibi's young life certainly ended as brutally as it would have in any case; yet in the position she took toward death, she condemned those who sentenced her.

Ellen is held at the station and is to be brought to the secret police – the event she had feared – in the morning. But as she sees one of the policemen tear a page off a wall calendar to reveal that the date is the fifth of December, Ellen is filled with certain hope of a "miracle" on the eve of *Nikolaus*.⁵⁰ The magical significance of this holiday for children cannot be overlooked in connection with Ellen's story. On a day when children believe their dreams come true through a personage from the realm of fantasy and outside the everyday reality, she still believes that her wish – as improbable as it is – will be granted.

As "Nikolaus" and his procession move through the streets, children's song casts a fantasy spell over the scene in the station, overwhelming the guards, and Ellen escapes through the open door, eluding the secret police. On this one enchanted night, the voices of children could triumph over injustice, as in a fairy tale: "Leise muß man singen, wenn es finster wird, leiser, noch viel leiser, so wie

⁵⁰ The feast day of St. Nicholas is the day on which children traditionally set out their shoes or stockings for the visiting *Nikolaus*, hoping he will fill them with nuts and sweets.

Kinder singen hinter verschlossenen Läden. [...] Die Verlautbarungen flüstern nur mehr und verstummen endlich vor dem fremden Lied. Was singt es, was singt es? Stoßt die Läden auf!" (213).

"Flügeltraum" is a chapter of Ellen's story over which she has considerable control, conversing with her oppressors of her own free will, challenging them and holding them captive with her words, and finally escaping their hold on her. However, it is also a chapter in which fantasy is given free reign over reality. Scholar and Aichinger biographer Gisela Lindemann poses the question of whether the story could have evolved as it did in cold reality. Her answer leaves the reader no comfort: "[D]ie Geschichte [...] konnte nur so geschrieben werden" (Lindemann 63).

Resistance Through Education

From the earliest days of the Third Reich, education for Jewish children came under restriction that grew in severity. As has already been discussed, Jewish students were ostracized in classrooms that now incorporated the teaching of racial prejudice and hatred. Schools were soon segregated, with Jewish students being sent to all-Jewish schools, the enrollments in which steadily decreased as Jews were forced to emigrate or to relocate according to increasingly stringent directives. Where Jewish schools did exist, they were committed to offering their students an environment in which they felt some

sense of community and belonging that provided a much-needed anchor for their lives in an increasingly unstable atmosphere.

Later, as Jews under Nazi jurisdiction were forcibly ghettoized, this anchor was all the more crucial. Families were uprooted and children separated from their comfortable surroundings, their familiar routines and their closest friends and treasured belongings. Children's circumstances and the growing distance and hostility that characterized how non-Jews (even other children) related to them did much to dishearten children and erode their vitality. Likewise, adults were affected by their powerlessness to protect their children and prevent their victimization. The creation of educational programs, therefore, not only benefited the children, but also boosted adults' morale and provided them with an opportunity to assert human decency and normalcy. Being engaged in learning, teaching and caring for young minds left that much less time and energy to contemplate the miserable reality of daily life in the Holocaust.

When the Nazis officially forbade formal education for Jewish children under their control,⁵¹ as historian Lucy Dawidowicz points out, "they underestimated the place of education in the system of Jewish values. [...] The survival of Jews and Judaism depended on the uninterrupted transmittal of the

⁵¹ According to historian Lucy Dawidowicz, Jewish children were officially barred from all schools in the greater Reich on 15 November 1938. In the wake of the Kristallnacht pogrom only days earlier, this was among the many stringent anti-Jewish decrees that were passed with the intention of working toward the complete exclusion of Jews from economic and social life that was set in motion by the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 (Dawidowicz 103). As the Germans conquered and absorbed more territories, these policies were immediately applied to the Jewish populations residing there (Dawidowicz 252). Later, as we will see, the Jewish Councils of the ghettos had some success in persuading the Nazis to re-open the elementary schools. Secondary and higher education for Jews, however, remained illegal.

tradition from generation to generation” (252). Rather than accepting the order and obeying it, Jewish communities rallied to establish underground schools, both religious and secular. It was this effort, more than any other outside the traditional family structure (which would also be targeted for destruction), which instilled in children and adults alike a sense of purpose and gave them hope for survival and a future after the war. Yitzhok Rudashevski wrote one Saturday in 1942 of the boredom that set in when there was no school: “I think to myself: what would be the case if we did not go to school, to the club, did not read books. We would die of dejection inside the ghetto walls” (qtd. in Dawidowicz 254).

Anne Frank, along with her older sister Margot and Peter van Pels (called Peter van Daan in Anne’s diary), pursued learning even when locked away in hiding from the outside world. As their attic hiding place was situated above an office building, the inhabitants of the “Secret Annex” had to maintain absolute silence during the work day. The young people – particularly the two Frank sisters – spent much of this time reading whatever books they could procure and doing their lessons under the guidance of Otto Frank. Anne’s comments on her education in hiding contain sentiments expressed by schoolchildren everywhere, but they also reveal how learning – an act that presumes a future – helped provide her with some normalcy:

I’m terribly busy. Yesterday I began by translating a chapter from *La Belle Nivernaise* and writing down vocabulary words. Then I worked on an *awful* math problem and translated three pages of French grammar

besides. Today, French grammar and history. I simply refuse to do that wretched math every day. Daddy thinks it's awful too. I'm almost better at it than he is, though in fact neither of us is any good, so we always have to call on Margot's help. I'm also working on my shorthand, which I enjoy. Of the three of us, I've made the most progress. I've read *The Storm Family*. It's quite good, but doesn't compare to *Joop ter Heul*. [...] Cissy van Marxfeldt is a terrific writer. I'm definitely going to let my own children read her books too. (Frank 55, 56)

Some time later, Anne records in her diary the value she had discovered in continuing with her education – not merely to keep from passing time in boredom, but as a means to an end she could foresee beyond her immediate circumstances. Persistence in learning and in living signified Anne's belief in her future and the refusal of her youthful spirit to succumb to the undeniable gloom of her situation and the desperate odds she and millions of other young people in the Holocaust faced: "I finally realized that I must do my schoolwork to keep from being ignorant, to get on in life, to become a journalist, because that's what I want!" (Frank 249).

The very fact that education was forbidden by the Nazis did much to increase Jewish children's thirst for learning. In German-occupied Poland, for example, *komplety* (the Polish word referring to groups of students meeting to study outside a formal classroom) were set up in private homes and public soup kitchens under the direction of former teachers and with the help of Jewish charity organizations. One student would be assigned to keep watch for German patrols; when the warning was given, the makeshift classroom had to disappear quickly. One teacher commented: "In prewar times we had never witnessed

such studiousness as the pupils demonstrated in these *komplety*. They went after their studies with zest [...]. No more dilly-dallying, no more excuses. They asked the teachers for more work" (qtd. in Dawidowicz 253). Chaim Kaplan organized one of these *komplety* in his own home, having been a teacher of Hebrew. He described in his diary in February of 1941 the circumstances under which this clandestine education took place:

Jewish children learn in secret. In back rooms, on long benches near a table, little schoolchildren sit and learn [...]. In time of danger the children learn to hide their books. Jewish children are clever – when they set off to acquire forbidden learning, they hide their books and notebooks between their trousers and their stomachs, then button their jackets and coats. (qtd. in Dawidowicz 253)

Like nourishing food, books became contraband in the ghettos. Sixteen-year-old Mary Berg noted: "We are cut off from the world of books. Nothing reaches us, the creations of the human mind are not permitted to enter our prison. Not only groceries and industrial goods, but cultural products as well have to be smuggled into the ghetto" (qtd. in Eisen 20). When books were available, many children read them with an almost frantic voracity. The Vilna ghetto boasted a library, which functioned as one of the ghetto's cultural centers, where young and old came not only to read, but also to study and engage in research. Just over a year after it was first established in November 1942 the Vilna ghetto library celebrated the borrowing of its ten-thousandth book. In 1943, a fourteen-year-old girl was awarded a prize for having read the most

books. She continued to borrow and read all she could until the final "action," in which the ghetto was liquidated (Eisen 60).

Ruth Klüger describes her childhood educational experiences in Theresienstadt in language that indicates a kind of defiance: "Geregelter Unterricht für die Kinder von Theresienstadt war von der deutschen Lagerverwaltung streng untersagt. [...] Durch das Lernverbot gewann das Lernen an Reiz" (Klüger 149). She notes that she and the other Theresienstadt children benefited from the presence in the ghetto of so many fine intellectual minds from all over Europe, who took pleasure in sharing their knowledge on all kinds of subjects, including art, history and literature.

The "Paradise Ghetto" of Theresienstadt was a striking example of the commitment of adults to nurturing children as much as was possible in the Holocaust. The child prisoners of Theresienstadt benefited – if only for a short time – from Nazi opportunism. The Czech ghetto was shown off periodically by the Germans for deceptive purposes, and healthy and happy-looking children had immense propaganda value. However, after visiting observers witnessed enough to submit seemingly glowing reports of conditions in the ghetto and went on their way, the thin veil of decency and good treatment was torn away from the pestilence, torture and deprivation that characterized the real Theresienstadt.

As the outside world began to receive reports of German atrocities against the Jews, the Nazis utilized Theresienstadt as a ploy to counter those "rumors." In preparation for a visit by a delegation of Red Cross representatives from

neutral countries, the SS authorities instituted a "*grosse Verschönerungsaktion*" ("great beautification") in Theresienstadt. Rather than substantially improving the lives of the ghetto population, this "beautification effort" involved transporting thousands upon thousands of Jews – mostly the elderly, the sick and unemployed orphans – from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, where most, in fact, were gassed – the very action the Nazis were using Theresienstadt to deny. The ghetto buildings were freshly painted and grass planted where there had been none, cultural life in the ghetto received sudden support and supplies from the authorities, and the ghetto residents who remained – including many children – received long-withheld Red Cross food parcels and stylish clothing to wear to impress the visitors. The children's homes were decorated, and the children were suddenly given books, toys and candy – luxuries many of them had never seen in their short lives. However, threatening arrest and torture of any ghetto resident who kept anything loaned to them, the SS demanded the return of these items immediately after the Red Cross visit. After the success of this hoax, a propaganda film, "*Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt*," was filmed in Theresienstadt in the hopes that it would prove how well off Jews really were. After this effort was completed, the film crew and almost all the children were sent to Auschwitz (Berenbaum 88).

Ruth Bondy writes that during the first few months of Theresienstadt's existence as a ghetto, children under the age of twelve were housed with their mothers. In June 1942, after the last of the Czech civilian population of the

former garrison had been moved out, separate children's homes were established. Mothers were not required to send their children there, but in view of the fact that work was mandatory in the ghetto, children would often be left unsupervised all day. In addition to providing the children with supplemental rations whenever possible and affording them the opportunity to interact with young people their own age, these institutions (run by the Theresienstadt *Jugendfürsorge*), also attempted to educate the children (Bondy 319-320) and instill in them a sense of community and morale that many children in other ghettos quickly lost.

The thousands of children who passed through Theresienstadt symbolized hope to the residents of the ghetto, many of whom devoted themselves to their mental, physical and emotional well-being. Under the direction of dedicated adults, the children of Theresienstadt left a legacy of music, art and poetry to the world most of them left behind at a tragically young age.⁵² They performed songs, most notably the children's opera "*Brundibár*," orchestrated by ghetto inmate Hans Krása. The Czech-language opera told a fairy-tale-like story of the triumph of children over evil. The children's mother is ill, and the children are determined to buy the milk that will ease her symptoms. They sing in the streets to earn money, but the wicked organ-grinder Brundibár steals their money and drives them away. With the help of other neighborhood children and a few personified animals, the children defeat Brundibár. As Alexander Goldscheider

⁵² Of the approximately fifty thousand children who passed through Theresienstadt, only a few hundred survived to see liberation (Berenbaum 88).

notes in his commentary on *Brundibár*, the plot of the piece bears significant parallels to the struggle of the Jews – and Jewish children – against Hitler and the Nazis (Goldscheider 7). The children of Theresienstadt performed *Brundibár* for the Red Cross delegation in the summer of 1944.

Ghetto artists and caring teachers such as Frieda Brandeis guided the children of Theresienstadt in painting and drawing works of art that not only helped them express their pain, but also taught them to see beauty and hope even where there was none (Berenbaum 90). Many of these drawings outlived their creators: while hundreds of children's artworks are displayed in the Pinkus Synagogue museum in Prague's old Jewish quarter, only a few hundred among the fifteen thousand children who passed through Theresienstadt survived.⁵³

As long as these pursuits did not interfere with work or discipline, the Theresienstadt authorities tolerated children's recreational activities (Eisen 46). Since, as Klüger testifies, formal education was technically forbidden in Theresienstadt (as in other ghettos), lessons were often camouflaged as games, which contributed greatly to children's physical health as well (Eisen 46). Play groups took the place of the traditional school structure, and "harmless" play activities covered the more dangerous pursuit of learning geography, history, math and other subjects that related to the world beyond the ghetto walls and beyond the present constraints. Ruth Klüger remarked on the irony of the Nazis' apparent fear of Jewish learning: "Der angeblich verachtete jüdische Intellekt als

Gefahr, selbst hier hinter Mauern, als Schulunterricht für gefangene Kinder?" (Klüger 149). So desperately did the Nazis want to prevent the formal education of children (which indicated an investment in the future of the Jews as a people and therefore defied the decreed "Final Solution") that anyone caught teaching or learning in one of these clandestine schools faced death as punishment (Eisen 84). Consequently, the commitment shown by both adults and children to learning reflects a defiance of the Nazi edicts and a tenacious hope for a future that could not be guaranteed in reality, but was envisioned by a faith that rebelled against reason. In a poem he wrote in Theresienstadt in 1944, Karl Fleischmann gave voice to the hope children symbolized to adults in the ghetto, and articulated the necessity of educating the children not only for their own improvement, but for the morale of the adults as well:

Doch einer von uns
wird diese Kinder wieder singen lehren
und mit Bleistift auf Papier schreiben,
daß zwei mal drei sechs ist.
Denn einer von uns
wird sicher überleben. (qtd. in Viëtor-Engländer 107)

The children of *Die grössere Hoffnung* also attend a secret school in an attic. Noah, the old man who teaches their English lessons, also teaches them deeper lessons about life and learning that pertain to the reality in which the children live. Though the war has closed the routes of physical escape, the children continue to learn, investing in a future they may not have. They learn

⁵³ Many of the paintings and poems created by the children of Theresienstadt appear in the collection edited by Michael Berenbaum, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* (New York: Schocken, 1993).

the language of a country they will never enter, translating vocabulary from the language they speak but now wish they could unlearn. It is no longer *their* language, but that of those who oppress them; the children wish they could not understand the insults being hurled at them. When they beg for answers to these unanswerable queries, Noah responds by expounding on age-old paradoxes, pointing out that concrete answers are not the ultimate goal of questions. Rather, he implies, the children must continue to live and to learn in the midst of their circumstances "*trotzdem*" – anyway:

"Übersetzen, über einen Wilden Fluß setzen, und in diesem Augenblick sieht man die Ufer nicht. Übersetzt trotzdem, euch selbst, die andern, übersetzt die Welt. An allen Ufern irrt der verstoßene Sinn: Übersetz mich, übersetz mich! Helft ihm, bringt ihn hinüber! Weshalb lernt man Englisch? Warum habt ihr nicht früher gefragt?" [...] "Weshalb lernt man lesen, weshalb lernt man schreiben, wenn man sterben muß?" [...] "Weshalb lernt ihr Englisch, wenn es keinen Zweck mehr hat? Es ist Krieg, die Grenzen sind gesperrt, keiner von euch wird auswandern." [...] "Weshalb decke ich meinen Tisch, auch wenn ich ganz allein bin?" [...] "Es ist wahr, vielleicht werdet ihr nicht mehr fliehen können. Der Zweck ist gefallen. Aber der Zweck ist nur ein Vorwand, um das Spiel zu verbergen, nur ein Schatten des Wirklichen. Nur für die Schule und nicht für das Leben lernen wir. Nicht um zu töten und nicht um zu fliehen. Nicht um der Dinge willen, die knapp vor uns sind." (91, 99)⁵⁴

⁵⁴ To some extent, this episode in *Die grössere Hoffnung* has a basis in Aichinger's own experiences. In an autobiographical text entitled *Der 1. September 1939*, she writes: "Aber meine alte Englisch-Lehrerin sprach kein Wort vom Krieg, ich auch nicht. Englisch zu lernen wurde übrigens auch später, als die Hoffnungen, die an diesem Tag zu schwanken begannen, endgültig einstürzten, und gerade bei solchen, die so schwarz sahen, daß sie recht behielten, zu einer Art von Disziplin, die bis vor die Türen der KZs und der Gaskammern anhielt. Viele haben auf diese Weise, von Ein- und Ausreisegenehmigungen, gut dotierten Bürgschaften und Arbeitsbewilligungen unabhängig, die Grenzen gesprengt und die Länder, die ihnen keine Zuflucht boten oder bieten konnten, als Zuflucht erfahren. Auch mir kam am 1. September 1939

Resistance Through Language

It is evident to any who approaches the task of reading or writing about the Holocaust that language does not suffice to express or contain its horror. The collection of words that we use to describe both positive and negative aspects of the familiar ring shallow and empty when applied to cruelty and evil that is so heinous as to defy comprehension.

Ilse Aichinger herself addresses this issue often in her works, beginning with *Die grössere Hoffnung*, in which she chooses not to label characters in racial or political terms (Jewish children are those "mit den falschen Großeltern," the Hitler Youth are the children "in Uniform," for instance). She does not articulate the geography of terror; she makes no mention of the terms "ghetto," "Holocaust," "Nazi" or "Final Solution," and she does not even name the city that was the setting not only for her novel, but also for her own life during the Nazi period. The theme of language and its inadequacies has been a basis for many of Aichinger's later works.⁵⁵ As Birgid Haines observes, Aichinger "refrains from articulation, and sows the seeds of doubt in her readers about whether language or the languages we have at our disposal, are adequate to articulate reality at all" (Haines 111).

nicht sinnlos vor, eine Szene aus *Lady Windemeres Fächer* zu übersetzen, weniger sinnlos jedenfalls als so oft an den alten regulären Schultagen" (qtd. in Reichart 172).

⁵⁵ Among such works is Aichinger's *Schlechte Wörter* (1976), in which she plainly admits: "Ich gebrauche jetzt die besseren Wörter nicht mehr" (Aichinger, "Wörter" 217). In her writings since *Die grössere Hoffnung*, which have been primarily short stories, Aichinger's style has evolved from the strangely poetic surrealism of her youth into a greater simplicity.

In the wake of the Nazis' blatant abuse of language toward unimaginably monstrous ends, the very foundation of humanity was shaken, necessitating a certain mistrust of all that had come before – including words – lest humanity complacently allow itself to slip back into the patterns of thought and philosophy that, while perhaps not begetting the Holocaust, certainly failed to prevent it and continues in its inadequacy to deal with the devastation it has wrought.

Aichinger expresses this very notion in her 1946 essay, "Aufruf zum Mißtrauen":

Kaum haben wir gelernt, den Blick zu heben, haben wir auch schon wieder gelernt, zu verachten und zu verneinen. Kaum haben wir stammelnd versucht, wieder "ich" zu sagen, haben wir auch schon wieder versucht, es zu betonen. Kaum haben wir gewagt, wieder "du" zu sagen, haben wir es schon wieder mißbraucht! Und wir beruhigen uns wieder. Aber wir sollen uns nicht beruhigen! (Aichinger, "Aufruf" 33)

While Aichinger remains skeptical about the capacity of language to contain and accurately portray experience, she has built an illustrious career on attempting this impossible task. As she admits in her essay, "Meine Sprache und ich:" "Ich schreibe, weil ich keine bessere Form zu schweigen finde" (qtd. in Rothmann 13). Aichinger is one of the artists to whom Lawrence Langer refers, who

first "lose" the attention of their readers [...] – then "regain" that attention, its premises having been thoroughly altered. The will of the reader is drawn into the autonomous milieu of the work of art and is subtly transformed [...] until it is compelled to recognize, to "see" imaginatively both the relationship between the empirical reality of the Holocaust and its artistic representation in the work of literature, *and* the fundamental distinction between both of these worlds and the nonvictim orientation of this will. The reader is temporarily

an insider and permanently an outsider, and the very tension resulting from this paradox precludes the possibility of [...] "pleasure," while the uncertain nature of the experience recorded, combined with the reader's feeling of puzzled involvement in it, prohibits [the] fear that the reader may discern in the inconceivable fate of the victims "some sense after all."⁵⁶
(Langer, *Holocaust* 3)

Both the fiction that has been written about the Holocaust and the nonfiction accounts that bear witness to its atrocity clearly show the inability of both human language and human understanding to grasp its ghastly truth. As desperately as eyewitnesses to this heinous barbarism wanted to communicate their experiences to the world, they are experiences that even the words of those who endured them cannot enable us to share.

However, that very mission of bearing witness was a source of strength for many in ghettos and camps, giving them a reason to outlive their oppression. Some of these, like Simon Wiesenthal, survived to bring the crimes of the Nazis to the attention of the world by seeking legal justice.⁵⁷ Others, like Emanuel Ringelblum, Chaim Kaplan and other diarists in the ghettos and camps kept a written record of what they saw, hoping that notwithstanding their deaths, their words would chronicle the truth and serve as a remembrance. Still others, both Holocaust survivors like Ruth Klüger and Alicia Appleman-Jurman, and those who simply seek to cope with its tragedy, write to work through the pain and anguish

⁵⁶ Langer is referring here to the arguments set forth by Theodore Adorno in "Engagement," in *Noten zur Literatur III* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1965. 125-26, 127).

⁵⁷ During his time in the camps, Wiesenthal managed to keep a detailed mental record and even to sketch scenes of violence he witnessed, willing himself to live long enough to pass his testimony on to the liberators. Not only did Wiesenthal live and give his testimony, but the so-called "Nazi Hunter" has brought over a thousand Nazi war criminals to justice through his

that the Shoah has inflicted on the soul of the individual and of humankind alike.⁵⁸

Children, too, used writing and language in their own unique ways to similar ends. Both the autobiographical accounts of children in the Holocaust and fiction written from the child's perspective also enable a wary humanity to consider this century's most unfathomable crime in a language that does not hearken back to tainted sources or attempt to reduce indescribable human suffering to an understandable system of logic or belief. As Ruth Klüger, who wrote both a memoir of her own childhood suffering in the Holocaust and works of juvenile fiction on this theme, argues, the gaze of the child opens up a rare avenue of possibility to explore the Holocaust through a "renewed" kind of language. In defending the poetry she composed as a young girl in Auschwitz, Klüger explains that though her childhood verses strike the modern reader as simplistic and the limited vocabulary insufficient to contain a horror like the Holocaust, they reveal much about the human psyche in general. In fact, a useful parallel may be drawn between Klüger's admitted attempt to deal with her horrific surroundings in poetic language and the urge of humankind in general to come to terms with the brutality of the Holocaust. She intimates in the following passage a notion that echoes Aichinger's approach to language: it is not the

Documentation Center in Vienna. He defended his pursuit of fugitive mass murderers in his book, *Recht, nicht Rache (Justice, Not Vengeance)*.

⁵⁸ Georges Perec, a French Jewish boy who survived the Holocaust to become a writer, notes that the memory of his loved ones compels him to write: "I write because we lived together, because I was one among them, a shadow amidst their shadows, a body near their body; I write because

words we use to describe, label and compartmentalize that which we cannot understand, but the way in which we conceive of and struggle to redefine those terms in the wake of the Holocaust that hold out a hope of moving humanity into a future that has been irrevocably tarnished by the past:

Man muß die abgenützten Worte auf die Waagschale legen, als wären sie neu, was sie dem Kind ja waren, und dann muß man die Schlaubeit durchschauen, die es mir eingab, das Trauma der Auschwitz Wochen in ein Versmaß zu stülpen. Es sind Kindergedichte, die in ihrer Regelmäßigkeit ein Gegengewicht zum Chaos stiften wollten, ein poetischer und therapeutischer Versuch, diesem sinnlosen und destruktiven Zirkus, in dem wir untergingen, ein sprachliches Ganzes, Gereimtes entgegenzuhalten [...]. (Klüger 189)

Writing provided some children in the Holocaust, like Ruth Klüger, with a means by which they could attempt to cope with experiences that were not only appallingly unfamiliar to them, but that were also unprecedented in human history. When the comforts and routines of daily life – friends, family, school and other activities – were suddenly disturbed and ultimately eradicated from children’s existence, many felt the impulse to deal with these catastrophes by writing. One young girl in hiding, closed off from nature and from her friends, used her pen and the power of imagination to accommodate her longing:

Standing behind the curtained window, I watched the children playing and wished that I too could go outside. Instead I visited the children on paper: I took a walk with them on paper. (qtd. in Eisen 63)

These same longings, along with similar feats of fantasy, are evident in the diary of Anne Frank, for whom writing was very personal; Anne even

they left in me their indelible mark and the trace of it is writing: their memory is dead to writing;

regarded her diary as a particularly close friend. In an entry on Christmas Eve 1943, Anne admits her discouragement and turns to writing her feelings as a way of lifting her spirits:

[...] I long to have a really good time for once and to laugh so hard it hurts. We're stuck in this house like lepers, especially during winter and the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Actually, I shouldn't even be writing this, since it makes me seem so ungrateful, but I can't keep everything to myself, so I'll repeat what I said at the beginning: "Paper is more patient than people." Whenever someone comes in from the outside, with the wind in their clothes and the cold on their cheeks, I feel like burying my head under the blankets to keep from thinking, "When will we be allowed to breathe fresh air again?" I can't do that – on the contrary, I have to hold my head up high and put a bold face on things, but the thoughts keep coming anyway. Not just once, but over and over. Believe me, if you've been shut up for a year and a half, it can get to be too much for you sometimes. But feelings can't be ignored, no matter how unjust or ungrateful they seem. I long to ride a bike, dance, whistle, look at the world, feel young and know I'm free, and yet I can't let it show. [...] Well, that's enough of that. My writing has raised me somewhat from "the depths of despair." (Frank 153-155)

Later, in addition to buttressing her persistent optimism, writing in itself also became Anne's aspiration for her future career. She reviewed and edited her diary during her stay in the "Secret Annex" with an eye to publication, and she also wrote several short stories, including the fairy tale "Eva's Dream" and "Cady's Life." Her remarks of 5 April 1944, only months before those hiding in the Amsterdam attic would be arrested and sent to camps (in which all the inhabitants of the "Secret Annex," with the exception of Anne's father Otto,

writing is the memory of their death and the affirmation of my life" (qtd. in Suleiman 572).

would die), illuminate the role that the act of writing played in giving her hope and purpose:

I know I can write. A few of my stories are good, my descriptions of the Secret Annex are humorous, much of my diary is vivid and alive, but ... it remains to be seen whether I really have talent. [...] [I]f I don't have the talent to write books or newspaper articles, I can always write for myself. But I want to achieve more than that. [...] I don't want to have lived in vain like most people. I want to be useful or bring enjoyment to people, even those I've never met. I want to go on living even after my death! And that's why I'm so grateful to God for having given me this gift, which I can use to develop myself and to express all that's inside me! When I write I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived! But, and that's a big question, will I ever be able to write something great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer? I hope so, oh, I hope so very much, because writing allows me to record everything, all my thoughts, ideals and fantasies. (Frank 249, 250)

Though her life was cut tragically short (she died only weeks before her sixteenth birthday and the Allied liberation of Bergen-Belsen, where she was imprisoned), Anne's diary brought her a kind of immortality. Her diary, one of the best-selling and most widely read books of all time, stands as a poignant testimony to the strength of the human spirit as expressed in the words of a young girl – a girl who represented only one of the millions whose lives were snuffed out before their potential could be realized.

Others also found that writing provided an outlet for personal feelings and a source of psychological sustenance. Elisabeth Welt Trahan discovered the world of writing while surviving through the war years in Vienna. She created the character of Katharina Brienne, whose world and the creation of it held out

to Trahan a sense of empowerment – one that was belied by the reality of deportations, food shortages, bombings and widespread physical and emotional destruction:

[...] I was almost happy when I could sit by a window upstairs or with a candle in our cellar cubicle, and write. No, it wasn't only lethargy that kept me alive during those days. It was Katharina Brienne, more than anything else. [...] She was my mentor and model, my consolation and hope. She was my great secret. [...] Her world became my refuge. [...] I poured into her most of my own yearnings and hatred. I can't even recall if I had her die or gave her a happy end, but at any rate I did finish the book. I hoped that it would legitimize me as a writer and person after the war. (Trahan 208, 209)

Ruth Klüger, too, found that the creation of mental poetry helped her endure the horror of Auschwitz ("Ich hab den Verstand nicht verloren, ich hab Reime gemacht" [Klüger 191]). Klüger defends the right of poetry to exist after and to deal with the "Final Solution," remarking that "Gedichte sind eine bestimmte Art von Kritik am Leben und könnten [...] beim Verstehen helfen" (Klüger 190).

Children's poetry composed in Theresienstadt reflects this very function; rather than constituting an attempt to impose an incongruous logic onto their surroundings, these lines represent the children's need to give voice both to their pain and to their hope – neither of which those outside their situation (and, indeed, many of those who did experience it) could comprehend. One of these Theresienstadt children, fourteen-year-old Hanus Hachenburg, wrote a poem that shares its title with the ghetto where he spent the last months of his short

life before being deported to Auschwitz, where he was killed on 18 December 1943. Though his verses reveal the hatred he feels toward his oppressors, they also allow for the hope of renewal, dim as it appears to be in the unrelenting pain of the present:

I was once a little child,
Three years ago.
That child who longed for other worlds.
But now I am no more a child
For I have learned to hate.
I am a grown up person now,
I have known fear ...

But anyway, I still believe I only sleep today,
That I'll wake up, a child again, and start to
 laugh and play,
I'll go back to childhood sweet like a briar rose,
Like a bell which wakes us from a dream, ...

Somewhere, far away out there, childhood sweetly sleeps,
Along that path among the trees.
There o'er the house
Which was once my pride and joy,
There my mother gave me birth into this world
So I could weep. (qtd. in Mendelsohn 83)

This young boy's feelings are echoed by the children of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, who also seek a sort of purpose in writing and in language. The scene in which the children discuss the problems of their native language (which had become an instrument of their oppression) and the seeming irrelevance of learning the language of a country to which they can no longer hope for acceptance reflect the deeper crises of language with which Aichinger herself, like many other writers of her time, is concerned. The words and thoughts expressed by the outcast children with respect to how language relates to reality

are the same concepts with which Aichinger herself wrestles. Can we reasonably hope for renewal? Are we to “un-learn” all that we took for granted before the madness of the Holocaust intruded on our ordered universe of thought?

At the beginning of the fourth chapter of *Die grössere Hoffnung*, the personification of the words written in Herbert’s lost *Vokabelheft* powerfully depicts this realization that words have been overpowered by a monstrous violence and, at the same time, have been declared null and void by their lack of meaning:

In der Mitte der Gasse lag auf dem grauen Pflaster ein offenes Schulheft, ein Vokabelheft für Englisch. Ein Kind muß es verloren haben, Sturm blätterte es auf. Als der erste Tropfen fiel, fiel er auf den roten Strich. Und der rote Strich in der Mitte des Blattes trat über die Ufer. Entsetzt floh der Sinn aus den Wörtern zu seinen beiden Seiten und rief nach einem Fährmann: Übersetz mich, übersetz mich! Doch der rote Strich schwoll und schwoll und es wurde klar, daß er die Farbe des Blutes hatte. Der Sinn war immer schon in Gefahr gewesen, nun aber drohte er zu ertrinken, und die Worte blieben wie kleine verlassene Häuser steil und steif und sinnlos zu beiden Seiten des roten Flusses. Es regnete in Strömen, und noch immer irrte der Sinn rufend an den Ufern. Schon stieg die Flut bis zu seiner Mitte. Übersetzt mich, übersetzt mich! (81)

As Annette Bridges maintains, the acts of translation and of learning English signify a refusal to give in to justifiable despair and “represent linguistic practices that simultaneously communicate and draw attention to the limitations of that communication” (133). The children must translate, learn English and re-learn German *trotzdem*, just as humanity must now, after the Holocaust, grapple with the irreconcilable conflict between the unimaginable horror of the

Holocaust and our desperate need to come to terms with it, despite the impossibility of such a reconciliation. Aichinger exhorts her readers to approach life and language from the viewpoint of the "Outsider," never contenting themselves with the comfort of simplistic answers that stifle unanswerable questions. The advice of the old teacher to the children in *Die grössere Hoffnung* also conveys the vigilant position of "strangeness" that Aichinger encourages her readers to assume:

"Wer von euch ist kein Fremder? Juden, Deutsche, Amerikaner, fremd sind wir alle hier. Wir können sagen 'Guten Morgen' oder 'Es wird hell', 'Wie geht es Ihnen?', 'Ein Gewitter kommt', und das ist alles, was wir sagen können, fast alles. Nur gebrochen sprechen wir unsere Sprache. Und ihr wollt das Deutsche verlernen? Ich helfe euch nicht dazu. Aber ich helfe euch, es neu zu erlernen, wie ein Fremder eine fremde Sprache lernt, vorsichtig, behutsam, wie man ein Licht anzündet in einem dunklen Haus und wieder weitergeht." (90)

As we have seen, children in the Holocaust defied their circumstances in ways that were "outside" the traditional concept of resistance. The Shoah embodied the antithesis of childhood, yet they were children nonetheless – their very existence was in this sense an impossibility. Their survival – however rare – was victory. As Martin Gilbert states:

To die with dignity was in itself courageous. To resist the dehumanizing, brutalizing force of evil, to refuse to be abased to the level of animals, to live through the torment, to outlive the tormentors, these too were courageous. Merely to give witness by one's own testimony was, in the end, to contribute to a moral victory. Simply to survive was a victory of the human spirit. (Gilbert 828)

Despite this “victory,” testimony of children’s existence and resistance in the Holocaust provides no solace for humanity; instead, it confounds our expectations of comfort and a modicum of saving grace that will allow us to establish some sort of continuity with a past we are not willing to completely repudiate.

The horrific experience portrayed in *Die grössere Hoffnung* – which, as Lawrence Langer asserts, only adults could fully “understand”– is one which the children do not fully comprehend themselves (*Holocaust* 134). Their lives are interrupted by the Holocaust, their innocence a victim of it, and their deaths inexplicably demanded by it; yet children attempted to “assert life and wrench some coherence from an existence that has been reduced [...] to the illogic of nightmare” (Langer, *Holocaust* 136).

Most children who experienced the Shoah never awoke from the nightmare to the comforting arms of their mothers; the power of their imaginations could not truly transcend the ghastly circumstances under which they lived and died. Yet, the children still played and dreamed, learned and laughed – beyond the capacity of adult logic to explain, understand and justify it. Rather than signifying the frivolity of children’s responses to the Holocaust, perhaps this phenomenon illuminates the poverty of adult logic and the ultimate futility of its efforts to create a space in which humanity may live comfortably with the terrible knowledge that the Holocaust brought to light. Ilse Aichinger, in portraying the Holocaust through the eyes of children, exhorts humanity to

choose the discomfort of "Otherness" over the deceptive consolation of accommodating truth to our own expectations. Like the children in Aichinger's novel, the individual in the post-Holocaust world must learn contentedness with the absence of comprehension and choose to affirm life and search for meaning *trotzdem*.

Conclusion

“So spielen wir auf dem Friedhof”

Given the barren and bestial landscape of the absurd Holocaust reality, hope seems at the very least out of place. But, like other themes considered the previous chapter, it appears not as a product of hideous circumstances but as a sort of rebellion against them. Children played, laughed and hoped not because they had reason to do so, but *trotzdem* – in spite of the fact that such reasons did not exist. Anne Frank marveled: “It’s difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It’s a wonder I haven’t abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I believe, in spite of everything [*trotzdem*], that people are truly good at heart” (Frank 332).

Hope, as Holocaust survivor and renowned Viennese psychologist Viktor E. Frankl noted, was a necessary tool for survival in the concentrationary universe. “The prisoner who had lost faith in the future – his future – was doomed,” he testifies. “With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and become subject to mental and physical decay” (qtd. in Haase 94). The tenacity of the hope displayed by many children in the Holocaust, while perhaps seeming senseless to the modern reader, was an indication of their will to survive. The children of the Vilna ghetto, in a song they were heard to sing during the recess hour in the makeshift schoolyard among

the ruins and stench of the ghetto, voiced this faith that defied the will of their persecutors: "We are young, we will overcome" (qtd. in Eisen 61).

Lawrence Langer rightly cautions against the notion that the perspectives of children add "a touch of hope and grace to the story of the Holocaust" (Langer, *Preempting* xiv). There is no morality or meaning inherent in the torture and murder of millions; if anything, the story of children in the Holocaust intensifies the senselessness and horror of its brutality as perhaps no other story of the Holocaust can. However, the hope displayed by the children of the Shoah is not *die grosse Hoffnung* of some sort of reconciliation and redemption, which we in the post-Holocaust world, like the children in the novel and their flesh-and-blood counterparts, cannot realize. Instead, the children of the Shoah cling to *die grössere Hoffnung*, a hope that endures despite the horrific environment it softly defies and that finds purpose not in its eventual fulfillment, but in the very act of hoping itself.

Die grössere Hoffnung, as experienced by Aichinger and articulated in her 1988 speech "Rede an die Jugend," is the result not of escaping reality, but of being immersed in its horror: "[W]ir mußten [...] die Hoffnung, zu fliehen und so vor dem Terror, der rasch um sich griff, gerettet zu werden, in eine Hoffnung verwandeln, die dem Tod standhielt" (Aichinger, "Rede" 279). Manfred Karnick pinpoints the impossible task of this "greater hope," that of defying reason and achieving both presence within and transcendence of the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust: "[H]art am Rand der Hoffnungslosigkeit, in irdischen Zuständen,

die als irdische Hölle treffend bezeichnet sind, steht Hoffnung auf ihrer schärfsten Probe" (Karnick 366).

Die grössere Hoffnung after the Holocaust depends not on humanity's reconciliation of traditional sources and interpretations of meaning with a reality that will always lie beyond its grasp; that is the *grosse Hoffnung* that can no longer be reached. Rather, it is to be found in placing oneself in the center of the conflict between these two irreconcilable forces, defying oversimplification and resigning oneself living and communicating in the perpetual paradox that is the legacy of the Holocaust. Though despair is all that remains, we must refuse it; though understanding is impossible, we must seek it; though hope and meaning seem futile, we must pursue them *trotzdem*. Our concept of the Holocaust must allow not only for the *Judenstern*, the cattle cars and the ashen smoke of the chimneys, but also for the playground, the power of imagination and the laughter of children where they least seemed to belong. That is the essence of the resistance exhibited by children in the Holocaust, and it is in this space of perpetual conflict between these two worlds of unbearable reality and impossible hope that humanity must willingly place itself in order to begin to grasp the ponderous and maddening truth of the Shoah.

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