

**EMPATHY EFFECTS: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF
EMPATHY IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN HOLOCAUST THEATRE**

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis considers how and why empathy is important in Anglo-American Holocaust theatre, utilising close readings of selected plays, existing theories of empathy and Holocaust representation, and authorial formulations of new empathic definitions. The first chapter examines the empathic responses of Frances Goodrich & Albert Hackett and Meyer Levin to Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, and how these subsequently affected their stage adaptations of the book. The second chapter interrogates how spectator empathy with child protagonists is problematic in terms of the 'Holocaust fairytale' narrative often used, potentially leading to spectator misinformation in the context of historical fact. The third chapter investigates British critical responses to *Bent* in 1979 and 1990 in terms of 'precocious testimony', establishing that *Bent* was only received in its proper socio-political context upon the emergence of overt contemporary queer oppression. The final chapter explores how 'empty empathy', engendered by 'Holocaust etiquette', can be challenged through inverting Holocaust signs, or 'balagan', in 'Holocaust cabarets' to evoke alternative audience responses. The thesis concludes that empathy is central in Holocaust theatre, enabling spectators to identify and engage with representative characters – fulfilling the didactic purpose of Holocaust theatre in teaching about the genocide and encouraging anti-prejudicial views.

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INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF EMPATHY IN THEATRICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Empathy Effects: Towards an understanding of empathy in British and American Holocaust theatre examines the ways in which empathy, from the conventional perception of the word as synonymous with 'sympathy' through to cognitive involvement and the human mirror neuron system, is utilised within Anglo-American plays dealing with the Holocaust and how this affects the reception of such plays (and thus the Holocaust itself) by the spectator. The key importance and general purpose of plays about the Holocaust is to educate spectators about the human aspect of the genocide and its consequent impact. The majority of British and American Holocaust plays – that is, Anglophone plays written by authors from these countries – concentrate upon the narrative of the victim or survivor, with the primary focus being the Jewish perspective. Several examine the stories of other groups persecuted by the Nazis, such as homosexuals (Martin Sherman's *Bent* [1979] and *The Timekeepers* [2002] by Dan Clancy) and the disabled (*The First To Go* [2007] by Nabil Shaban). The perpetrator perspective has been presented periodically since the Sixties with plays from *The Man in the Glass Booth* (1967) by Robert Shaw, *2* (1990) by Romulus Linney and *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts* (1994) by Jo Davidsmeyer to *Albert Speer* (2000) by David Edgar and *Blonde Poison* (2013) by Gail Louw. In 1992 Christopher R. Browning published *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. This was followed by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996). Both books drew upon the same archival material, yet derived different conclusions regarding the nature of anti-Semitism in Germany and its role in the Holocaust. This subsequently provoked widespread academic debate and increasing interest in perpetrator studies within the broader field of Holocaust studies, as well as theatre and literature.

While the emergence of different Holocaust narratives and their function has been explored by scholars such as Robert Skloot (1988) and Edward R. Isser (1997), little academic attention has been given to the concept of empathy within the realm of Holocaust

theatre. In the field of cognitive theories of performance, led by specialists such as Nicola Shaughnessy (2013), there is an emerging and rapidly growing area of research in empathy and performance. Scholars such as Bruce McConachie (2008), Naomi Rokotnitz (2011), Gabriele Sofia (2013) and Matthew Reason (2013) have published studies examining empathy within areas such as audience studies, actor training, dance and theatre. I argue that empathy is intrinsic to the success of Holocaust theatre in that it influences both actor and spectator, and in a variety of ways. The most fundamental of these is the way in which empathy affects the creator's response to the source material, resulting in the choice of *what* story will be told (such as a direct adaptation of true events) and from *whose* perspective (victim, rescuer, perpetrator and so on). In terms of the creative/rehearsal process, empathy enables the actor not only to identify with their character, but I also posit that an understanding of empathy (in both the cognitive and affective definitions of the term) can enable the actor to gauge if they are over- or under-engaged with the material, and thus to help determine the potential response from the spectator. Following on from this, empathy aids the actor in establishing what response (empathic or otherwise) that they wish to evoke from the spectator, and in developing their performance accordingly. Empathy will be evoked in a number of different ways by the spectator during the performance, from perspective-taking (cognitive) to affective reactivity, and to different extents depending upon the individual. All of this is true within the context of theatre as a whole, but the questions that I am primarily concerned with are thus: what impact does empathy in the context of Holocaust performance have upon spectator engagement with, and further consideration of, the Holocaust itself? How can Holocaust theatre therefore be used as a tool for learning and engagement? I therefore argue that empathy should be at the heart of all creative decisions made by Holocaust theatre practitioners, from playwrights and directors to producers and actors.

In this thesis I will make a specific contribution by developing my argument through an examination of several relevant definitions of the term 'empathy' in the context of

Holocaust theatre, from authorial responses to the source material and the development of paradigms to critical and spectatorial reactions and the progress of the avant-garde. In the first chapter, “Empathy and the Author: Adaptations of Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl*”, I utilise two case studies, one by Meyer Levin and the other by Frances Goodrich & Albert Hackett, to posit how the empathic reactions of adapters – in this instance, ‘empathetic’ and ‘in-his-shoes’ perspective-taking (Goldie, 2011: 302); ‘empathic’ and ‘advisory’ projections (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999); and ‘empathic distress’ (Hoffman, 1987) – towards their subject stands to affect the potential empathic response of the spectator. In the second chapter, “Effective Empathy and the ‘Holocaust Fairytale’: Child Protagonists in Holocaust Drama”, I interrogate the use of child protagonists in three Holocaust plays to explore how the rise of the ‘Holocaust fairytale’ poses a significant problem in the context of mutually-reinforcing spectator empathy – predominantly arising from the universality of childhood and the engagement of the human mirror neuron system (McConachie, 2008) – and historical misinformation. In the third chapter, “*Bent* and the Staging of the Queer Holocaust Experience”, I analyse the British reception of Martin Sherman’s *Bent* (1979) within the framework of ‘precocious testimony’ (Felman and Laub, 1992) to demonstrate how such testimony could prevent the evocation of spectator empathy. In the final chapter, “‘Balagan’, ‘Empty Empathy’ and ‘Holocaust Cabaret’”, I investigate the inversion of Holocaust signs, or ‘balagan’ (Kaynar, 1998), in ‘Holocaust cabaret’ as a means of challenging what I term ‘empty empathy’ in the spectator.

In simple terms, ‘sympathy’ constitutes a spontaneous emotional feeling of alliance with, or pity for, another person, usually in the context of a sad event, while ‘empathy’ is an experiencing of similar emotion with another person, either spontaneously (through having undergone an equivalent event) or deliberately (through cognitive effort) (Davis, 1996). Historically, sympathy has been defined as “the shared feeling that results when we observe other people in emotional states” from sorrow to triumph (ibid, 2), whereas empathy, derived from the German term *Einfühlung*, originally referred to the tendency of observers to project

themselves 'into' what they were observing, usually a piece of art (ibid, 5). According to David Howe (2013), "To be sympathetic is to have feelings (*pathos*) that are the same as (*sym*) those of the other. To be empathic is to know, sense or enter into (*em*) the feelings (*pathos*) of the other." (13) The term 'empathy' came into usage in psychological terms to denote the internal imitation of "emotional cues" when witnessing another's emotional state, leading to similar – if lesser – reactions in the observer (Davis, 1996: 5). The notion of putting oneself into the place of another runs broadly through most definitions of empathy, from the first use of the word in English in 1909 by British psychologist Edward Titchener to contemporary explorations of it. For example, it has been delineated as "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, [...] provoked by witnessing another's emotional state" (Keen, 2006: 208); "a complex imaginative process involving both cognition and emotion" where the observer takes up the "psychological experience" of another person and "imaginatively experiences, to some degree or other, what he or she experiences" (Coplan, 2004: 143); "feelings that [...] are 'congruent with the other's emotional state or condition'" (Darwall, 1998: 261); "the faculty or capacity for imagining the [...] feeling and/or motives of another living creature" (Levy, 1997: 182); and so on. According to Carolyn J. Dean, the current contemporary understanding of 'empathy' – especially in a performative context – can be broadly rendered as the reliving of the past by identifying with the experiences of others (2004: 6).

George Gunkle (1963) maintains that due to the usage of the term in both the behavioural sciences and "communication arts of speech and theatre" it is not easy to come to a full understanding of what it means (15). He identifies five meanings that the concept of 'empathy' embraced from its perceived origins at the beginning of the twentieth century:

- 1) [T]he 'common sense' meaning of putting oneself in the place of someone or something else;
- 2) the [...] mental process in which an individual attributes aspects of his personality to an external object, animate or 3) inanimate;
- 4) and the physical meanings involving either *overt* motor mimicry [...], or 5) *covert* motor mimicry, [...] through [...] [the] concept of *Innere Nachahmung* [inner imitation]. (Ibid, 16)

Gunkle observes that the “concept of empathy” has been “seized upon [...] with more enthusiasm than accuracy, with the result that the term, stretched to mean almost anything, has come to mean almost nothing.” (Ibid, 17) Yet while Gunkle decries the apparent confusion of the overlapping and simultaneous usage of all five meanings above, Dolf Zillmann (1994) integrates the “various conceptualisations”:

Empathy is defined as any experience that is a response (a) to information about circumstances presumed to cause acute emotions in another individual and/or (b) to the bodily, facial, paralinguistic, and linguistic expression of emotional experiences by another individual and/or (c) to another individual’s actions that are presumed to be precipitated by acute emotional experiences, this response being (d) associated with an appreciable increase in excitation and (e) construed by respondents as feeling with or feeling for another individual. (40)

Empathy can therefore be seen as a process comprising the contemporaneous involvement of separate components to varying extents, with the outcome corresponding with Gunkle’s delineation of ‘putting oneself in the place of someone else’. Zillmann categorises three sets of processes through which empathy is brought about. The first constitutes “innate, reflexive processes” which are more generally referred to as “*motor mimicry*”; the second posits that empathy is aroused through “processes that entail neither awareness nor deliberate cognitive operations”, which Zillmann terms as “*affective reactivity*” and “*empathic reactivity*”; and the third involves “deliberate cognitive maneuvers [sic]” which, in the context of being “an attempt at understanding as much of [...] [the] other’s experiential state as possible”, address “*perspective-taking or role taking*.” (Ibid, 40) ‘Affective empathy’ is widely understood as what comprises an empathic response – namely the recognition of the feelings of another person while remaining clear that these feelings are those of the other and not the self (Howe, 2013: 13-14). ‘Cognitive empathy’ is based upon “seeing, imagining and thinking” about the situation of another from their point of view, and David Howe describes this as a “reflective process” that necessitates some knowledge of the “history, personality, circumstances and situation” of the other person in order to imagine what it is like to be them (ibid, 14).

'Motor mimicry' is the most primitive of all empathic processes, with its basis in mimetic movements as a response to seeing another person performing actions such as smiling, yawning, stuttering and reaching (Zillmann, 1994: 41). It is automatic in nature and, as an instantaneous reaction to the perception of another person's overt behaviour, it makes minimal demands on "elaborative and evaluative cognition" (ibid, 41). In recent years, particularly in the context of cognitive theories of performance, the concept of motor mimicry has been discussed within the neuroscientific framework of the human mirror neuron system (Keen, 2006; McConachie, 2008). As I will examine in further detail in relation to child protagonists in Holocaust drama, this system is located within the brain and involves the activation of specific neurons when an action is performed by the self or when one witnesses that action being performed by another. 'Affective' and 'empathic reactivity' are essentially learned or conditioned responses. These arise from either having personally experienced an identical event to that being witnessed or described, or through having experience of a comparable event, which is not identical but is similar enough to that being shown to induce a "mediated empathic response" (Zillmann, 1994: 42). 'Perspective-taking' is referred to by Zillmann as "deliberate empathy", which is achieved through "focused cognitive efforts" (ibid, 43). Interestingly, in the context of theatre, its involvement in spectatorial responses is limited as the continual flow of events onstage impairs "deliberate response preparations and makes their explicit execution unlikely." (Ibid, 43) However, Zillmann concedes that those who frequently engage in perspective-taking may come to do so habitually and without conscious effort (ibid, 44). An understanding of the above empathic processes, both as separate and simultaneously occurring components, and how they may be implemented in the context of spectators of Holocaust theatre, is of particular importance due to the perceived prevalence of 'Holocaust fatigue', as I shall now discuss.

‘Holocaust fatigue’ defined

One of the most commonly-identified problems surrounding contemporary perception and public reception of the Holocaust is that of ‘Holocaust fatigue’, which equates to a lack of empathy in relation to the genocide. Precise definitions of the term vary: for instance, blogger Arlene Stein (2013) centres her argument around the overpowering nature of the Holocaust in terms of defining Jewish identity:¹

Growing numbers of Jewish Americans yearn to be an ethnic and religious group [...] defined by distinctive foods and ritual customs, rather than by the legacy of pain and suffering. Holocaust memory is crowding out other sources of Jewish meaning [...]. Their Holocaust fatigue registers ambivalence about the fact that the genocide has emerged as a core element of Jewish identity.²

From this perspective Holocaust fatigue has arisen from a desire to celebrate what it means to be Jewish, rather than dwell upon persecution. In an article for the *Jewish Chronicle*, journalist Miriam Shaviv wrote: “About 10 years ago [...] I felt myself getting Holocaust fatigue. [...] I had reached saturation point. *I had been surrounded by Holocaust stories and history for so long, I did not feel the need to know any more.*” (2013; italics added)³ While Shaviv’s “cure” for her own Holocaust fatigue was to visit Auschwitz with a group of British teenagers and to see it from their perspective,⁴ her reference to feeling ‘saturated’ by ‘Holocaust stories and history’ is particularly pertinent. In British and American culture there are a wide number of documentaries, television programmes, books and films that deal with the Holocaust. These include the American television mini-series *Holocaust* (1978); the British television film *Escape From Sobibor*, based upon the 1982 book by Richard Rashke;

¹ Such a concern was raised as early as 1981, when Robert Alter questioned “How much ‘Holocaust’ is healthy for American Jews?” and was concerned that “overemphasis on the Holocaust overshadows other important dimensions of Jewish education, history, thought, culture, and literature.” (Magid, 2012: 120-21)

² Arlene Stein (2013) ‘Holocaust Fatigue and the Lure of Normality.’ *steinarlene* [blog] 26 August. <https://steinarlene.wordpress.com/2013/08/26/holocaust-fatigue-and-the-lure-of-normality/> [Accessed 1 May 2014].

³ Miriam Shaviv (2013) ‘My cure for Holocaust fatigue.’ 13 December. <http://www.thejhc.com/comment-and-debate/columnists/114000/my-cure-holocaust-fatigue> [Accessed 1 May 2014].

⁴ Ibid.

the American film *Schindler's List* (1993), based upon *Schindler's Ark* (1982) by Australian writer Thomas Keneally; and the British television series and book by Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the 'Final Solution'* (both 2005). In his review of *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust* (2004) by Carolyn J. Dean, Holocaust scholar Berel Lang asserts that such an output of Holocaust-related material negates Dean's claim of wider "moral 'numbness'" and an alleged loss of empathy in the wake of the Holocaust (2005: 1119). However I argue that this output, further to Shaviv's discussion, actually contributes to empathy fatigue by 'saturating' audiences in Holocaust accounts and narratives that rarely differ – predominantly through 'Holocaust etiquette', which I shall later discuss.

Barry Gewen (2003) questions if "too many Holocaust documentaries [are] now being made", citing Holocaust survivor Aviva Slesin: "[...] Even I roll my eyes when I hear about another Holocaust documentary [...]."⁵ The Holocaust fatigue of the survivor is mirrored by that of a German student, described by Michael Blumenthal (2000) as being "tired of hearing so much about the Holocaust" that it felt as if it were being "perpetually rammed down" his throat.⁶ Julie Szego (2005) states that people are "weary" of the Holocaust, especially in view of other historical atrocities which mean that "The vow 'Never again Auschwitz!' is just one cry among many."⁷ Jon Kean (2010) points out that the world today is "Holocaust adjacent".⁸ He observes that despite the Holocaust being "everywhere in film and television" there is actually "very little about the systematic destruction of 11 [sic] million people", and so popular representations do not truly face the actual genocide and suffering.⁹ A contextual backdrop is

⁵ Barry Gewen (2003) 'Holocaust Documentaries: Too Much of a Bad Thing?' 15 June. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/15/movies/holocaust-documentaries-too-much-of-a-bad-thing.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm> [Accessed 23 August 2013].

⁶ Michael Blumenthal (2000) 'Of Rest and the Weary.' 28 February. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2050935,00.html> [Accessed 23 August 2013].

⁷ Julie Szego (2005) 'Of ghosts, eternity and Holocaust fatigue.' 22 January. <http://www.theage.com.au/news/World/Of-ghosts-eternity-and-Holocaust-fatigue/2005/01/21/1106110938126.html#> [Accessed 23 August 2013].

⁸ Jon Kean (2010) 'Have we hit Holocaust fatigue?' 7 April. http://www.jewishjournal.com/cover_story/article/have_we_hit_holocaust_fatigue_20100406 [Accessed 23 August 2013].

⁹ Ibid.

offered instead where the Holocaust “looms in the background, foreboding, foreshadowing or coloring a character’s back story” and so “we *may* turn out to watch” (italics added).¹⁰ Kean argues that as a result:

[...] [I]t is exceedingly hard to get people to [...] watch something they think they have already witnessed. They insist that ‘they have seen enough’ and want us to ‘move on.’ As if one could watch ‘Schindler’s List’ or read Elie Wiesel’s ‘Night’ and feel that he had experienced the Holocaust. [...] Only the survivors understand that reality. We who live in the post-Holocaust world can only try to learn more [...].¹¹

The term ‘Holocaust fatigue’ thus encompasses the reluctance of many people to engage further with the Holocaust beyond a basic comprehension, primarily due to a perceived saturation of Holocaust films, television programmes and literature that consequently cause spectators to feel that exposure to just one of these constitutes an adequate encounter. From both the Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives, Holocaust fatigue also comprises an unwillingness to dwell upon the legacy of persecution and suffering. What is of particular interest is that the articles cited above concur that the ‘cure’ for Holocaust fatigue is increased knowledge and new perspectives. This involves reintroducing people to the facts of the Holocaust rather than using it as a background story, and encouraging the viewing of the Holocaust in a way that differs from conventional popular dissemination and reception of Holocaust material, such as films that have an “increasing inclination to go for sentimentality”¹² or documentaries that are “formulaic, using the same German footage, [and] the same static interviewing techniques.”¹³ Moreover, in terms of Holocaust education within schools, students need

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Barry Gewen (2003) ‘Holocaust Documentaries: Too Much of a Bad Thing?’ 15 June. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/15/movies/holocaust-documentaries-too-much-of-a-bad-thing.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm> [Accessed 23 August 2013].

¹³ Ibid.

to be engaged with the material in a way that does not cause them to feel that they are having the subject 'rammed down their throats'.

Issues with empathy

I do not suggest that empathy is without its problems; indeed, the multiple definitions of the term that I have touched upon pose a significant issue in how empathy is even categorised and comprehended. If, by way of example, I use just one of these definitions, the widely-understood notion of empathy as being stepping into the shoes of another, this in itself is problematic in that empathic reactions vary greatly between individuals. Rafael Moses notes that there is a spectrum of empathy that ranges from "excessive empathy to extremely negative or dis-empathy" (1985: 135), meaning that an individual's experience can range from vicarious traumatising to complete dissociation. Such a view is supported by Simon Baron-Cohen, who in *Zero Degrees of Empathy* offers a pertinent example of different levels of empathy in an account of a hanging at Auschwitz:

[...] [A]n inmate was forced to hang his friend who had tried to escape [...] [and] ordered [...] to put a noose around his friend's neck. The man couldn't [...] because his hands were shaking so much, with fear and distress. His friend [...] took the noose and [...] kissed his [...] hand, and then put the noose around his own neck. Angrily, the SS guard kicked the chair away from under the man [...]. [...] The empathy within the friendship comes through [...] powerfully [...], as does the extreme lack of empathy of the guard. [...] Presumably he chose this particular [...] punishment because he *wanted* the two friends to suffer. (2011: 3; original italics)

However, I argue that Baron-Cohen's claim of the guard as having an 'extreme lack of empathy' is incorrect, denoted by Baron-Cohen's assertion that the guard wanted his prisoners to suffer. By placing himself in the position of the prisoners and presuming how much anguish the hanging would cause the two men, the guard actually exhibited a significant level of empathy. I suggest that Baron-Cohen, in referring to the guard's lack of empathy, is in fact describing a lack of presumed feeling that could arguably be expected to arise from aligning oneself with those undergoing the experience. Herein lies another

concern: namely, that empathy does not always automatically equate to a subsequent correlation of identical feeling with the individual with whom one is empathising (Moses, 1985: 136). In the context of this thesis, therefore, while I posit that Holocaust theatre can enable a spectator to engage with the Holocaust itself by experiencing feelings correlating with the presumed anti-prejudicial themes advanced by Holocaust plays, such spectatorial responses cannot be guaranteed. This is illustrated by what Baron-Cohen refers to as the “empathy bell curve”; the majority of the population fall within the middle third of this bell curve, corresponding with medium or ‘ordinary’ ranges of empathy, while those in the lower third have “low” levels of empathy (potentially leading to dissociation) and those in the upper third experience “high” levels of empathy (possibly resulting in vicarious trauma) (2011: 13).

In the context of placing oneself in the position of another, two questions arise: can an observer ever place themselves entirely in the situation of someone else (empathetic perspective-taking), and how can one empathise with another individual who holds views diametrically opposed to one’s own? In relation to the first question, Peter Goldie argues that this is simply not possible; the empathy of an observer for the other will always be tempered by the life experiences and personal beliefs of the observer, even when undertaking deliberate cognitive efforts to place themselves wholly in the position of the other (2011: 302-03). Goldie’s argument is supported by Jan Slaby, who states that:

Empathy in this demanding sense fails to achieve a true understanding of the other and instead imposes the empathizers [sic] self-constitutive agency upon the person empathized with. Attempts to ‘simulate’ human agency, or attempts to emulate its cognitive or emotional basis, inevitably distort their target phenomena in profound ways. (2013: 2)

This is not to say that empathetic perspective-taking is completely unsuccessful, but rather that it is only efficacious when utilised at a lower level – i.e. when the observer does not attempt to ‘become’ the other person, but at least endeavours to perceive a situation from that person’s point of view (Goldie, 2011: 303).

The second question is particularly pertinent in the context of Holocaust theatre, which in some cases calls upon the spectator to empathise with a character who is ostensibly 'unempathic' – predominantly with narratives that are told from the perpetrator perspective. The problems presented through the notion of empathising with an unsympathetic protagonist are illustrated by the character of Stella Goldschlag in Gail Louw's *Blonde Poison* (2013). Goldschlag was a Jewish woman living illegally in Berlin during the Second World War until she was captured by the Gestapo, and she and her parents were promised exemption from deportation if she agreed to inform on fellow Jews in hiding. Goldschlag did so and, through her activities, a significant number of Jews (estimates range from several hundred to two thousand) were caught and deported; Goldschlag was subsequently convicted as a war criminal by the Soviets. In Louw's one-woman play, and correlating to wider views of Goldschlag's story, Goldschlag is simultaneously charismatic and repellent. She is a victim, a perpetrator, a seductress, a mother, desperate, devious, manipulative and, at the play's conclusion, suicidal. When Goldschlag relates how her baby daughter was taken from her by the Soviets and her unsuccessful attempts to form a relationship with her child after being released from prison, the spectator can empathise with her in human terms. However, when she moves from describing her parents in loving and affectionate terms to expressing outright contempt for them, and vice versa, throughout the course of the play, it is difficult for the spectator to maintain this empathy – especially because, as I encountered during my own experience as a spectator, there is a strong chance that the spectator will feel disgusted with themselves for empathising and being moved into alignment with the character. Will spectators really want to empathise with a character who ultimately makes them feel disgusted for doing so? Whilst it is not within the remit of this thesis to offer an exploration of empathy and the perpetrator perspective, or an exhaustive critique of empathy itself, I hope to offer an insight into just how broad the field of empathy within Holocaust theatre can be, and a beginning that poses opportunities for further and continued research in the context of what Nicola Shaughnessy has observed as

being the “productive and creative harmonies and dissonance” in the interaction between cognitive science and performance (2013: 4).

The efficacy and potential of Holocaust theatre

If the public are to turn away from the conventional ‘teaching’ of the Holocaust, grounded within the milieu of the historian and the documentarian, then I suggest that theatre is ideally positioned to refresh interest and create it anew. As Alvin Rosenfeld (2011) observes, many people learn about the Holocaust through representations of it within popular culture. By presenting multifaceted views of the genocide within a live and immediate performance medium, theatre about the Holocaust invites spectators to engage cognitively and affectively with the subject and (potentially) to draw parallels between the historical atrocities and their own lives, including current genocides and persecution. In this context Rosenfeld notes the words of the former project designer of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Michael Berenbaum, who declared that the story of the Holocaust has to be told in such a way as to connect one’s audience to the past in a manner that informs their “current reality” (2011: 66-67). The narrative must “[...] resonate not only with the survivor in New York [...] but with a black leader from Atlanta, a midwestern [sic] farmer, or a northeastern [sic] industrialist.” (Ibid, 67) Within each representation or telling there must be empathic factors that enable a diverse audience demographic to associate and engage with it.

Gene A. Plunka declares the importance of Holocaust drama, outlining the “ad infinitum” nature of plays in their written and performative contexts (2012: 22). He states that the capacity for staging Holocaust drama enables the introduction of the Holocaust to audiences that “may not be conducive to reading texts” or that “are more visually oriented”, and affirms that such plays have the advantage of “disseminating historical information, and therefore enhancing collective memory, to diverse groups of people worldwide.” (Ibid, 22) Likewise, Plunka underscores the ability of theatre to affect audiences “emotionally,

subliminally, or intellectually (sometimes simultaneously) in a direct way (between actor and audience)” in a way that other art forms cannot (ibid, 22). In his book *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (2004), Gary Weissman asserts that there is a strong desire among ‘nonwitnesses’ – those who do not have a familial or personal connection to the Holocaust – to be able somehow to experience the events of the Holocaust in order to further comprehension and understanding, thereby suggesting that Holocaust fatigue can be overcome by representations that involve the spectator/witness through cognitive and/or affective participation.

Rosenfeld posits that the memory of the Holocaust will soon come to depend less upon the records drawn by historians and more so on the projection of such events by writers, artists and filmmakers as the Holocaust becomes an event that no longer took place within living memory and creative artists are compelled to portray its horrors (2011: 2). Rosenfeld’s view is supported by Daniel R. Schwarz, who comments that “imaginative literature” will help to keep the events of the Holocaust “alive” as the “historical period [...] recedes” and cites Shakespeare as an illustrative example, stating that more is known about the War of the Roses and the history of Britain from his plays than from Holinshed’s chronicles (1999: 6). As the eminent historian Raul Hilberg observes, “[...] The artist usurps the actuality. The words that are written thus take the place of the past; these words, rather than the events themselves, will be remembered.” (ibid, 2) This sentiment is echoed by Edward R. Isser (1997), who affirms that “artistic licence must be coupled with social responsibility” (3), and Alison Landsberg (1997), who notes: “When there are no longer survivors left to testify [...] responsible memory transmission becomes problematic.” (64) I argue that Holocaust theatre is hence required to combine the aesthetic standards of the theatre performance with a careful and well-balanced grounding within the basis of Holocaust history, engaging spectators in questions of morality and codes of behaviour framed within the context of the first systematically mechanised genocide in history.

Many Holocaust scholars highlight the necessity of finding new ways to approach the Holocaust and its history as the number of survivors continues to lessen. The notion of the perpetrator narrative is increasingly advanced; as discussed at the beginning of this introduction, such narratives are certainly not new in Holocaust theatre. The perpetrator narrative is seen as potentially fulfilling various functions, including an understanding of 'why' and a warning against the ease of prejudice. However, instead of shifting focus to concentrate on perpetrators, I argue that a reconsideration of new ways to engage the spectator with existing material ensures a mutually beneficial relationship between Holocaust education and the theatre in that both can thus be innovative, educating spectators while perpetuating the avant-garde. This thesis seeks to explore existing Holocaust narratives within the theatre and how the use of empathy can spur the spectator away from conventional perceptions of the Holocaust and towards a renewed consideration.

"Empathy and the Author: Adaptations of Anne Frank's 'Diary of a Young Girl'" examines the first two stage adaptations of Anne Frank's diary: *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1956) by the husband-and-wife screenwriting duo Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, and *Anne Frank: A Play* (1967) by journalist and writer Meyer Levin. I discuss the concepts of "empathetic perspective-shifting" and "in-his-shoes perspective-shifting" (Goldie, 2011: 302), and "empathic projection" and "advisory projection", in which the situation of another person is viewed through either their own values or the values of the observer respectively (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999); and "empathic distress", in which the observer undergoes an empathic affective response to the distress of another person and experiences a parallel reaction (Hoffman, 1987). Drawing upon existing biographies and original archival research, I explore the backgrounds of Levin and Goodrich & Hackett to locate empathic commonalities with Anne Frank, and demonstrate how these had an impact upon the authors' adaptations through a close reading of two dramaturgical examples: action/extracts from the *Diary* and the use of religion. An analysis of newspaper reviews is utilised to discuss to what extent this affects the engagement of empathy from the spectator. Ultimately, I suggest that the

empathic response of an author to his subject in the context of empathic/advisory projection and empathic distress results in the substitution of the subject's story for that of the author and can thus have a detrimental effect upon spectatorial reception.

Moving on from considerations of authorial empathy but keeping within the realm of the creation of Holocaust theatre, "Effective Empathy and the 'Holocaust Fairytale': Child Protagonists in Holocaust Drama" interrogates the problematic nature of what I call the 'Holocaust fairytale', which often results within a play that features a child protagonist. Three case studies are used: *Number the Stars* (1996) by Douglas W. Larche, *Remember My Name* (1989) by Joanna Halpert Kraus and *The Flight into Egypt* (1996) by Julian Garner. The chapter opens with a discussion of "empathy fatigue" (Dean, 2004) and the effectiveness of the child protagonist in terms of readily evoking spectator empathy and emotional engagement, particularly within the context of the "mirror neuron system" and its use in theatre (McConachie, 2008). I posit that it is not the presence of the child protagonist that raises concern but rather the structure of the ensuing narrative. I discuss the rise of the Holocaust fairytale as a phenomenon within American theatre, resulting from dominant cultural values of memorialising the Holocaust. I define the seven precepts of the Holocaust fairytale, from the basis of the play in historical fact to the use of a reductive and/or redemptive ending, analysing the implementation of what Gary Weissman (2004) defines as the "sugar-coating" of the Holocaust – the key danger of the Holocaust fairytale. Through a close reading of the case studies I illustrate how each play fulfils these precepts to varying extents. Finally I argue that affective and cognitive empathy towards the child protagonist by the spectator is an ideal device within the framework of Holocaust engagement, but I call for a reconsideration of how plays featuring child protagonists are conceived.

Further to the notion of a re-evaluation of paradigms in Holocaust theatre, "*Bent* and the Staging of the Queer Holocaust Experience" investigates the two British productions of Martin Sherman's *Bent* in 1979 and 1990, the first play to represent the persecution of gay men by the Nazis. I discuss *Bent* in the context of "precocious testimony", a term developed

by Shoshana Felman and which is essentially a narrative or testimony that is given before it is widely known or even accepted as truth (Felman and Laub, 1992). By its very nature precocious testimony is thus an inhibitor of empathy, demonstrated by the hostile critical response to the 1979 premiere of *Bent* in London. I begin by considering the historical context of the play and the ensuing 'wall of silence' until *Bent* "put the world on notice" (Plant, 1987: 15). I review the critics' reactions to the 1979 production alongside a focused survey of original audience members, illustrating the vast difference between the critical and popular responses. I interrogate how the AIDS crisis and the implementation of Section 28 in the eleven years between the productions enabled critics to empathise with the characters, especially as the play was no longer truly precocious testimony, by drawing comparisons between the persecution of gay men by the Nazi state and the contemporary queer oppression in Britain of the 1980s and early 1990s.

In keeping with the notion of new perspectives, and in an exploration of the Holocaust theatre avant-garde, in "'Balagan', 'Empty Empathy' and 'Holocaust Cabaret'" I argue for the use of violating Holocaust taboos as a means of preventing the spectator from undergoing what I call 'empty empathy'. This chapter examines three case studies: *How We Danced While We Burned* (1973) by Kenneth Bernard, *Camp Comedy* (1999) by Roy Kift, and *Sammy's Follies: A Criminal Comedy* (2003) by Eugene Lion. I begin with a definition of 'empty empathy', in which the spectator is aware of historical reality but distances themselves emotionally from it, and the correlation between this and "Holocaust etiquette" (Des Pres, 1988), in which certain prescriptions regarding the treatment of the Holocaust in theatre and society dictate not only how plays are created but how they are received. I explore the concept of balagan, drawing upon the original use of the term by Vsevolod Meyerhold, and the definition by Israeli scholar Gad Kaynar in the context of Holocaust theatre, to mean a violation of 'Holocaust signs' in order to bring about a renewed sense of their original horror. I draw upon the theories of Kaynar and Patrick Duggan (2012) to establish the connotation of the Holocaust sign repertory. A close reading of each play

establishes to what extent each one fulfils the dictates of balagan and highlights the difficulties inherent in the use of Holocaust cabaret while simultaneously discussing why it is a necessary tool in eliciting spectator engagement, discussion, and a re-awakening of interest in learning about the Holocaust.

The scope of this thesis is to examine the ways in which the Holocaust is represented in a specific demographic of English-language plays, selected from the canon (such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Bent*) as well as from underrepresented works (such as *Anne Frank: A Play* and *Sammy's Follies: A Criminal Comedy*). The plays were selected through an evaluation of their prominence within the public arena and, subsequently, wider reactions to them (or a lack thereof). Through an examination of these case studies I aim to establish both the fixed and evolving roles of empathy within Holocaust theatre and their fundamental importance. Examples include the automatic deployment of empathy by the spectator (McConachie, 2008) and the concept of empathy as being a measure of the efficacy of a Holocaust play (Plunka, 2009 & 2012), as well as the need to prevent empty empathy and the existence of empathic prescriptions relating to Holocaust representation (Des Pres, 1987; Kron, 2001). Likewise, I would like to encourage a new consideration of how twenty-first century audiences can be engaged through empathy as, to paraphrase Rosenfeld and Isser, the responsibility of remembering the Holocaust and keeping it alive within public memory begins to shift increasingly to writers, artists, and performers.

EMPATHY AND THE AUTHOR: ADAPTATIONS OF ANNE FRANK'S *DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL*

Introduction

As stated in the Introduction, I argue that empathy should be at the heart of all creative decisions made by those who craft theatre about the Holocaust. In this chapter I am going to examine the importance of doing so in the context of the relationships of authors with their subject material and the necessity of maintaining what Amy Coplan terms “self-other differentiation” (2011a: 15). ‘Self-other differentiation’ refers to an observer’s awareness of themselves and another as distinct and separate, and therefore the observer’s ability to witness the emotions, desires, characteristics and so on of the other person while maintaining a clear sense of self and without becoming “enmeshed” (ibid, 16). In this way the observer is able to recognise themselves and their own experiences as being separate from those of the other person (ibid, 16), enabling empathy (feeling *with*) rather than sympathy (feeling *for*) (Howe, 2013: 13). While an observer will generally be influenced to some extent in their empathic response to another by their own personal experiences and beliefs (Goldie, 2011), self-other differentiation prevents the observer from either wholly projecting themselves on to the other person or becoming too closely associated with, or vicariously experiencing, the emotions of the other person. In the context of Holocaust theatre I argue that unless a play is specifically intended to be autobiographical in nature, such as relating a writer or performer’s familial connection to the Holocaust, it is important for a playwright not to project themselves on to the subject, or at least to be aware of and thus minimise the extent to which this may happen, otherwise there is an inherent risk that the play will become about the playwright and not about their subject – especially in the case of representing an historical figure. Likewise, if the playwright loses their sense of self-other differentiation then they can become enmeshed with their subject and, as a consequence, vicariously undergo the emotions or even experiences that they are attempting to portray. In either situation the play becomes about the playwright and not about their subject.

In this chapter I will consider the concept of loss of authorial self-other differentiation in two adaptations of Anne Frank's diary. *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1955) by Frances Goodrich & Albert Hackett is the most well-known stage adaptation of Anne Frank's diary as well as, arguably, the most famous piece of Holocaust theatre worldwide. The play won the 1956 Pulitzer Prize and an Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award, and was performed throughout America and Europe. However, Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation was not the first; Jewish-American writer Meyer Levin adapted the *Diary* in 1952 into *Anne Frank: A Play*, revising it in 1967.¹⁴ Yet *Anne Frank* remains largely unknown, while *The Diary of Anne Frank* continues to be staged in the present day. Levin's play did not receive its English-language premiere until it was performed at the Lyric Stage in Boston in 1983, two years after Levin's death. The virtual disappearance of Levin's adaptation from the public arena is generally attributed to his 'obsession' with Anne Frank and the controversy surrounding his adaptation; Levin claimed that the Jewish voice of Anne Frank, as represented in his adaptation, was suppressed by Anne's father Otto and Goodrich & Hackett, amongst others, when his adaptation was rejected for production. Consequently Levin undertook actions including a prolonged and extensive media campaign, lawsuits against Otto and other parties involved with adapting the *Diary*, letter-writing campaigns, and an investigation into Levin's personal conviction that Otto Frank had survived the concentration camps at the cost of his family's lives (a view that was proven to be false). Lawrence Graver (1995) and Ralph Melnick (1997) have written extensively about Levin's 'obsession' while others, including David L. Goodrich (2001) and Carol Ann Lee (2002), have dealt peripherally with the subject. However, existing literature does not examine Levin's case in the context of Levin as suffering from 'empathic distress', in which the observer undergoes a parallel response to witnessing the distress of another person (Hoffman, 1987: 53), even while there is a general focus on Levin's 'personal distress'. According to Coplan and Goldie (2014), "personal distress" occurs when the

¹⁴ Due to access and copyright restrictions, the text of the 1967 version is used in this chapter.

observer's distress causes "emotional over-arousal", leading to a focus on their own distress rather than that of the other, and through which the actions of the observer are aimed at alleviating the distress of the *observer*, not that of the other (xxiv). It is of note that the emotional reactions of Goodrich & Hackett towards the material is treated in a manner that denotes perception of those reactions as 'normal', while Levin's is inherently regarded as being the precursor to a dangerous and unhealthy fixation, even from the beginning of his encounters with the diary. I argue that it was not Levin alone who suffered from empathic distress, but that Frances Goodrich also underwent it, and they each experienced a loss of self-other differentiation by projecting themselves on to Anne and her story.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the history of Anne Frank's diary and the controversy following Levin's involvement in adapting it. I will utilise the work of Graver, Lee et al, Levin's writing, and original research conducted in the Meyer Levin archives held at Boston University (BU) to consider the personal experiences and beliefs of Levin and Goodrich, and thus their own perceived areas of empathy with Anne. I will draw upon the theories of Martin L. Hoffman, Peter Goldie, Amy Coplan, George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, and David Howe to outline concepts of perspective-taking, empathic distress, self-other differentiation and sympathy, and how these affected Levin and Goodrich. Through a close reading of two dramaturgical aspects within the adaptations – the use of action/extracts from the *Diary* and the inclusion of religion – I will illustrate how the adapters experienced varying levels of loss of self-other differentiation in projecting themselves on to Anne Frank, and consider how this subsequently impacted spectatorial responses as demonstrated by contemporary newspaper reviews.¹⁵ Ultimately, I will demonstrate that although it is Meyer Levin who is generally perceived as having projected himself on to Anne, Frances Goodrich & Albert Hackett did likewise. As such, I posit that their adaptations are highly selective

¹⁵ However, it must be noted that critical reviews, while offering accounts of contemporary reactions, do not necessarily reflect the wider audience response. Such an issue is addressed in "*Bent* and the Staging of the Queer Holocaust Experience".

readings of Anne's voice that prove a loss of authorial self-other differentiation and which have subsequently had a profound influence on the wider reception of Anne Frank. It is only in the last few years that efforts have been made in theatre and television to represent Anne as she represented herself in her diary. Notable examples are the 2009 BBC television mini-series and Theater Amsterdam's 2014 stage adaptation *Anne* – the only adaptation to date to draw upon all extant versions of the *Diary*.

The history of the *Diary* and the controversy surrounding adaptation

Anne Frank is the most well-known victim of the Holocaust. She was born in Frankfurt in 1929 to Jewish parents Edith and Otto and older sister Margot. After Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and increasing German anti-Semitism, the Franks moved to Amsterdam, where Otto established a successful business and the family made a new life for themselves (Lee, 1999: 26-35). The Nazis invaded the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, implementing progressively harsher anti-Jewish laws until eventually the Franks were forced into hiding in the so-called 'Secret Annexe' above Otto's business premises in July 1942 (Frank, 2002: 8, 19-20). Anne began keeping a diary, recording her hopes and fears as well as day-to-day accounts of life in hiding. Hiding with the Franks was Hermann van Pels (van Daan), a friend and colleague of Otto's, his wife Auguste, and their son Peter.¹⁶ The two families were aided by Otto's Dutch employees, and in November 1942 Fritz Pfeffer (Albert Dussel),¹⁷ who had been friends with Otto before the war, joined them (Lee, 1999: 112). On 28 March 1944 Anne heard a radio broadcast from the Dutch government in exile, in which it was announced that a repository would be established for diaries, letters and other documents depicting the lives of the Dutch people under Nazi occupation (Lee, 2002: 167). Anne continued to write her daily diary entries and contemporaneously rewrote previous entries with a view to publication

¹⁶ Anne gave pseudonyms to everyone in her diary. When editing it Otto chose to use the real names of his family and Anne's pseudonyms for the others; the van Pelses are called Hermann, Petronella and Peter van Daan (Frank, 2002: vii-viii). To avoid confusion, these names will be used in this chapter.

¹⁷ This was Anne's somewhat cruel pseudonym for Pfeffer: 'dussel' means 'idiot' in Dutch.

(ibid, 167). On 4 August 1944, the occupants of the Secret Annexe were discovered and arrested by the Nazis. Anne's diaries – comprising various notebooks and loose sheets – were gathered up for safekeeping by Miep Gies, one of the family's Christian helpers, ready for Anne's return. But Anne died at Bergen-Belsen in March 1945; out of the eight who had gone into hiding, only Otto Frank survived.

Otto was liberated from Auschwitz in January 1945 and returned to Amsterdam. In July he was told of the deaths of Margot and Anne, and Miep gave him Anne's diary (ibid, 210-11). Otto was "captivated" by it and translated excerpts from Dutch into German for his remaining family (Lee, 2002: 165-67); encouraged by their reactions, he began to consider publication. Working from both the original diary and Anne's revised version, he compiled a new version, omitting passages that he considered too uninteresting, intimate or wrathful (Lee, 1999: 217-18). In early 1946 publisher Annie Romein-Verschoor received the new version. Her husband Jan Romein was a respected Dutch historian and, reading the manuscript, he wrote an article called "A Child's Voice" which Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* published on 3 April 1946 (Lee, 2002: 172-73). The article described the diary and Romein's reaction in fervent terms, and publishers began to express interest. After further editorial changes (including the removal of twenty-five passages dealing with subjects such as menstruation, sexuality and Anne's relationship with her mother), the diary was published by Dutch publisher Contact on 25 June 1947 under the title of *Het Achterhuis: Dagboekbrieven van 14 Juni 1942 – 1 Augustus 1944*¹⁸ (Lee, 1999: 222-23). British and American editions were published in 1952 by Vallentine, Mitchell and Doubleday respectively. The *Diary* became an instant bestseller upon its American release, attributed to an ecstatic review by Meyer Levin in the *New York Times* (ibid, 225).

Levin's involvement with the *Diary* began in August 1950 when his wife, writer Tereska Torres, gave him a copy as a present. He was a forty-four-year-old novelist,

¹⁸ The literal translation of this is "The House Behind: Diary Letters from 14 June 1942 – 1 August 1944."

journalist and freelance writer who had been sent to France during the war as a battle correspondent and was one of the first Americans to see the newly-liberated concentration camps. He had been transformed by what he had witnessed and became possessed with a desire to tell the story of the Holocaust (Lee, 2002: 187). Simultaneously, he knew that he could never tell the story himself and that only those who had undergone the Holocaust had the right to do so: “Some day [sic] a teller would arise from amongst themselves.” (1950: 174) Torres gave him the *Diary* knowing of his desire to find such a ‘teller’, and Levin “fell in love with it.”¹⁹ He wrote to Otto Frank and suggested the possibility of adapting the diary into a play and/or film. Initially Otto was hesitant but Levin persuaded him that it was at least worth attempting. Levin began a personal campaign to assist Otto in getting the diary published in America, which resulted in his becoming Otto’s unofficial literary agent, and in March 1951 Otto accepted a publishing deal with Doubleday (Lee, 2002: 196). In March 1952 Levin was assigned to review the *Diary* for the *New York Times Book Review*. He “was confident the diary would find someone to transfer it to the stage [...] and hoped Otto would send any enquiries he received about it on to him, since he felt he could write the adaptation.” (Ibid, 198) This is apparently the first time that Levin explicitly stated his wish to adapt the *Diary* to Otto, and this was fortified by Levin’s offer to step aside as agent as his real desire was to undertake the actual writing.²⁰ Otto told Levin that he wanted him to remain as agent for the adaptation, as he was “not entirely confident” with Doubleday (ibid, 198). On 31 March,

[...] Otto signed a document authorizing Levin to ‘negotiate for motion picture, television, radio and dramatic adaptation for a period of one year from this date, with the stipulation that I, as sole owner of these rights, shall require to approve any such agreements, and any adaptations of the material in this book, before public presentation’. (Ibid, 199)

¹⁹ Letter from Meyer Levin to the *New York Times*, 9 December 1952. Boston University archives (BU).

²⁰ At this time Otto told Barbara Zimmerman, his main contact at Doubleday, that Levin was “[...] an able man and the only one who had [sic] the right sentiment in regard to the book” (Lee, 2002: 197) – an ironic assertion when considering Otto’s later rejection of Levin’s play.

Levin's review in the *New York Times* came out in June and is credited with making people "race out to read the diary" (ibid, 200). When the *Diary* was published on 16 June 1952, every copy of the five thousand printed had been sold by the afternoon, with a further fifteen thousand being rushed through: "By late afternoon, theatrical agents, producers and television executives had converged upon Doubleday [...] demanding to know who they should contact for dramatic rights." (Lee, 2002: 201)

Levin resigned from his position as co-agent with Doubleday and told Otto that he "now wished only to write the adaptation" (ibid, 202). In a further effort to prove his commitment to the overall success of the diary, Levin offered the following terms: "Of course, should the situation arise where a production by a famous playwright is only possible if I step aside, I would step aside."²¹ At this point theatre producer Cheryl Crawford had called Doubleday to ask about dramatic rights and, unaware of Levin's plans, had suggested Lillian Hellman and Clifford Odets as adapters (ibid, 202). On 18 June, Otto cabled Doubleday: "Consent to give you authority to handle film and play rights [...] providing [...] conditions [...] be approved by Meyer Levin and myself, as desire Levin as writer or collaborator [...] to guarantee idea of book." (ibid, 202) One may deduce that Otto had little idea of Levin's ultimate motives for adapting the *Diary*. Levin wished to use Anne as an example of the results of hatred and persecution, but he wished her example to be that of the Jews alone; Otto wanted a 'universal' Anne. Arguably, as Anne's father, he would have felt entitled to decide how she would be portrayed. By encouraging the image of Anne as a typical 'girl-next-door', Otto was enforcing the message of anti-discrimination so intrinsic in Anne's diary.²² Otto made his views clear to Levin:

²¹ Letter from Meyer Levin to Otto Frank, 16 June 1952 (BU).

²² As Edward Shapiro (1999) states in his essay *Liberal Politics and American Jewish Identity*, "Jews have been universalists, loudly claiming that Jews are like everyone else only more so" (Selengut, 1999: 115).

As to the Jewish side [...] I do not feel the same way as you do. [...] It is not a Jewish book [...] though Jewish sphere, sentiment and surrounding is in the background. [...] It is (at least here) read and understood more by gentiles than in Jewish circles.²³ [...] So do not make a Jewish play out of it!²⁴

Otto had now entered into talks with Doubleday regarding the adaptation and Levin wrote to Otto to laud his own qualities as a playwright, affirming that several producers had declared their confidence in his playwriting ability.²⁵ He proclaimed that “if you use a ‘famous’ playwright, you are in danger of his wanting to make the play more his own than Anne’s, and also of encountering some very stubborn qualities should you disagree with the treatment”²⁶ – an ironic statement given what later transpired – and replied to Otto’s dictum regarding a ‘Jewish play’. He stated that his emphasis was “on the lack of opportunities open to Jewish writers” rather than “any undue emphasis” given to the “Jewish quality of the material.”²⁷ Not only were these comments obviously designed to persuade Otto, but they also show a certain scheming quality on Levin’s part; he had always intended to tell ‘the story of the Jews’.

On 25 June 1952 Doubleday vice-president Joseph Marks and Cheryl Crawford met to confer about the adaptation. Crawford agreed to meet Levin and discuss his ideas, following which he would be given two months to write his adaptation.²⁸ If it was not “right”, then another writer would be hired “for extra work” – conditions that Levin deemed “reasonable”.²⁹ He was enthusiastic about Crawford’s involvement on the grounds of her twenty-year theatre career and viewed her as being “sensitive and successful”; it also appeared that she was one of those producers who had lauded Levin’s playwriting abilities.³⁰

²³ Francine Prose points out: “Of course the diary was read by more European gentiles than by Jews; there were so few Jews left.” (2009: 190)

²⁴ Letter from Otto Frank to Meyer Levin, June/July 1952 (BU).

²⁵ Letter from Meyer Levin to Otto Frank, 3 July 1952 (BU).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Letter from Meyer Levin to Otto Frank, 26 June 1952 (BU).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. It is unclear as to whether the letter was ever sent.

Otto accepted Crawford as producer and Levin began work. But as early as June 1952 Otto had expressed concern, stating that while Levin had helped to get the *Diary* published and understood Anne “perfectly”, nobody who bought the dramatic rights would want a “prescription” of what they had to do (Lee, 2002: 203). He even articulated doubts to Crawford: “I like Meyer Levin [...] but how can I know if he is the right dramatist?” (Ibid, 208) Following further talks with Doubleday, Otto told Levin that he should work with another writer on the adaptation (ibid, 203).³¹ By doing so, Otto was trying to prevent Levin from becoming too fixated upon a Jewish Anne. Levin completed his adaptation and Crawford read the first draft in September 1952, pronouncing in its favour. But days later, Crawford announced that she did not like it and that it did not have enough potential for Levin to continue working on it, with or without a collaborator. Crawford attempted to offer an explanation and a solution:

I still do not feel emotionally involved (the way you’ve written these people). I am perfectly aware that my judgment is very personal. It has to be as no producer has a criterion beyond his own taste and reaction. In order to protect you, I am perfectly willing to have another producer read your version. [...]

If it were primarily a matter of construction, I know we could iron that out, but my criticism is harder to pin down, to convey or discuss.^{32 33}

Crawford suggested that Levin approach Kermit Bloomgarden, who had successfully produced major Broadway plays including the premiere of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949) (Graver, 1995: 43). Bloomgarden had approached Doubleday about the *Diary* in July 1952, but Levin had opposed him as producer on the grounds of his “left-wing political sympathies” (ibid, 43). Levin duly sent his script to Bloomgarden but Bloomgarden rejected it; according to a letter from Levin to Crawford, Bloomgarden was highly negative

³¹ It was in this letter that Otto also told Levin not to write a ‘Jewish play’.

³² Letter from Cheryl Crawford to Meyer Levin, 7 October 1952 (BU).

³³ Lawrence Graver (1995) remarks that, “Later evidence suggests that she had [...] been influenced by the responses of Lillian Hellman and other friends with whom she had discussed Levin’s draft” (42), although he does not detail this ‘evidence’.

and had stated to Otto that “no producer” would want Levin’s play.³⁴ Levin asserted that only Otto had the right to decide who would produce and who would adapt. He implied that Crawford owed her position as producer to Levin himself through his recommendation, and stated that Otto was “torn between his sense of obligation” to them both.³⁵ In Levin’s view neither Levin nor Crawford were able to judge the “quality” of his adaptation before Otto, and that as Crawford had not objected on grounds of “dramatic technique”, he could not “feel that the proposed understanding applies.”³⁶ He then attempted to persuade Crawford to withdraw:

[...] I ask you to release Mr. Frank from a present sense of obligation to you. Let my play be available to producers acceptable to Mr. Frank, and who have faith in it [...].

I trust this letter will remain confidential [...] to avoid further distress to Mr. Frank.³⁷

Levin had already approached Otto and asked him to remove Crawford, but Otto had refused. If he did not like the play, he reasoned, it was one thing – it was entirely different if Crawford as a seasoned producer felt the same. Otto had already decided that Levin was not the right adapter: “From this moment on, my confidence in Levin’s script was vanishing.” (Lee, 2002: 211) Otto’s lawyer wrote to Levin in October 1952 and revealed that Otto knew about Levin’s letter to Crawford. The letter asserted that Otto’s questioning of Levin’s suitability as adapter was not intended to disparage his abilities or “sensitive appreciation of the book”,³⁸ and urged Levin “to go along with Miss Crawford in accordance with your original understanding with her”, adding that “[...] it seems [...] that Mr. Frank [...] will prefer to withdraw the book entirely from dramatization rather than prolong a painful controversy.”³⁹

³⁴ Letter from Meyer Levin to Cheryl Crawford, 28 October 1952 (BU).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Letter from Myer Mermin to Meyer Levin, 29 October 1952 (BU).

³⁹ Ibid.

Levin hired his own lawyer and sent a revised script to Otto, declaring that he had “made a number of changes, particularly in the last half”⁴⁰ and showing that Levin was aware that his play needed work and was prepared to undertake it. After protracted and contentious negotiations, on 21 November Levin signed an agreement “under protest” which allowed him one month to find a producer for his play from a list compiled by him and approved by Crawford and Otto’s lawyer (Graver, 1995: 47). After that time Levin would have to relinquish his adaptation rights and Otto would be able to engage any other writer and producer that he wished (Lee, 2002: 213). However, for various reasons – from outright rejection to doubts over the suitability of the play’s material – Levin’s adaptation was not accepted (Graver, 1995: 46-49). When the month had passed, Levin was forced to renounce his rights; Crawford, foreseeing trouble to come, withdrew from the project in April 1953 (ibid, 69). Kermit Bloomgarden made an offer to Otto to produce the new, as yet unwritten adaptation and was accepted. Levin blamed Bloomgarden, Crawford et al for his removal and exonerated Otto.⁴¹ Yet on 25 December 1952 Levin wrote to Otto after having read that Carson McCullers – a “non-Jew” – would probably adapt the diary: “[...] I will not stand for this. I will write about it wherever I can.” (Graver, 1995: 52) Even though McCullers did not write the play, Levin’s obsession with the idea of a non-Jewish writer adapting Anne’s diary grew. While Otto sympathised with Levin and was even unsure as to how fairly he had been treated, he remained unconvinced that a Jewish writer was necessary or even desirable (Lee, 2002: 214-15). In November 1953 husband and wife Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett were hired to write the new adaptation. They had started their respective careers in theatre before writing comedies and musicals for the big screen and were a commercial success, as proved by films such as *The Thin Man* (1934) and *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946). They had no definitive religious or political views and were renowned for their social pluralism and liberal standpoint.

⁴⁰ Letter from Meyer Levin to Otto Frank, 30 October 1952 (BU).

⁴¹ Letter from Meyer Levin to Otto Frank, 22 December 1952 (BU).

On 13 January 1954 Levin placed a full-page advertisement in the *New York Post*, challenging Bloomgarden “to hold a test reading of my play before an audience” and urging readers to write to Otto to demand the same (Graver, 1995: 80-81). Otto’s diminishing regard for Levin lessened further as Levin’s “public campaign” continued, and he finally ceased all personal communications with him (ibid, 82-83). Levin denounced the new adaptation and those involved with it at every opportunity, his disappointment making him bitter and angry. His battle alternated between ‘championing’ Anne’s cause (to allow her ‘Jewish’ voice to speak) and a personal crusade against his ‘oppressors’, a continuation of the persecution complex that had plagued him all his life, and which shall be discussed shortly. In this, Levin perceived that his and Anne’s Jewish identities were being stifled.

Goodrich & Hackett’s adaptation previewed in Philadelphia in 1955 before transferring to New York in October, and Levin instigated a lawsuit against Otto and Bloomgarden for plagiarism (Graver, 1995: 94-104).⁴² The jury at the Supreme Court of the State of New York found in Levin’s favour and awarded him \$50,000 in damages (ibid, 104). Otto and Bloomgarden appealed and the verdict was overturned; in an out-of-court settlement, Levin received “\$15,000 for agreeing to give up all claims and not to make the matter a subject of public or private controversy” (Goodrich, 2001: 237). Yet Levin continued with his campaign: for example, he sent out various petitions; continually attempted to present his case in the American and British press; pursued allegations that Gusti Huber, who played Mrs. Frank in the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation, was a Nazi-approved actress;⁴³ and even queried if Otto had survived Auschwitz at the cost of his family’s lives.⁴⁴

⁴² In December 1954 Levin had sued Crawford, alleging that she had fraudulently induced Otto to break the contract of March 1952 and claiming over \$76,000 in damages; he also sued Otto to set aside the November 1952 agreement and to have his adaptation staged (Graver, 1995: 91). Levin asserted that he was fighting for the right to have Anne’s voice – and so that of the Jewish people – heard by as wide an audience as possible (ibid, 91-92). Otto vacated the summons on the grounds that “he was not a New York resident doing business in the state” (ibid, 92-93). After Otto’s motion was upheld, the case did not make it to court at all.

⁴³ Letter from Meyer Levin to ‘Irving’, 23 February 1957 (BU).

⁴⁴ Letter from Meyer Levin to Herbert Luft, 28 February 1956 (BU).

According to David L. Goodrich, “Levin [...] concluded that he was the victim of a conspiracy: [...] powerful, theater-world Jews of German descent [...] had suppressed his play because he wasn’t like them (he was descended from Eastern European Jews) and because his play was ‘too Jewish’.” (2001: 237) The most frequent culprits that Levin blamed were ‘Communists’, such as Kermit Bloomgarden, exemplified in the following statement to Otto: “For more than three years I have been trying to show you that, with your daughter’s ghost as a shield, the Communists [...] have carried on a murderous attack on me.”⁴⁵

Yet despite Levin’s convictions, there was never a conspiracy. Lawrence Graver (1995) posits that Levin’s ‘oppression complex’ and conspiracy theories can “be seen as a response, although extreme, to the times in which he lived, as well as a product of his own personality.” (233) Graver states that as a progressive Jewish writer in the 1930s, Levin had had enough reasons to be suspicious of the response to his work from editors and audiences, and that by the late 1940s his troublesome experiences in publishing and selling his work heightened his susceptibility to “translating neglect and silence into animosity, and negative criticism into ideological opposition.” (Ibid, 233) When the *Diary* was published in 1952 America was locked in “the midst of a Cold War fever about communism [sic], security and loyalty” and this “only heightened Levin’s tendency to look for subterranean political connections.” (Ibid, 233) Levin’s fight continued for the ensuing twenty-nine years following Crawford’s rejection of his script, and his ‘tendency’ to blame political ideology never varied.

Otto Frank died in August 1980, having succeeded in his mission to bring his daughter’s story to millions around the world and with his reputation as the kindly father whom Anne adored cemented in popular consciousness. Meyer Levin died in July 1981, not living to see his adaptation of the *Diary* produced in America and with his reputation as a writer tarnished by the decades-long controversy. While *Anne Frank* was finally produced at Boston’s Lyric Stage in 1983 by Mordecai S. Kaplan, and again in 1991, it has not been

⁴⁵ Second draft of letter from Meyer Levin to Otto Frank, September 1958 (BU).

staged since. Goodrich & Hackett's *The Diary of Anne Frank* continues to be the most well-known adaptation and is regularly performed by amateur and professional theatre companies throughout the world.

'Empathetic perspective-shifting', 'in-his-shoes perspective shifting', 'empathic projection' and 'advisory projection' defined: their effects upon Levin and Goodrich & Hackett

Upon close examination the two forms of empathy most obviously inherent in the case of Levin and Goodrich & Hackett are 'affective empathy', in this instance constituting an appropriate emotional response to the situation of another (Baron-Cohen, 2011: 11), and 'cognitive empathy' or 'perspective-taking', which involves placing oneself imaginatively in the position of another person (Zillmann, 1994: 90). While each component – affective and cognitive – has a different definition, the two are not usually mutually exclusive and take place concurrently, resulting in the "complex imaginative process" (Coplan, 2004: 143) previously referred to in the Introduction; each part of the empathic process informs the other (Baron-Cohen, 2011: 11). Levin's predominant response in terms of affective empathy towards Anne – through the medium of her diary – was distress at the realisation of her fate, coupled with a desire to tell her story, coinciding with Anne's own wishes in relation to the publication of her work. Likewise, Goodrich & Hackett underwent similar affective empathic responses in the context of the aspiration to tell her story and sorrow over Anne's death: for example, in January 1954 Frances Goodrich recorded: "[...] 'Terrible emotional impact. I cry all the time.'" (Goodrich, 2001: 207) The affective empathic responses of Levin, Goodrich and Hackett are generally experienced to varying degrees by the majority of those who read the *Diary*, as Batson, Fultz and Schoenrade point out: "Without doubt, people often react emotionally to the perceived distress of someone else. Furthermore, their emotional reaction is often congruent with what they perceive the other's welfare to be." (1987: 164) Simon Baron-Cohen states that "*we all lie somewhere on an empathy spectrum (from high to low)*"

(2011: 10; original italics), referring to what he calls “the empathy bell curve” and concluding that the majority of the population have a similar “empathy score”, generally medium (ibid, 13). In this manner Levin, Goodrich and Hackett can have reasonably presumed that the reactions of their intended audience would have been extremely similar to their own. In the context of cognitive empathy, Goodrich, Hackett and Levin deployed perspective-taking to place themselves in the position of Anne Frank in a number of ways throughout their respective associations with the diary. For example, Levin had visited Bergen-Belsen during his time in liberated Europe – prior to his reading the diary – and subsequently was able to envisage what Anne’s experiences in the camp would have been like before her death. Goodrich & Hackett travelled to Amsterdam to visit places such as the Secret Annexe and the Frank family’s pre-war apartment (Goodrich, 2001: 214), although this was during the process of adapting the *Diary* for the stage. As well as attempting to view pertinent geographical spaces from Anne’s perspective, the adapters likewise sought to *imaginatively* place themselves in Anne’s position. I suggest that this imaginative standpoint, especially in terms of aspects such as Anne’s feelings towards those whom she was in hiding with, was made significantly easier by the fact that Anne herself recorded those feelings in detail. In much the same way as an actor can (mentally) embody a character through the actions and speech ascribed to that character by a script, the adapters were able to place themselves in Anne’s position and imagine how she felt and reacted in given situations that she described. However, I argue that the perspective-taking of Levin, Goodrich and Hackett was significantly influenced by their personal life experiences and beliefs; as stated by Peter Goldie (2011), individuals are not able to entirely separate themselves and their experiences from the person whose perspective they seek to take. Goldie defines two types of perspective-taking. The first is “*empathetic perspective-shifting*”, which is “consciously and intentionally shifting your perspective in order to imagine *being* the other person, and thereby sharing in *his or her* thoughts, feelings, decisions, and other aspects of their psychology.” (Ibid, 302) The second is “*in-his-shoes perspective-shifting*”, which is similar to the definition above but involves

“shifting your perspective in order to imagine what thoughts, feelings, decisions and so on you would arrive at if you were in the other’s circumstances.” (Ibid, 302) The latter form of perspective-taking enables the self-other differentiation that is fundamental to empathy (Coplan, 2011a: 15). It prevents an individual from becoming fixated upon the feelings of the other person, which results in the individual feeling *for* the other (sympathy) rather than *with* them (empathy) (Howe, 2013: 13).

The definitions of perspective-shifting given by Goldie are similar to two concepts developed by George Lakoff & Mark Johnson in the context of projection and empathy: ‘empathic projection’ and ‘advisory projection’ (1999: 281). ‘Empathic projection’ occurs when an observer places themselves in the situation of another person and views it with that person’s values (ibid, 281). ‘Advisory projection’ takes place when the observer perceives the situation of someone else but imposes their own values upon it (ibid, 281). As I have stated, the perspective-taking of Levin and Goodrich & Hackett was shaped by their experiences and beliefs, and these are demonstrated by the message that the respective adapters declared that they wanted their work to convey. For Levin, Anne’s story was about the struggle of Jewish identity and the consequences of racism and prejudice in the context of the fate of Europe’s Jews; for Goodrich & Hackett, Anne’s story was a universal warning against hatred and prejudice, told through the medium of an archetypal teenaged girl. Initially Levin and Goodrich & Hackett were able to maintain self-other differentiation, recognising aspects in Anne that they felt they had in common with her – what I term ‘empathic factors’ – and undergoing congruent emotional responses and in-his-shoes perspective-shifting, or advisory projection. These empathic factors are most prominent in the adaptations themselves, as I will discuss in the following sections. Nevertheless, a brief comparison of Anne’s life as related in the *Diary* and the experiences of the adapters illustrates some fundamental empathic factors.

Empathic factors between Anne and Goodrich & Hackett in terms of life experiences are somewhat tentative. For example, Hackett lived in poverty as a child (Goodrich, 2001:

22), and it is possible that this enabled him to empathise with Anne in terms of the privations that she suffered in hiding. In the *Diary* Anne tells of the close relationship she had with her maternal grandmother (Frank, 2002: 9; 163); Hackett had a similar relationship with his grandmother (Goodrich, 2001: 30). Hackett, Goodrich and Anne were all descended from immigrant families: Hackett's father was a second-generation Irish immigrant (ibid, 2); Goodrich's ancestors were French Huguenots who had come to America in 1663 (ibid, 16); and Anne's paternal family had been immigrants to Germany. Aside from these there is little else to suggest explicit empathic factors between Anne, Goodrich and Hackett. It is possible to draw comparisons through a selective – that is, non-Jewish – reading of the *Diary* and the universal ideology of Goodrich & Hackett, a combination of which can be seen in their adaptation, particularly in the context of humanistic elements. At the beginning of the *Diary* Anne is not particularly religious, despite her Jewish background and religiously observant mother; Goodrich & Hackett were respectively a lapsed Protestant and a lapsed Catholic (Goodrich, 2001: 203). As Anne's writing continues the element of her Jewish faith grows stronger and more pronounced. Yet as Alvin Rosenfeld (2011) observes, Goodrich & Hackett “understate[d] the specifically Jewish aspect [...] and instead universalized her experience” (105). Not only did this correspond with their own beliefs – and to some extent substitute the ‘real’ Anne with a projection of themselves – but it encouraged audiences towards a particular view of both the play and the book that emphasised Anne's universal qualities. It directed spectators to “to come away [...] with feelings of affection for the author rather than fear for her fate or loathing for those who brought it about” (ibid, 104). Crucially, it deliberately downplayed Anne's Jewishness in order to make her more ‘relatable’ for American audiences (simultaneously deploying empathic and advisory projections, as Goodrich & Hackett perceived Anne's universal views from their own perspective, and expanded upon these to make Anne more universal).

As with Goodrich & Hackett, Meyer Levin was not of the same nationality or culture as Anne Frank. He did not have a particularly close relationship with his family, although he

came from an immigrant background: his parents were from Eastern Europe. Yet there is a direct empathic factor between Levin and Anne: that of their both being Jewish. Levin's gnarled relationship with his Jewish heritage occupied him from an early age and is significant in that his perceived connection with Anne, and his subsequent relationship to the *Diary*, was characterised by his perception of their (empathic) connection as Jews and writers. Both Levin and Anne had a limited relationship with their Jewish identity early in life. Anne did not express any particular views of her religious background before going into hiding, but Levin noted that "My dominant childhood memory is of fear and shame at being a Jew." (1950: 13) The primary cause of his attitude came about mainly due to his parents, who despite emigrating to America never lost their sense of inferiority at being Jews (ibid, 14). His issues surrounding what it meant to be Jewish continued into his career as a writer, including reporting on the rising hostilities between Arabs and Jews in Palestine and publishing six novels in which he wrote with increasing frequency about the "problems of acculturation and self-definition for Jews" (Graver, 1995: 2; 4). Like Anne, Levin used his writing to examine issues surrounding what it meant to be Jewish.⁴⁶ While Levin did not experience the Nazi concentration camps first-hand, he was one of the first to witness several camps after their liberation. In 1942 Levin worked as a writer and director at the Office for War Information (see Appendix 1, Note 2) before being dispatched as a battle correspondent for the Overseas News Agency and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, travelling with American troops in France (Graver, 1995: 7). Levin had heard stories of the Nazi genocide and was determined to tell "the story of the fate of the Jews [...] [and] discover the facts behind the gruesome rumors [sic] of mass slaughter and slavery" (1950: 170). Accordingly Levin saw camps such as Nordhausen, Buchenwald, Dachau and Bergen-Belsen, where Anne had died (Graver, 1995: 7-8; Abzug, 1985: 58-59) (see Appendix 1,

⁴⁶ Levin's troubles with his Jewish identity were compounded in his writing career by the attitudes of editors and publishers towards the Jewish characters and themes in his later novels (see Appendix 1, Note 1).

Note 3). He was subsequently able to compare Anne's suffering and death with what he had seen for himself and, as I shall discuss in the next section, this contributed to his experiencing 'empathic distress'. Similarly to Goodrich & Hackett, Levin's personal ideology – in his case rooted firmly in Judaism – was his primary empathic factor in relation to Anne Frank. Both Levin and Anne underwent a strengthening of religious faith directly related to the suffering of the Jews. For example, on 19 November 1942 Anne described seeing large numbers of "innocent people [...] ordered about by a handful of men who bully and beat them until they nearly drop. [...] The sick, the elderly, children, babies and pregnant women – all are marched to their death." (2002: 69) In this instance she made no reference to God, but a year later she expressed her subsequent supplications to God after dreaming about the fate of a school friend (ibid, 149) and her hopes that she was praying sufficiently in order "for God to perform a miracle" in saving those whom she loved (ibid, 156). Levin's strengthening of faith was initially shown by his emotional reaction to the camps, illustrated by the reports that he sent from Europe (often as cablegrams for another reporter to rewrite for publication on Levin's behalf). The following illustrates how he was affected by what he saw and indicates how it came to consume him:

As ghostly figures approach we recognize stunted human shapes[.] We recognize convict bluestriped pantlegs over broken bundlewrapped shoes recognize shapeless black [...] torn civilian cloak[s] and outpeering dark feverglistening human eyes. We know these are men[.] These are Europe[']s last Jews. [...]⁴⁷

Levin's pity and horror is palpable, and it is possible to discern the beginning of the shift from his shaky relationship with his Jewish identity to something analogous to the conviction of a new convert. It is notable that this shift corresponds with his problems with his Jewish identity through hints that Levin suffered feelings of guilt, both through having rejected (or at least 'problematized') the religion and way of life that others had died for, and for having survived. These 'guilt feelings' are important in that such feelings often accompany 'empathic distress'

⁴⁷ Undated cablegram (BU).

and, as I shall shortly argue in Levin's case, can contribute to the lessening or loss of self-other differentiation. Lawrence Graver asserts that after the war Levin considered himself to be "enriched" by traditional Jewish life and contemporary American experience (1995: 11), and posited himself as an American writer who wrote about the fate of the Jews: specifically, the aftermath of the Holocaust and its meaning for Jews. In this way he was already 'conditioned' towards Anne Frank's diary before he ever discovered it, but Levin challenged his own biculturalism on various occasions, denouncing as anti-Semitic those who 'killed' his adaptation of the diary – "They have censored Anne Frank in their hat[r]ed of everything Jewish" (Torres, 37) – and increasingly presenting himself (and Anne) as, foremost, a Jewish writer.

As I have stated, the beliefs and experiences of Levin and Goodrich & Hackett impacted upon their reception of the *Diary*, their empathic responses towards Anne Frank, and consequently their adaptations of the *Diary* for the stage. What is crucial is the fact that Levin and Goodrich & Hackett believed that they were assuming *Anne's* point of view – empathetic perspective-shifting or empathic projection – through *their* perception of Anne via the medium of her diary, and through their heightened identification with aspects within it. I posit that the adapters underwent a combination of empathic and advisory projections/empathetic- and in-his-shoes-perspective shifting as the adaptation process continued, but that ultimately the advisory/in-his-shoes element took precedence as the adapters projected their own story on to Anne. This was especially the case for Levin as he lost self-other differentiation between Anne Frank and himself; Frances Goodrich underwent this loss but to a far lesser extent and, to some degree, eventually managed to regain it. Initially Levin and Goodrich & Hackett were able to maintain this differentiation, but, as their adaptation processes continued, Meyer Levin and Frances Goodrich both manifested 'empathic distress' – a precursor to loss of self-other differentiation.

‘Empathic distress’ defined and its effect on Levin and Goodrich

Levin’s emotional response and cognitive empathy were mutually reinforced by the fact that his visiting the camps had given him a greater insight into what Anne had suffered during the last months of her life. However, while it could be suggested that this experience enabled Levin to add greater urgency to his adaptation in terms of highlighting the fate of Europe’s Jews, I argue that this contributed significantly to his undergoing ‘empathic distress’ and, as I shall discuss presently, eventually projecting his own story on to Anne. Both Levin and Goodrich experienced empathic distress through their association with Anne’s diary. Martin L. Hoffman defines ‘empathic distress’ as “an empathic affective response to another person’s distress” (1987: 48), and it constitutes a parallel reaction in that it is “a more or less exact replication of the victim’s presumed feeling of distress” (ibid, 53). Hoffman notes that the victim is ordinarily present when the observer experiences empathic distress (ibid, 49), although this was obviously not so in this case. Moreover, when Goodrich and Levin expressed their feelings about what had happened to Anne, they were reacting to what they *imagined* to have been Anne’s fate concurrently with what they *knew* of her through her diary: a prime example of what Hoffman calls “higher-level cognitive” modes of “empathic affect arousal” (ibid, 50). According to Hoffman there are five hypothesised modes:

I. Modes of empathic affect arousal; operate singly or in combinations

(Automatic – nonvoluntary [sic])

- A. Primary circular reaction; neonate cries to sound of another’s cry
- B. Mimicry; automatic imitation plus afferent feedback
- C. Conditioning and direct association

(Higher-level cognitive)

- D. Language-mediated association
- E. Putting self in other’s place; other-focused and self-focused

(1987: 50)

When the victim is not present, information about their distress communicated by another person can produce empathy in an observer through arousal modes I.D-E (ibid, 49). For Levin and Goodrich & Hackett, language-mediated association took place through the *Diary* and the input of Otto Frank through letters and conversations. The cognitive aspect of putting the self into the place of another was demonstrably evoked by Levin when he connected Anne's fate with what he had witnessed at the concentration camps. Goodrich experienced similar feelings but to a lesser and more vicarious extent, as Levin had seen the camps in person while Goodrich & Hackett received mediated information from Otto and, presumably, contemporary news reports.⁴⁸

Hoffman argues that empathic distress may be transformed, at least partly, into "reciprocal concern for the victim" and so while the observer may continue to respond in an empathic manner – "feeling uncomfortable and highly distressed themselves" – they may also experience a feeling of compassion – "sympathetic distress" – for the victim (ibid, 53). In this case empathic distress has an empathic and a sympathetic component, in which can be located the wish to terminate the distress of the victim (sympathetic) and a wish to terminate distress in the self (empathic) (ibid, 53). Goodrich and Levin underwent empathic and sympathetic distress at different points. In Goodrich's case this is highlighted by her 'tears of guilt', during which she expressed distress at Anne's suffering (sympathy) as well as a feeling of guilt at not having intervened somehow (empathy/'guilt feeling').⁴⁹ In Levin's case this was very much the same, but his combined sympathetic and empathic distress evolved into primarily empathic distress as his battle to have his adaptation staged became less about Anne and more about his own 'oppression', therefore resulting in a loss of self-other differentiation. The 'guilt feeling' mutually experienced by the adapters is a "related moral affect" of empathic distress (ibid, 54). This is usually associated with the observer as being

⁴⁸ It is not recorded if Goodrich & Hackett ever visited Westerbork (the Nazi transit camp in Holland where Anne and the others were initially imprisoned) or any other camps.

⁴⁹ There is no record of Albert Hackett having any overtly emotional reaction towards Anne or her story.

the cause of the victim's distress, but Hoffman remarks: "Even if one is an innocent bystander [...] one may feel guilty because one blames oneself, not for *causing* the other's plight, but for [...] not intervening to help – the guilt is over inaction." (1987: 55) Neither Levin nor Goodrich could have personally prevented Anne's fate yet still felt a sense of associated guilt. For instance, Goodrich was once asked "why she wept so often, and she replied, 'Guilt, guilt, guilt.'" (Goodrich, 2001: 207). According to Hackett, "[...] 'She kept saying, 'Where was I when this was happening? [...]" (Ibid, 207-8) Levin was similarly afflicted by guilt, "in part because of the marginal role he had played in the struggle to stop the slaughter" while reporting from the front lines in Europe, and wrote: "This is the guilt of the living [...] Isn't there something we must do to pay for being alive?" (Melnick, 1997: 2) In this context Levin suffered from "existential guilt" (Hoffman, 1987: 56), which Goodrich experienced to a lesser degree. Hoffman suggests that existential guilt occurs through the self-perception of the observer as being in a relatively advantaged position in relation to the victim; one has not done anything wrong but "feels culpable owing to life circumstances beyond one's control" (ibid, 56). Levin's guilt feeling was exacerbated in that he belonged to the same religious group as Anne, but was more 'privileged' as he was American and did not suffer Nazi persecution (although if his parents had stayed in Eastern Europe, Levin and his family would have been victims).

I argue that Levin's empathic distress was inclined more towards the empathic element; that is, a wish to terminate distress in the self. His distress was a culmination not only of his response towards Anne and the *Diary*, but as a result of his perceived suppression as a Jewish writer and his issues surrounding his Jewish identity before the Holocaust. He believed that Anne's Jewish voice was being suppressed by her father and others such as Goodrich & Hackett when his adaptation was rejected. Levin's experiences in liberated Europe had strengthened his Jewish faith and it became of the utmost importance to him to tell the story of what had happened to the Jews. He therefore wished to present Anne's story in what he considered to be its proper context: the persecution and oppression

of the Jewish people, which included Levin by extension in view of his life experiences as a Jew, including feelings of shame and suppression. When his adaptation was rejected Levin argued that the prevention of it from being staged was another example of the oppression of the Jews – in this case, Anne and himself. In this context Levin ‘fused’ Anne and himself as suppressed Jewish writers, resulting in his losing self-other differentiation and focusing on alleviating his own distress, rather than setting forth Anne’s story. Goodrich & Hackett did not suffer from the ‘oppression complex’ that obsessed Levin; moreover, their adaptation was approved by Otto Frank. As a result they did not feel that Anne’s voice or their own was being suppressed, even though I argue that they did shape their adaptation of the *Diary* to fit more closely with their personal beliefs and so moulded an Anne who adhered to their universal and humanist views. I suggest that their viewpoint was as strong as Levin’s, but that the empathic distress of Goodrich was rooted equally in empathic and sympathetic components. I posit that the act of adaptation enabled Goodrich to exorcise her empathic distress: by telling Anne’s story as she and Hackett perceived it, they were able to metaphorically alleviate Anne’s distress by allowing her story to achieve a higher purpose. Goodrich’s distress was thereby relieved through her perception of this as having taken place and, as such, a wrong having been redressed; the suppression of Anne’s voice through her death was assisted in being overcome by the staging of her diary.

The influence of the adapters’ empathic responses on the use of action/ extracts from the *Diary*

The way in which extracts from the *Diary* – the same text, relating the same events by the same person (Anne) – have been included or excluded from the adaptations goes some way to denoting the authorial empathic responses towards Anne Frank, especially pertaining to loss of self-other differentiation. Furthermore, some action has been fabricated in order to render an Anne that fits more closely with the adapters’ perception of her, constituting a significant example of advisory projection and in-his-shoes perspective-taking. While Lakoff

& Johnson theorise the concept of advisory projection in terms of a *hypothetical* situation in which the observer projects their own values on to the life of another person (1999: 281), in the following instance Goodrich & Hackett projected their values on to events that had already happened in order to present those events in a different light, and so to portray an Anne who adhered more closely to those values. At the beginning of the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation the Franks arrive at the Annexe dressed in multiple layers of clothing (1.2). This is described by Anne in the *Diary*: “[We] were wrapped in so many layers [...] it looked as if we were going off to spend the night in a refrigerator [...]. No Jew in our situation would dare leave the house with a suitcase” (2002: 21). Anne does not go into further detail, but Goodrich & Hackett depict her as removing her underwear in front of the van Daans, who in the play she has only just met:⁵⁰

MRS FRANK (*shocked*) Anne, please!

ANNE It’s all right. I’ve got on three more [.]. (*She removes two more pairs of panties*) [1.2]

This child-like action projects a young and naïve girl. However, this is not the Anne of the *Diary*, who was deeply concerned with how others perceived her and was not as naïve as Goodrich & Hackett represent her: “I have a throng of admirers who can’t keep their adoring eyes off me and who sometimes have to resort to using a broken pocket mirror to [...] catch a glimpse of me” (2002: 6-7). Anne would never have considered the action ascribed to her by Goodrich & Hackett, and thus their decision to include Anne’s undressing is indicative of a lessening of their self-other differentiation. I posit that they attempted to present the situation through empathetic perspective-taking, in that they tried to place themselves in the situation and view it from Anne’s perspective, but instead underwent in-his-shoes perspective-taking: they placed themselves in the situation and viewed it from the perspective that *they* had

⁵⁰ The notion of the Franks and the van Daans only just meeting is more fictionalisation by Goodrich & Hackett.

ascribed to Anne through their selective reading of her diary and thereby imagining how *they* would have behaved. In this context I argue that Goodrich & Hackett can actually be seen as undergoing a response that is more in accordance with sympathy rather than empathy, according to David Howe's definition. They are literally feeling 'for' Anne (dictating her reaction and behaviour in a situation that they have invented) rather than 'with' her (for example, by having her remove herself to another room in order to undress, or not having the situation occur at all).

In Levin's adaptation Anne also removes layers of clothing:

ANNE (*dropping her outer skirt*) Oh, don't be embarrassed, Mr. Koophuis, I have on as many layers as an onion. [...] (*She takes off several skirts and sweaters.*) Miep's idea, since we couldn't be seen carrying suitcases. [1.1]

Instead of taking off her underwear Anne removes skirts and sweaters, which is more in keeping with the real, socially-conscious Anne Frank; Levin's Anne does not need to be admonished for not observing social niceties. She is aware that Koophuis, one of the family's Christian helpers, could be embarrassed by her actions, but reassures him in a manner that indicates mindfulness of why he might be embarrassed as well as a consciousness that neither he nor she need to be: after all, she is only removing her outer clothes. It cannot be disregarded that Levin has similarly fabricated Anne's removal of her clothing but in this instance Levin, unlike Goodrich & Hackett, is not appropriating the action to suit his own ideals: he represents Anne more as she comes across within her diary. Interestingly in this instance – given the context of Levin's obsession with Anne – it is Goodrich & Hackett who use the action of Anne removing her clothing as a means of advisory projection and to speak 'for' her.

The other instance of fabricated action in each adaptation is the theft of food. In Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation this takes the form of Mr. van Daan stealing bread in Act 2 Scene 3, and I argue that this scene epitomises the loss of self-other differentiation between

Goodrich & Hackett and Anne Frank. Mr. van Daan steals bread from the communal food cupboard in the middle of the night and a door squeaks, waking Mrs. Frank, who discovers Mr. van Daan and demands that he leave the Annexe for good. While this adds tension and conflict, the events depicted do not appear in the *Diary*. Anne complained about the greediness of the van Daans when it came to food (Lee, 1999: 117) but there is no mention of theft, and it cannot be ascertained that the events in question occurred.⁵¹ With Anne's undressing at the beginning of the play, Goodrich & Hackett can be seen as elaborating upon Anne's description of events in the *Diary* in taking her account of wearing layers of clothes and expanding upon it. Their invention of the bread theft to add tension in the second act means that they literally speak and act 'for' Anne, manifesting a significant loss of self-other differentiation and becoming enmeshed with her in attributing behaviour to her that they could not have really established was truthful or correct, and that they want her to exhibit. Goodrich & Hackett employ an outright advisory projection on to Anne in that she intervenes with her mother and pleads in a mature and compassionate manner against Mr. van Daan being expelled from the hiding place. In the *Diary* one can perceive Anne's developing maturity as her time in hiding continues, but in the bread-stealing scene Goodrich & Hackett endow Anne with adult sensibilities and calmness in the midst of the predicament that Mrs. Frank reacts to with near-hysterical anger. (It is worth noting that Anne would probably have reacted differently to how Goodrich & Hackett portray her; commenting upon the selfishness of Dussel in helping himself to gravy at mealtimes and leaving the rest of the Annexe occupants to do without, Anne wrote: "I [...] feel like [...] knocking him off his chair and throwing him out of the door." [2002: 169]) In line with Peter Goldie's observation that

⁵¹ The scene was written in September 1955 as the Philadelphia opening approached; Bloomgarden, Goodrich & Hackett and director Garson Kanin felt that more tension was needed in the second act (Goodrich, 2001: 225), and the idea of having Mr. van Daan steal food is attributed to Bloomgarden (Lee, 2002: 221-222). Bloomgarden recommended that Dussel be the culprit, but Otto advised them to make it Mr. van Daan due to his friendship with Dussel's widow. Carol Ann Lee (2002) notes Otto's subsequent fears that van Daan's brother, who lived in New York, would file a lawsuit. Nothing came of it, but given Otto's self-emphasised respect for the dead his motives for permitting such a scene are questionable (224).

empathetic perspective-shifting can never be successful as the views and experiences of the observer will always colour their appraisal of the other person's situation, I argue that Goodrich & Hackett attempted to view the bread-theft through Anne's eyes but ultimately failed in that instead they saw it, and Anne's reaction, through their own. This shows a strong desire on the part of Goodrich & Hackett to present Anne in the best possible manner and establishes the foundation for the tone of tolerance and forgiveness with which the play concludes, when Anne's posthumous voice declares her ultimate belief in the goodness of humanity. Her apparent attitude of compassion and reconciliation in the second half of the play highlights the extent to which Goodrich & Hackett became enmeshed with her, in having her promote the humanistic and universal ideals that they publicly held as their own.

Levin includes the stealing of food in his adaptation, although it is more implicit and Anne is not directly involved:

PETER has [...] come downstairs. As he passes the kitchen, he gobbles food from a pot. MRS. FRANK crosses; his back catches her eye.

MRS. FRANK Peter? ..Peter! What are you doing!

PETER Well, I'm not reducing!⁵²

MRS. FRANK Everyone shares alike here!

MRS. VAN DAAN (*coming down*) [...] He's a growing boy.

MRS. FRANK We have growing children too. [...]

[...]

Peter, I want you to promise never again to steal food.

PETER (*penitent*) All right, Mrs. Frank. [1.2]

As with the stealing of bread there is no evidence that such an incident never occurred, but it illustrates the immaturity of Peter and provides a contrast between him, Margot and Anne, who are the other 'growing children'. Anne is in the same position as Peter but has not

⁵² In this scene Peter's mother is upstairs, doing "reducing exercizes [sic]" (1.2).

resorted to taking food; she has better self-control and a greater awareness of the needs of others. In this instance Levin can be seen as experiencing a more self-other differentiated response than Goodrich & Hackett. He subtly infers Anne's 'higher' qualities without the need for these to be overtly displayed by the character herself. Contemporaneously Levin still undergoes advisory projection in contriving the food theft and highlighting an Anne aligned with who he wants her to be. Significantly within each adaptation, the authors had to fabricate action in order to demonstrate some of the empathic qualities that they personally located in Anne, and which they believed would subsequently further a positive view of her by audiences.

The action in each adaptation mostly follows that of the *Diary*, with alterations to allow for dramatic ease and pace; for example, in each play the van Daans arrive in the Secret Annexe on the same day as the Franks, when in reality they came several days later (Frank, 2002: 21; 30). Much of the dramatic action in the two plays is similar, from a break-in by thieves to the coming of Dussel and the celebration of Hanukkah. What is of particular interest is the use of the *Diary* in the context of 'extracts'. In the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation there are eight voiceovers that represent Anne's diary entries. However, none of these have been lifted directly from the original text and they are condensed versions of Anne's words. For instance, in the first voiceover Anne tells of her family's emigration to Holland, the Nazi invasion and anti-Jewish decrees, her father's revelation that the family was going into hiding, the location of their hiding place and the family that they are going into hiding with (1.1), reducing ten pages of the *Diary* into a speech of thirty lines. Moreover, it is the only 'extract' that contributes significantly to the story, providing a general background for Anne and her family. In this manner Goodrich & Hackett can be seen as utilising a combination of empathic and advisory projections. The voiceovers represent a very specific reading of the *Diary*, with Goodrich & Hackett selecting passages and extracts that corresponded with their own views. The words used, although subsequently altered in the adaptation process, are Anne's and so their usage constitutes empathic projection. Goodrich

& Hackett were able to view scenarios from Anne's perspective and use her values as these matched theirs in universality due to the specificity of their reading of the *Diary*. As well as in-his-shoes perspective-taking, simultaneous advisory projection took place in that Goodrich & Hackett altered/adapted the action for the stage, imposing their values in such a way as to make 'Anne' behave in a manner that may not necessarily have reflected real life. David L. Goodrich asserts that Goodrich & Hackett "had to be objective and find ways of showing character traits that were merely mentioned in the diary" (2001: 217), but the highly specific and selective reading of the book indicates that Goodrich & Hackett could not have been, or chose not to be, 'objective' in the sense of presenting a balanced portrayal of Anne. The 'extracts' do not deliver any in-depth analyses of personal matters that closely touched Anne, including her Jewish faith and the scathing self-scrutiny of her own character. Instead they offer a generalised view of Anne's activities while in hiding and descriptions of her relationships with the people around her.⁵³ The omission of Anne's closely-held personal views means that much of the true Anne is lost. This firmly centres Anne in a universal context through an avoidance of dealing with weightier subjects such as religion or sexuality, both of which feature prominently in the *Diary*.⁵⁴ Even when Anne discusses her period in Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation, this is done so through inference rather than direct reference:

[...] There is one great change, however, A [sic] change in myself. I read somewhere that girls of my age [...] become quiet within and begin to think of the miracle that is taking place in their bodies. I think that what is happening to me is so wonderful – not only what can be seen, but what is taking place inside. Each time it has happened I have a feeling that I have a [...] sweet secret. (2.1)

⁵³ The voiceovers include such varying aspects as: Anne's background (1.1); the families' helpers (1.2; 2.1; 2.3); complaints about her mother (1.2), Dussel and Mrs. van Daan (1.3); the progress of the war (1.4; 2.1); and the lack of food (2.1; 2.2), amongst others.

⁵⁴ Entries dealing with sexuality were edited or omitted by Anne (while rewriting her diary with a view to having it publicly read after the war) and Otto, who edited it further after her death.

Overt references to such matters were taboo at the time, hence the subtlety in referring to the subject. But out of the eight 'extracts', this is the closest that the adapters come to revealing the innermost thoughts of the true Anne. The rest – one of which is completely fabricated, a hurried note that Anne writes while the Nazis are waiting for the Annexe occupants to collect their belongings (2.4) – perpetuate Anne's 'universal' image and imply that both her public and private personas were virtually identical; that the Anne one sees in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in both the literal public arena of the stage and the public site of interacting with others around her, does not differ greatly from the private Anne of the *Diary* – at least, the 'diary' as Goodrich & Hackett depict it. All of the subjects mentioned in the extracts are discussed in the *Diary* (with the obvious exception of the fabricated entry), and from this point of view the 'extracts' do contain a degree of authenticity. However, the universality can be seen; most people will be able to readily relate to the topics, and there is nothing to denote that Anne is different from any other person. Even though Goodrich & Hackett are referring to the *Diary*, they have deliberately selected the subjects that correlate with their own universal ideals to create their 'ideal' Anne and, as such, an extension of themselves.

Levin uses a similar device of voiceovers in *Anne Frank*, although there are only two and these are just a few lines long. In the first Anne expresses a feeling of being "deserted" and a longing for "real love" (1.2), and in the second – following a conversation with Peter about male and female sexual urges – Anne describes a new understanding of the "strangest and most wonderful things" (2.1). I suggest that Levin's non-reliance on 'extracts' results from the fact that his adaptation is more faithful to the original text. Most of the action shown is depicted in the *Diary*, and as such there is less need to draw attention to the similarities between the 'diary' – as it is rendered by the adapter – and the action onstage. Two crucial aspects of the *Diary*, religion and sexuality, are either not dwelt upon or not included in the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation; in Levin's play Anne and Peter have a conversation, as referenced above, about sexual urges (2.1) and religion is a continuous topic. In terms of

being true to the *Diary*, Levin's play is the closest in terms of action. A reader of the *Diary* will recognise events such as Margot's call-up notice (Prologue); Anne and Otto setting the Annex to rights upon arrival (1.1); Mrs. van Daan's flirting with Otto (1.1); Margot and Otto's attempts to listen to a conversation in the office below (2.1); and Dussel's examination of Anne when she is ill (2.2). Not only does this action make the play immediately identifiable as representative of the original *Diary*, it negates the need for reference back to it through voiceover in order to underscore its authenticity. While Goodrich & Hackett carefully chose extracts to create their ideal of Anne, fashioning a less colourful but more universal character, Levin also selected elements which fit with his ideals of Anne as, foremost, a Jewish teenager. However, Levin did not suppress Anne's beliefs or any aspects of her identity in order to do so. There are still fictionalised and temporally-compressed elements, yet Levin has essentially taken the Anne of the *Diary* and transported her to the stage. Contemporaneously, though the action that Levin includes reflects that of the *Diary*, and as such is both less idealised and more representative of Anne, the factor which reveals the extent of Levin's loss of self-other differentiation in the adaptation is the use of religion.

The influence of the adapters' empathic responses on the use and inclusion of religion

In Goodrich & Hackett's *The Diary of Anne Frank* there are few religious references, the most predominant being the Hanukkah celebration at the end of Act 1 (1.5). In Levin's *Anne Frank* religion is much more prevalent and is highlighted throughout – from Margot's demonstration of love towards the Star of David (1.1) and the Hanukkah celebration (2.2) to Anne and Peter's conversation about Jewish suffering and the need for faith (3.1). It is clear that Levin's beliefs are synonymous with the Jewish faith and that those of Goodrich & Hackett are principally non-religious. Several examples of religious representation in both adaptations are strikingly similar, such as a version of the Hanukkah celebration; a conversation between

Anne and Peter about religion; the (false) portrayal of Dussel as being ignorant of his own faith; and the removal of the Star of David from clothing at the beginning of each play. The inclusion of a Hanukkah celebration in each play is significant. Hanukkah is the only Jewish festival referred to in the *Diary* as being celebrated in the Annexe, and it simultaneously commemorates a miracle – in which one day’s worth of oil burned for eight days in the Second Temple of Jerusalem – and the historical victory of the Maccabees, a Jewish tribe, over religious oppression by Syrian-Greek forces in the second century BC (Falcon and Blatner, 2001: 256-57). Over time the celebration evolved to emphasise the miracle of the oil over the military victory, but in the nineteenth century the increased popularity of giving presents at Christmas in Europe and North America led to many Jews, who noticed how attractive Christmas was to children, finding a new meaning in celebrating Hanukkah: both the miracle of the oil and the Maccabee victory “could easily be interpreted as anti-assimilationist, and became a tool for strengthening Jewish identity.” (Ibid, 257-58) Levin’s Jewish heritage meant that he would have known about the underlying context of the reaffirmation of Jewish religious freedom and identity enshrined within Hanukkah. During their adaptation of the *Diary* Goodrich & Hackett carried out extensive research into the Hanukkah celebration and Otto Frank “recalled ‘every detail’ he could from their observance of Hanukkah in the annexe [sic].” (Lee, 2002: 220) However, Goodrich & Hackett later said that their aim had been to “to see ‘what liberties we could take without offending anyone’” (ibid, 220), and it is not clear as to what extent the Hanukkah scene in their adaptation matches that of the Annexe. I argue that the ways in which the Hanukkah celebrations denote the religious beliefs of the celebrants are a strong indicator of authorial projections and self-other differentiation. In Goodrich & Hackett’s version Anne does not directly participate in the service; Otto reads the blessing as he lights the menorah candles before Edith reads a psalm (1.5). In reality Otto was deeply assimilated and not particularly religious: he “had little interest in his Jewish heritage”, and “was neither proud nor ashamed of being born a Jew; it was a matter of indifference to him.” (Lee, 2002: 7) The beliefs of

Anne and Otto are portrayed as being the same – both have an awareness, but no deep knowledge, of the Jewish faith – and in this respect one can recognise the influence of Otto, as well as an advisory projection of Goodrich & Hackett. Additionally, the use of religion in this manner promotes an even closer bond between Anne and Otto. Even though Anne’s relationship with her father is continually referenced by Anne in her writing,⁵⁵ the resemblance in beliefs between them in Goodrich & Hackett’s adaptation implies that Otto – who was acknowledged as speaking not just about, but *for* his daughter (Lee, 2002: 285) – and his overall (idealised) view of Anne were automatically ‘correct’. Given Otto’s close involvement with Goodrich & Hackett throughout the adaptation process,⁵⁶ and their mutual advisory projections on to Anne (with Otto believing that Anne shared the same beliefs as him and subsequently admitting that he had not truly known his daughter until reading her diary [Lee, 2002: 166-167]), the ideals shared between Otto, Goodrich and Hackett took precedence in the adaptation.

Of notable interest in the Hanukkah scene written by Goodrich & Hackett is their choice of song. During the celebration a crash is heard from downstairs and the terrified group fear that they have been discovered. After Otto investigates and establishes that it was a thief, the ‘family’ are still afraid and disheartened, and Otto “*knows he must restore their courage*”:

MR FRANK [...] A moment ago we thought [...] it was the end. But it wasn't [...]. (*He prays*) We thank Thee, Oh Lord our God, that in Thy infinite mercy Thou hast again seen fit to spare us.

[...] Come on, Anne. [...] The song.

⁵⁵ There can be little doubt that Anne did have a warm and loving relationship with Otto, but Anne’s maternal family members viewed its true extent with scepticism, especially as Otto edited the *Diary*:

‘...after corrections [...] and self-serving additions by Anne’s father who was by then the one living family member, Otto had become Anne’s mentor, role model and undisputed influence in her life. This may sound like sour grapes now, but it is common family knowledge – of a family who has by now no voice in this world anymore.’ (Lee, 2002: 23)

⁵⁶ This included giving them a tour of the Annexe, as well as taking them to see Anne’s school and the Franks’ old apartment, in December 1954 (Lee, 2002: 224).

[...]

ANNE (*singing*)

“Oh, Hanukkah. Oh, Hanukkah.
The sweet celebration.”

([...] [O]ne by one the others join in. [...] [...] [T]heir courage and faith are
beginning to return)

ALL (*singing*)

“Around the feast we gather
In complete jubilation.
Happiest of seasons
Now is here.
Many are the reasons for good cheer.
Together
We’ll weather
Whatever tomorrow may bring.

([...] *They sing on with growing courage*)

“So hear us rejoicing
And merrily voicing
The Hanukkah song that we sing.
Hoy!” [1.5]⁵⁷

In initial drafts the traditional song of the Maoz Tzur was used, but a short time before the New York opening it was replaced with “O Hanukkah”, which is “a popular song among American Jews.” (Lee, 2002: 227) Goodrich & Hackett furthered their advisory projection of Anne by ensuring that American-Jewish audience members could connect with her through a song that Anne and they seemingly had in common. The Maoz Tzur is usually sung in Hebrew and would not have been understood by non-Jewish/non-Hebrew-speaking spectators. By transposing the song Goodrich & Hackett ensured that there would be no marked difference between Anne and the audience. When Otto pleaded for the Maoz Tzur to be reinstated for the European performances of the play, Goodrich, Hackett and Garson Kanin were adamant that “O Hanukkah” would remain; their reasons for keeping it included a

⁵⁷ The symbolic use of a religious festival at a moment of crisis can also be seen in the 2008 film *Defiance*. When he learns of Nazi plans to attack his settlement, Jewish community leader Tuvia Bielski (Daniel Craig) realises that it is Passover, the celebration of the Jews’ exodus from slavery in Egypt, and that the Jews escaped from the Pharaoh only by Moses leading them to flight before an attack could materialise – prompting Tuvia to attempt to do the same.

fear of alienating the audience (ibid, 232).⁵⁸ The reticence of Goodrich & Hackett to use the Maoz Tzur in America is understandable given that “O Hanukkah” was more popular there, but their failure to reverse this for the European productions demonstrates that they did not appreciate what might be more ‘popular’ with the remaining Jews of Europe.⁵⁹ The refusal of Goodrich & Hackett to use the Maoz Tzur in Europe not only alienated audiences from Anne’s Jewishness in favour of her universalism, but denied an aspect of Jewish culture from countries that had lost virtually all of their own.

In Levin’s depiction of Hanukkah Anne lights the candles and says the blessing, urged by her family. A crucial element in illustrating Levin’s loss of self-other differentiation is that while Anne has a basic knowledge of the religious customs, she has to read the blessing:

FRANK	Will you light the candles, Edith?
MRS FRANK	One of the girls.
MARGOT	The youngest. Anne.
ANNE	!! This is the part of religion I like. Candles and singing.
MRS FRANK	You should really learn the words for blessing the candles, Anne. Here, you can read them. (<i>Hands her the prayerbook</i> [sic].) [2.2]

This occurs nearly two-thirds of the way through the play, and yet Anne does not know the words to bless the candles. I argue that it evidences Levin’s enmeshment with Anne as she becomes an allegory: Anne represents Levin himself. As discussed, Levin’s Jewish identity

⁵⁸ Kanin told Goodrich & Hackett: “[...] The ending of the first act will be flat as a latke unless the song [...] is a gay one.’ A Hebrew song would be ‘a great mistake...it would simply alienate the audience’.” (Lee, 2002: 232) It is notable that Goodrich & Hackett disregarded Otto, who had been instrumental in helping them to create the play, in favour of their own idealised wishes.

⁵⁹ Judith E. Doneson (1987) states: “This approach obscures the fact that it was not by chance that Anne was hiding, but specifically because she was Jewish. [...] The play’s insistence that fate chose the Jews only serves to universalize Nazi anti-Semitic ideology at the expense of the particularity of the historical facts.” (Enzer and Solotaroff-Enzer, 2000: 130)

had been problematic until his assignment to Europe; likewise, Anne did not have any particularly strong religious convictions until going into hiding. With their mutual, new-found bond to Judaism (resulting from Levin's wartime experiences and Anne's life in hiding), Levin and Anne shared a common link. In the play, this is metaphorically represented by Edith placing the prayer book in Anne's hands, showing a passing on or 'discovery' of religion as a result of the actions of others. This is upheld by the fact that just as Levin expressed his difficulties with his identity he contemporaneously still felt himself to be Jewish (*In Search*, 1952). In his adaptation, Anne conveys a parallel feeling when her mother gives her the prayer book:

ANNE I really think all prayers should be private. That's the only way you can talk to God. How can you say anything that's written out for you by others? [2.2]⁶⁰

Expressing a distaste for organised religion (and mirroring Levin's early feelings towards Judaism), Anne's line is also an appeal to Jews (by Levin) not to allow themselves to be judged by the rest of global society and to have conviction in their own beliefs, echoing Levin's personal religious journey. In this regard, and like Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation, Levin's loss of self-other differentiation is displayed through an advisory projection: what the character speaks is not necessarily what the real Anne thought or believed, but more so what the adapter wishes her to say. At the same time, this appropriation corresponds broadly with aspects of the *Diary* and as such is grounded in truth, even while the sentiments being voiced by the character are not wholly those of the real Anne.

As with the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation, Otto encourages the others to sing. In this instance the song is the Maoz Tzur ("Rock of Ages"), and it is sung "*in Hebrew or English*"

⁶⁰ One cannot avoid seeing the subtle connotation of Anne's words given the bitter wrangling between Levin and Otto Frank over who had the right to 'speak' on behalf of/for Anne.

(2.2), enabling it to be adapted to suit particular audiences.⁶¹ Moreover, the song functions on a metaphorical level: while the Jewish celebrants are singing two young thieves break in below: “[...] *One of them [...], listens, motions to his partner, who also listens.*” (2.2) The thieves leave as the song is ending and it is clear that they are aware that Jews are hiding within the building. References to the danger of thieves discovering the Annexe and selling information to the SS in such cases (3.1) add a sense of tension (in a similar way to the bread theft in Goodrich & Hackett’s adaptation, the audience are aware of what has happened but the characters are not). In this context the scene is representative of the Annexe occupants’ religion being the cause of their persecution and downfall (it is implied that the scenario imagined by the Annexe occupants, of thieves ‘selling’ or bartering information if caught, has transpired).⁶² The scene functions on two metaphorical levels when posited alongside the loss of self-other differentiation in Levin’s case. Firstly, it is implied that by becoming too insular in the matter of religion, the community will inevitably bring about its own destruction from secular forces – paralleling Levin’s early conflicted feelings towards Judaism and his own persecution complex, as well as his second-hand witnessing of the Holocaust. The second metaphor is the value of true faith under terrible conditions. Even in the midst of danger the Annexe occupants are still desirous of celebrating their faith, demonstrating pride and defiance. If one considers Levin’s dual-sided conflict within himself, comprising both aversion of and pride in being Jewish, then the Hanukkah scene becomes a representative combination of both and exhibits Levin’s loss of self-other differentiation and his empathic distress.

⁶¹ It also indicates Levin’s hope that his play would be performed outside of Israel, to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike. Furthermore, although the song is bilingual, the prayers that Anne reads are in English.

⁶² This occurs in the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation: a break-in ensues during the Hanukkah celebrations, and van Daan and Dussel are convinced that the thief knows that they are there, with Dussel portending that one day the thief will bargain with the “Green Police” to obtain freedom by betraying Jews (1.5) At the end of the play, discussing who betrayed the hiding place, Mr. Kraler affirms: “It was the thief” (2.5).

The final example to be examined within both plays is the conversation between Anne and Peter over religion. Peter and Anne did have in-depth discussions, several of which Anne references in her diary, but the conversation utilised in each play is an amalgamated adaptation of two entries made by Anne on 23 February 1944 and 11 April 1944. In the former Anne discusses her feelings towards nature (Frank, 2002: 197-98), and in the latter she tells of how the warehouse below the Annexe was burgled,⁶³ describing the danger and terror before turning to a discussion of God and the Jews (ibid, 253-60). Both entries are used as the foundation for the conversation in each play, but again in such a way as to reflect the specific empathic responses of the authors.

In Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation, Anne goes to comfort Peter after a tense quarrel between the adults (2.4). Anne tries to console Peter by talking about nature, and the conversation turns to religion:

ANNE (*softly*) I wish you had a religion, Peter.

PETER ([...] *bitterly*) No, thanks. Not me.

ANNE Oh, [...] it doesn't matter what. Just to believe in something. When I think of all that's out there – the trees – and flowers – and seagulls – when I think of the dearness of you, Peter – and the goodness of the people we know – [...] risking their lives for us every day – [...] I'm not afraid any more [sic] – I find myself, and God, and I...

PETER (*rising; impatiently*) That's fine! But when I [...] think, I get mad. Look at us, hiding out for two years. [...] Waiting for them to come and get us – and all for what?

ANNE (*rising*) We're not the only people that've [sic] had to suffer. There've always been people that've had to – sometimes one race – sometimes another – and yet...

PETER [...] That doesn't make me feel any better.

ANNE I know it's terrible, trying to have any faith – [...] But [...] I think the world may be going through a phase [...]. It'll pass, maybe not for

⁶³ The investigating men from the Annexe, disturbing the burglars, were seen by passers-by and mistaken for thieves themselves. The police were called and explored the property, even rattling the bookcase concealing the Annexe entrance, but discovery was avoided (Frank, 2002: 253-60).

hundreds of years, but some day. I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart.

[...]

Look at the sky, now. Isn't it lovely? [2.4]

Goodrich & Hackett have altered the original text to make it appear that Anne's 'religion' is Nature over Judaism. Anne mentions God, but this is only in passing and is not dwelt upon with the same fervour that Anne displayed in her writing. In the original text, Anne looks upon Nature as God's creation and not as two separate entities. The portrayal of Anne as someone who believes in 'the goodness of people' is emphasised through her assertion of the 'dearness' of Peter and the actions of the helpers, and the use of the much misquoted line from the *Diary*: "I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart." (Frank, 2002: 332)⁶⁴ Such humanist ideals fit strongly with those of Goodrich & Hackett and the diary entries have been adapted to reflect this. Anne's discussion of the Jews and their suffering throughout time is reduced to two lines that make a broad statement about the universal suffering of humanity.

Levin utilises both of the diary entries mentioned but these are closer to their original form, and he also draws upon other moments from the *Diary*. After a visit from their helpers, Anne and Peter talk privately. The conversation is protracted and whereas Goodrich & Hackett concentrate upon humanism and nature over Judaism, Levin does the reverse:

ANNE Oh, Peter, the best remedy for those who are unhappy, or lonely, or afraid, is to go somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature, God. As long as this exists, and I can see it, I cannot really be unhappy... [...]

[...]

Peter. What do you believe in?

⁶⁴ Taken from Anne's diary entry of 15 July 1944, this line is repeated by Otto at the conclusion of the play. It is problematic as it has been taken completely out of context. As will be discussed Levin also uses this line in *Anne Frank*, but within its correct context.

[...]

PETER I don't know yet. [...]

ANNE [...] Margot [...] thinks we must be Jews first, and then –

PETER Jews, Jews! Oh Anne, why always Jews! Who inflicted this on us! Who made us Jews any different from other people! [3.1]

Peter expresses a wish to keep his Jewish identity hidden after the war,⁶⁵ and then the conversation returns to God and the Jews:

ANNE [...] It is God who made us as we are, and it will be God, too, who will raise us up again. If we bear all this suffering, and if there are still Jews le[f]t when it is over, then Jews instead of being doomed will be held up as an example.

[...]

Who knows, perhaps the whole world will learn, from that good that is in us, and perhaps for that reason the Jews have to suffer now. Right through the ages there have been Jews, through all the ages they have had to suffer, and it has made us strong, too. [3.1]

Levin's simultaneous dislike and pride in being Jewish is emulated through the two characters: Peter wishes to hide his Jewish identity, while Anne takes pride in hers. Anne's dialogue has been quoted almost verbatim. Even allowing for the maturity of Anne's writing, Levin has not rephrased the words in a manner more fitting to the speech of a teenaged girl (as he generally manages to do throughout the rest of the play), suggesting that the audience are hearing Levin's voice through Anne's words. This is supported by the structural positioning of this dialogue: Anne's penultimate assertion of the strength and martyrdom of the Jews as God's chosen people echoes the epiphany of Levin's spiritual journey. His choice to use the text virtually as it appears in the *Diary* reflects his empathic distress in that it mirrors almost exactly his feelings about his faith, becoming an empathic projection. Anne speaks reverently of the strength and suffering of the Jews and concurrently places herself

⁶⁵ This is based upon Anne's entry from 16 February 1944 (Frank, 2002: 191).

amongst that number. In this context Levin posits Anne as a Jewish martyr: a “sacrificial” victim “of innocence and purity” (Isser, 1997: 14). Her death, not mentioned in Levin’s adaptation, becomes a transcendent act. This “redemptive sacrifice” (ibid, 14) matches Levin’s need to find meaning in his own Jewish identity, particularly in the context of the Holocaust, coupled with his guilt at having survived and hitherto rejected the faith that Anne died in, and in this is a clear indicator of Levin’s empathic distress.

The play ends with Anne declaring her belief that “peace and tranquillity” will ultimately triumph, but she recognises the suffering around her and her assertion about the goodness of people ‘at heart’ is repeated in the context in which it appears in the *Diary*.

ANNE When I look at moonlight and have a feeling of beauty, when I feel love, and all creation, flowers, and insects, and people, and even horror and pain – the answer comes out of my heart. It’s as though God spoke to us through our own selves. And then, in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.

[...]

THE ROOM *becomes darker. ANNE’S recorded voice is heard, with the light from the air battle reflected on her face.*

ANNE (*recorded*) I see the world gradually turning into a wilderness. I hear the ever approaching thunder which will destroy us too. I can feel the suffering of millions, and yet if I look up into the heavens, I think it will all come out right, and this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquillity will come over the earth. [3.1]

Goodrich & Hackett posit Anne’s final words as being spoken in the contemporary moment of the 1950s, implying that Jewish suffering is over and that there should be forgiveness for the perpetrators of the Holocaust through an idealistic belief that they, too, are somehow ‘good at heart’.⁶⁶ One can see Levin’s conviction of the continued, post-Holocaust oppression of the Jews through his use, and structural positioning, of Anne’s words. In Goodrich & Hackett’s adaptation, Anne’s words appear in the present tense, just as they do in the *Diary*. However,

⁶⁶ Eva Schloss, a childhood acquaintance of Anne and her posthumous stepsister, has observed that Anne wrote these words *before* experiencing Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen (2013: 106).

the audience are aware that Anne is dead and so, given their position at the end of the play, the words become enshrined as Anne's final sentiment. Within Levin's adaptation the words appear in the present tense but take on the future tense: Anne believes in the goodness of people, yet portends that the cruelty and suffering *will* end – it has not already done so. This reiterates Levin's post-war experiences in Europe and Israel – specifically, his travels with 'illegals' attempting to reach Palestine – and his embittered struggle to have his adaptation produced. Here again his empathic distress with Anne can be seen alongside empathic projection and a loss of self-other differentiation: the sentiments of Levin and Anne are parallel and thus Levin views the situation through his own values, and with which those of Anne coincide.

In order to ascertain to what extent the empathic responses of the playwrights and the consequent tone of the adaptations affected the empathic reception of the spectator, it is important to examine a select demographic of responses through a discussion of critical reviews written at the time. The following two sections draw upon articles from a number of American newspapers in order to consider how the adaptations may be construed as achieving empathic efficacy, especially in terms of how they fulfilled authorial objectives through causing spectators to empathise and engage with the character of Anne Frank.

The effect on spectator empathy: critical reactions to Goodrich & Hackett's *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1955)

Most existing literature emphasises the overtly positive reaction of critics to Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation at its premiere (e.g. Goodrich, 2001; Lee, 2002; and Prose, 2009). What is of particular interest is the way that, although the critics in the articles examined here do not refer specifically to the evocation of empathy, the empathic constructs of Goodrich & Hackett are visible in the critical writing, as are similar empathic responses to those undergone by Goodrich & Hackett themselves. As with the play itself, the reviews mention Anne's Jewish identity briefly before focusing on her apparent spirit and vitality. For example,

Richard Watts Jr. of the *New York Post* refers to Anne as a “little Jewish girl” and extols her “valiant spirit” and “warm nature”.⁶⁷ In addition, the scope to which the adaptation is seen as directly representative of both Anne and her life in hiding is shown by Watts’ declaration that “There isn’t a fabricated [...] moment”;⁶⁸ as previously illustrated, the scene in which Mr. van Daan steals food is not only fictionalised but demonstrative of the advisory projection of Goodrich & Hackett.

Watts refers implicitly to the ease of empathy with the characters, stating that:

They are very ordinary [...] and [...] because they are such commonplace human beings, the sufferings and indignities heaped upon them are all the more terrifying, and we can share their experiences in a fashion we couldn’t if they had been idealized or made larger than life.⁶⁹

The universality of the characters as portrayed by Goodrich & Hackett thus enabled this spectator to locate empathic commonality with them and ‘share their experiences’ in an example of affective and empathic reactivity. The notion of ‘humanity’ can be construed as referring to both the contrast in behaviour and civilisation to that of the ‘inhumanity’ of the perpetrators, and the perceived qualities with which the spectator is able to identify and empathise. The majority of the critics appear to utilise the latter concept in that they mention the ‘human’ aspect of the characters. William Hawkins of the *New York World Telegram* and *The Sun* refers to the “human simplicity” of Mrs. Frank and the “human grouch” of Mr. van Daan,⁷⁰ while in his review for the *Christian Science Monitor* John Beaufort compares the characters of Otto and Edith Frank with “the less admirable but no less human Van Daans [sic]”.⁷¹ It can reasonably be assumed that the ‘humanity’ alluded to is synonymous with ‘reality’, in the sense that the characters are portrayed in such a way as to ease the ability of

⁶⁷ Richard Watts Jr. (1955) ‘The Moving Story of Anne Frank.’ *New York Post*, 6 October.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ William Hawkins (1955) ‘Faith Under Stress Revealed in ‘Diary.’’ *New York World Telegram* and *The Sun*, 6 October.

⁷¹ John Beaufort (1955) ‘Diary of Anne Frank.’ *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 October.

the spectator to empathise with them through all three empathic modes: motor mimicry (such as the fearful reactions of the families to the crash downstairs [1.5]), affective and empathic reactivity (such as Mr van Daan's outward expressions of greed for cake [2.1]), and perspective-taking (such as the reactions of each character following the discovery of Mr. van Daan stealing bread [2.3]). In this the critics' responses to the play, empathic or otherwise, fall within the idealistic framework constructed by Goodrich & Hackett. Describing the characters as "real people", Robert Coleman writes in the *Daily Mirror* that "You enjoy their minor victories, and sympathize with their despairs."⁷² Writing for the *Journal American* and showing affective reactivity and in-his-shoes perspective-taking, John McClain finds a universal reality within the characters that is conducive to empathy with them: "There is [...] the feeling that this is not theatre, this is real. [...] The mood grows, and we become part of this heroic group [...]. And when, at the end, there comes the realization that the struggle has been futile, we are moved to sincere despair."⁷³ Similarly to Watts, McClain notes "an authoritative quality to the tale",⁷⁴ demonstrating that Goodrich & Hackett are seen to be representing Anne exactly from the pages of the *Diary* and without overt authorial alteration.

The efficacy of the empathic and advisory projections of Goodrich & Hackett in their selective reading of the *Diary*, and revision of entries to function as voiceovers, come across strongly in the critics' reactions. Richard Watts Jr. incorrectly asserts that all of the events depicted onstage were recorded in Anne's diary – including by implication the Nazi discovery of the Annexe – stating that it is "presented [...] with the straightforward accent of complete credibility" and that "the authors were completely right in setting it down in documentary fashion".⁷⁵ This highlights the fact that he has empathised with the characters to the point of seeing the play as a 'documentary', an outright representation of the people exactly as they were, without allowing for the possibility that this might not have been the case, or that the

⁷² Robert Coleman (1955) "Diary of Anne Frank' A Gripping Drama.' *Daily Mirror*, 6 October.

⁷³ John McClain (1955) 'Stark Study Of Terror.' *Journal American*, 6 October.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Richard Watts Jr. (1955) 'The Moving Story of Anne Frank.' *New York Post*, 6 October.

original diary is written from Anne's subjective point of view. His willingness to view the adaptation as an accurate and faithful rendition of the *Diary* denotes his high level of empathy with the characters in his perception of them as 'real' and his exhibiting of affective reactivity.

Brooks Atkinson asserts in the *New York Times* that Goodrich & Hackett "have absorbed the story out of the diary and related it simply."⁷⁶ Interestingly he asserts that from "any practical point of view" it is "impossible" to make a play out of the diary, and that Goodrich & Hackett have "succeeded" by not contriving anything.⁷⁷ As with Watts, Atkinson is able to receive the play well through his ability to empathise with the apparently 'non-contrived' reality of the characters. As such, Atkinson's empathy presumably arises from a combination of motor mimicry and affective reactivity. The 'simplicity' and 'non-contrived' manner in which the play is apparently presented implies that the characters are easy to follow in mimetic terms of both behaviour and emotion, as illustrated by Atkinson's view that "Out of the truth of a human being has come a delicate, rueful, moving drama."⁷⁸ This statement likewise indicates a degree of affective reactivity, in a similar way to that of Richard Watts.

John McClain claims that the play is "the literal dramatization of the book",⁷⁹ and this opinion is underscored by other reviewers. A critic for *Variety*, identified only as 'Hiff', describes how between scenes the voice of Susan Strasberg, the actress playing Anne, "quotes lines from Anne's diary, each setting the mood for the next sequence. It is an effective device. Anne's last line [...] is 'There must be some good in all people, everywhere.'"⁸⁰ The view of Goodrich & Hackett in seeing Anne as unconditionally believing that 'people are truly good at heart', emphasising their loss of self-other differentiation, is

⁷⁶ Brooks Atkinson (1955) 'Theatre: 'The Diary of Anne Frank'.' *New York Times*, 6 October.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ John McClain (1955) 'Stark Study Of Terror.' *Journal American*, 6 October.

⁸⁰ 'Hiff' (1955) 'Diary of Anne Frank.' *Variety*, 12 October.

reiterated, and Hift's response is couched in terms that reflects their idealism: "'Diary' is a fine play [...]. Hollywood should give it to the world as a monument to the unconquerable spirit of Anne, and as a reminder of man's inhumanity to man."⁸¹ Anne's 'spirit' thus becomes the dominant element for remembrance, rather than the genocide of which she was a victim, and removes her further from the Jewish context of the Holocaust in a manner denoting the unwitting continuance of Goodrich & Hackett's constructs on the part of the spectator.

John Chapman of the *Daily News* contends that the voiceovers – "the inner voice of Anne" – are "not a handy theatrical device but a part of the play itself", calling them "most absorbing."⁸² Chapman does not differentiate between the action of the play and the tone of the voiceovers, not only showing the craft of Goodrich & Hackett but exemplifying how their voice became that of Anne. Such a view is perpetuated by Rowland Field in his review for the *Newark Evening News*, in which he describes "the voice of the youthful heroine reading portions of her diary in absentia".⁸³ It is implied that Field receives the voiceovers as both a theatrical device and as first-hand accounts from Anne, denoted by referring to the heroine as being 'in absentia'. Field evidently believes that the accounts are real and unmediated, facilitating empathy in the form of empathic reactivity and empathetic perspective-taking through his belief that the voiceovers are a re-presentation of first-hand testimony.

Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation conditions the spectator towards a reception of Anne as a universalised figure with whom it is easy to empathise due to her idealised and identifiable character. As established by the critics' responses outlined above, the majority of audience members were able to do so as Anne and the other Annexe occupants are portrayed in a manner which allows the spectator to locate direct empathic commonality with them, denoted by the frequent critical use of the word 'human', as well as more idealised empathic traits such as Anne's 'spirit'. The fact that most of the critics frame Anne's religion

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² John Chapman (1955) "'Diary of Anne Frank' a Splendid Drama, Beautifully Done at Cort.' *Daily News*, 6 October.

⁸³ Rowland Field (1955) "'Anne Frank'." *Newark Evening News*, 6 October.

within the same constructs as Goodrich & Hackett – that is, positing it as the reason for her persecution – before emphasising more readily identifiable aspects of her nature signifies how Goodrich & Hackett were ultimately successful in their objective of creating a universal Anne with which mainstream audiences would be able to empathise and engage.

The effect on spectator empathy: critical reactions to Levin's *Anne Frank: A Play* (1991)

Levin's adaptation was given its American premiere at the Lyric Stage in Boston in 1983, but no reviews have survived.⁸⁴ Instead, the critical reviews explored in this section relate to the second American production of the play in 1991, again at the Lyric Stage.⁸⁵ The number of reviews is limited but the critical responses are illuminating, especially as they demonstrate the reviewers' awareness that Levin's play is a direct contrast to the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation. The name of Levin's version was changed from *Anne Frank: A Play* to *The Diary of Anne Frank* for the Lyric Stage production.⁸⁶

Writing for the *Boston Herald*, Arthur Friedman finds Levin's play "flat" and "safe", expressing a hope that "the tide of historical revisionism isn't about to wash over the story of Anne Frank"⁸⁷ and thus attesting to the extent of which Goodrich & Hackett's image of Anne has taken hold in popular consciousness. Friedman's reaction constitutes a conditioned empathic response as a result of the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation, and can therefore be deemed as affective reactivity: he has previously 'experienced' the *Diary* for himself and evidently enjoyed it, but has failed to locate his experience of this prior encounter within Levin's play and as a result cannot engage empathically with it. Friedman notes that the

⁸⁴ Potential reasons for this range from a possible lack of critical interest, arising as a consequence of the earlier controversy, to archival restrictions resulting from the relocation of the Lyric Stage – the situation cannot be definitively established.

⁸⁵ The reviews have been sourced from the archive at the Lyric Stage.

⁸⁶ Again, possible reasons for this are numerous. The most likely explanation is that by this time the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation was widely known and it was therefore highly probable that prospective audience members would be more familiar with the subject under this title.

⁸⁷ Arthur Friedman (1991) 'Lyric Stage's 'Anne Frank' is flat, safe.' *Boston Herald*, January (exact date unknown).

adaptation is more “ethnically oriented” than that of Goodrich & Hackett, but equally that Levin’s rendering of Otto Frank is not as “emotionally [...] involving” as theirs and that Levin’s depiction of Anne is “reductive”.⁸⁸ He concludes that the play is therefore “less focused and moving”,⁸⁹ and in this case Levin’s empathic treatment of Anne leads to an overall dislike of and distancing from her by the spectator (who expresses his preference instead for the character in Goodrich & Hackett’s play).

In direct contrast Eric Secoy writes in *The TAB* that Levin’s adaptation is “a more compelling and moving drama than the standard adaptation by Goodman [sic] and Hackett.”⁹⁰ He praises the play for placing “the Franks’ plight in its political and religious context”⁹¹ and it is implied that this is the reason for his perception of the play as being ‘more compelling and moving’. Levin’s empathy with Anne in terms of their mutual religion hence causes his adaptation to be received in its proper context, and Levin’s play is lauded for its ‘reality’ in presenting the Franks as an overtly Jewish family and thus emphasising their persecution by the Nazis. Secoy affirms that the different reactions of the characters to being in hiding correspond with what “one would expect ordinary people thrust into an extraordinary situation to do”, expressing the view that the ensuing tensions are “natural” for the circumstances.⁹² In this Secoy undergoes empathic projection and demonstrates cognitive empathy through in-his-shoes perspective-taking, in that he is able to perceive the situation of the characters in hiding from their perspective and with their values. He gives emphasis to this with his assertion that one of the “play’s virtues” is that the “tension can be felt”,⁹³ signifying that as well as empathic projection he experiences motor mimicry.

Anthony Tommasini of the *Boston Globe* compares Levin’s adaptation closely to the original text of the *Diary*, and proposes that the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation “can seem

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Eric Secoy (1991) ‘Theater.’ *The TAB*, January (exact date unknown).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

diminished and conventional” when contrasted with the *Diary* itself.⁹⁴ In this sense Tommasini can be seen as trying to locate his own views of Anne (“The book is [...] astonishing [...] [and] achingly personal”⁹⁵) within both adaptations, particularly as he notes that Levin’s version is “more factual, graphic and honest” but complains that it frequently employs a “dramatically stiff preachiness”.⁹⁶ Moreover Tommasini criticises the historical inaccuracies within Levin’s script, citing that Anne “was given the diary by her father not by her young girlfriend Jopie, as the play depicts in the prologue”, and declaring that such small details “lend poignancy and truth”.⁹⁷ In this example the spectator appears to engage entirely in cognitive empathy in the context of in-his-shoes perspective-taking. He has previously read the book and obviously knows it well, and therefore attends a production of each adaptation with Anne’s perspective in mind and thus expecting to locate such a perspective in the plays. When this does not happen he cannot have any additional or affective empathic response to either of the adaptations through his concern with their veracity in relation to the *Diary*.

In a review for Boston University student newspaper the *Daily Free Press*, Lisa Tuomivaara locates an empathic commonality with Anne Frank through noting the contemporary conflict of the Gulf War and how the play has continued resonance via its depiction of “the effects of war on the individual”.⁹⁸ Tuomivaara posits empathy with the characters in the play through both the physical space of the performance – “The confined, yet intimate space [...] lends itself well to reproducing the claustrophobia experienced by the Franks and VanDaans [sic]” – and the “strong bonds and love that exist” between the characters.⁹⁹ In these respects she asserts that “It really feels like you’re in the attic with

⁹⁴ Anthony Tommasini (1991) ‘Serious, skillful telling of ‘The Diary of Anne Frank’.’ *Boston Globe*, 30 January.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Lisa Tuomivaara (1991) ‘Still Hopeful After All These Years.’ *Daily Free Press*, 31 January.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

them” and likens it to “peering into someone’s window on a snowy night, directly experiencing the warmth that emerges”.¹⁰⁰ In this regard, and like Secoy, spectator empathy arises from Tuomivaara undergoing empathic projection, as well placing herself alongside those onstage. This predominantly reflects empathetic perspective-taking: Tuomivaara ‘experiences’ the same events as the characters through her position as a spectator within the same space, and yet as she cannot truly appreciate exactly how the characters themselves are feeling – again due to her status as a spectator – she takes her ‘experience’ of those events and imagines how the characters feel.

The empathic reactions of the critics in response to Levin’s adaptation are mixed, ranging from a desire to locate their personal perspective of Anne within the play to empathic projection and identification that is likened to a physical sensation. Anne has not been idealised or ‘Americanised’ in Levin’s adaptation, and as such I suggest that spectators are not as able to readily identify with her as they are with Goodrich & Hackett’s Anne. As discussed previously the action in Levin’s play adheres more closely to that of the original *Diary*, but in the critics’ reviews this is alluded to in terms of ‘historical revisionism’ in one regard and as a praiseworthy contextualisation in another. As with Goodrich & Hackett’s adaptation the empathic responses of the spectators are framed in terms of direct empathic commonality, with Levin’s version evoking reactions that correspond with his empathic construct of Anne to a lesser extent.

Conclusion

When one considers the adapters’ efforts to create their ‘ideal’ Anne, whether through highly specific readings of her diary or by placing emphasis on those elements that most suited their own values and ideals, each play can be seen as having positive and negative features

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

in the context of how they speak 'for' and represent Anne, and in this regard neither Levin's nor Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation emerges as 'better' than the other.

Anne does have both 'universal' and 'Jewish' qualities. Levin's empathic distress as an immediately post-Holocaust Jewish writer faced with the genocide of European Jewry meant that he placed emphasis on Anne's Jewish identity and the notion that her voice "[...] becomes the voice of six million vanished Jewish souls." (Graver, 1995: 26) Goodrich & Hackett also empathised with Anne, but their focus was upon her universality and the potential for her voice to speak to humanity on behalf of all victims of persecution, not just Jews. Levin's *Anne Frank* is more true to the Anne of the *Diary*, representing her mercurial and imperfect character, while Goodrich & Hackett's *The Diary of Anne Frank* is more theatrical (ibid, 238) and portrays Anne as the archetypal image of childish (as opposed to childlike) innocence. This latter perception was actively cultivated by Otto Frank, along with the repression of Anne's Jewishness; it is not unexpected that the portrayal of Anne arising from her grieving father's view of her fits closely with how he wished to remember her (a perception additionally clouded by the passage of some eight years from Anne's death until the beginning of the adaptation process by Goodrich & Hackett).¹⁰¹ Likewise, it is not surprising that the depiction of Anne as a maturing teenager, developing her personal sense of Jewish identity, should be drawn by a man who had endured his own religious turmoil and who connected with Anne in terms of their mutual 'Jewishness'. With opposing sets of empathic factors directly influencing stage representations of Anne, the Levin and Goodrich & Hackett adaptations each illustrate a different picture of her. One does not see Anne Frank, the spirited and animated teenaged narrator of her own life, but a refracted image of how others wished to perceive her. Levin and Goodrich & Hackett suppressed the real Anne beneath their idealism and unwitting loss of self-other differentiation, going against what Levin himself termed as "The rights of an author who has died [...] to a fully faithful

¹⁰¹ Carol Lee Worden observes that "Because Otto Frank survives [both in the play and in real life], Anne's story has become his story, and needs to change from this place" (2002: 67).

interpretation.”¹⁰² As Carol Lee Worden (2002) states, “Anne Frank’s story has always had an agenda” (74) and nowhere is this demonstrated better than in the two adaptations.

When one considers the length of time that has passed since those adaptations, and the fact that these were so obviously influenced by differing authorial empathic responses and empathic distress, I argue that Anne’s diary should continue to be explored anew through fresh adaptations, allowing her stage voice to be updated for the structure of feeling and sensibilities of twenty-first-century audiences. Wendy Kesselman re-adapted Goodrich & Hackett’s text in 1997, but even though the new adaptation is grittier – for instance, Otto’s closing speech details the fates of the Annexe occupants – it still propagates the image of Anne first instilled by Goodrich & Hackett. I argue that the growing diversity of multicultural societies, especially in Britain and America, means that there is less need for a wholly ‘universal’ Anne; just as in life, Anne’s Jewish identity and humanistic/universal qualities would easily be able to co-exist onstage. This has been proven by Theater Amsterdam’s 2014 adaptation *Anne*. The production had a budget of fourteen million Euros and combined state-of-the-art technology and digital media with three life-sized sets that moved around the audience on tracks in a custom-built auditorium. The meticulously-crafted script was adapted from all extant versions of the *Diary* and did not try to speak ‘for’ Anne. Indeed, at the play’s conclusion Anne, standing alone and directly addressing the audience, spoke in a halting manner, saying lines such as “I believe that...I dream that...” without stating definitively what she believed or dreamed, before moving away from the audience in a stylised tableau that was simultaneously moving and illustrated the popular exaltation of the historical figure. However, the play was performed entirely in Dutch, with electronic simultaneous translation devices available for audience members, and at the time of writing is only being staged in one location on the outskirts of Amsterdam, meaning that it is not widely accessible to English-speaking audiences. If this adaptation were to be translated into English and

¹⁰² Undated note (BU).

performed in the UK and USA, I argue that it would have a profound and significant effect on the current perception of Anne Frank within these countries and potentially re-ignite interest for both old and new generations; to do so is, ultimately, the primary purpose of any stage adaptation of the *Diary*. Until such a time English-speaking audiences will have no other recourse than the Goodrich & Hackett and Kesselman adaptations. Worden (2002) has criticised both the Goodrich & Hackett adaptation and Kesselman's reworking, arguing that it is time for the play "to be re-visioned [sic] or reconsidered as a viable play for representing the Holocaust, or simply disappear." (80) Anne's public status is too great for the plays to 'simply disappear'. Moreover, "Despite epochal social and cultural changes [...] Anne's diary continues to have lasting appeal. Readers of all ages identify with her enthusiasms and fears because they can readily recognize their own [...] in her words" (Enzer and Solotaroff-Enzer, 2000: 2). This, coupled with the fact that, as noted by Lawrence L. Langer (1983), both the book and the plays "permit the imagination to cope with the idea of the Holocaust without forcing a confrontation with its grim details" (Enzer and Solotaroff-Enzer, 2000: 200), enables spectators to be eased into a less traumatic introduction to, or encounter with, the Holocaust.¹⁰³

Yet contemporaneously there is a very real need for a paradigm shift when it comes to presenting Anne's story. This is in itself beset by problems such as the severe restrictions imposed by the Anne Frank-Fonds over using the actual diary for adaptation, either for stage or screen; until the Theater Amsterdam production, a BBC adaptation in 2009 was the first production that the rights had been granted to for nearly a quarter of a century.¹⁰⁴ Another

¹⁰³ According to Alex Sagan:

'It would be anachronistic and unduly dismissive to deny the positive role of the play [...], especially insofar as audiences developed empathy for Anne Frank. Though such empathy may have been limited or ill-informed, I am convinced [...] that such emotions constituted an early step in the process of coming to terms with the legacy of the mass murder of European Jewry.' (Enzer and Solotaroff-Enzer, 2000: 9-10)

¹⁰⁴ British Broadcasting Corporation (no date) 'Ellie Kendrick Interview.'
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/annefrank/about.shtml> [Accessed 31 December 2011].

inherent difficulty is the fact that Anne is fixed in the public empathic imagination as a sweet, wondering and innocent girl-child. Anne does exhibit these characteristics at points within her diary, but these were not her dominant character traits. At the beginning of the *Diary* Anne is spoilt, self-centred and domineering, jealously craving of her father's love and attention, continually dismissive and critical of her mother, and pettish towards her sister. These attitudes did change as Anne's diary and life in hiding continued. Yet Anne's egocentric traits are lessened in Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation, and any negative behaviour that she does display is excused through being attributed to the whims of a child. The child-like nature of Goodrich & Hackett's Anne is accentuated through moments such as her removing her underwear in front of strangers (1.2), trying on Margot's bra, walking in high heels for the first time, and experiencing her first kiss (2.2). Goodrich & Hackett's adaptation is therefore largely responsible for the sentimentalising and romanticising of Anne's story and Anne herself, securing her place in popular consciousness as a bright, naïve and virginal victim of Nazi evil. In recent years this image has started to change: in 2009, the BBC broadcast a five-part television miniseries, adapted by Deborah Moggach from the *Diary*, and in which Anne (Ellie Kendrick) is notably closer to how she was than how she is idealistically perceived. Kendrick commented: "[...] [T]here's a danger [...] of making Anne Frank into this kind of saint-like figure, which [...] has been done a lot of times before, when really she was this [...] joyful, [...] snappy girl [...] [with] a [...] feisty streak".¹⁰⁵ Levin's stage adaptation does not make Anne a 'saint-like figure', as he adheres more to the *Diary* and as such more accurately represents her. This is especially the case in his prologue, where Anne's social popularity, difficult relationship with Edith and curiosity about menstruation and sexuality are shown. However, although Levin's adaptation is truer to Anne, his empathic distress means that the adaptation is laden with broader meaning, focused upon the central theme of Jewish identity and what it means to be Jewish in the face of persecution.

¹⁰⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation (no date) 'Ellie Kendrick Interview.'
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/annefrank/about.shtml> [Accessed 31 December 2011].

The need for a new adaptation therefore arises from the necessity to tell Anne's story without empathic distress or loss of authorial self-other differentiation. The emphasis by Levin and Goodrich & Hackett upon those elements that they felt to be most important, and which automatically equated with their personal beliefs, means that their adaptations have great potential to manipulate audience empathy and dictate the resonance that audience members receive. Hyman A. Enzer and Sandra Solotaroff-Enzer state:

[...] [A]fter a half-century of interpretations the distinctive selves that constituted the 'bundle of contradictions,' as she described herself, have been separated. Once, Anne turned herself inside out to discover who she was. Now others tell us they know who she 'really' was. [...] [M]any of her interpreters have reconstituted Anne Frank from their often righteous self-interests or their misreading of her words. Anne Frank has become an intricate play of shadows. (2000: 2)

I argue that a new adaptation must come from a motivation to tell Anne's story and allow the spectators themselves to determine the meaning that they take from it, including any empathy with the character of Anne, without authorial mediation. This has the capacity to indicate new possibilities for hearing new, or new versions of, 'traditional' Holocaust narratives. In addition, I suggest that a narrative that is deliberately contrived to wholly manipulate audience empathy is at risk of losing all impact entirely: Alvin Rosenfeld has declared that "When we all become Anne Frank then she is dislodged from history, and her story is distorted and sadly diminished." (Worden, 2002: 70) If one empathises too much with Anne Frank, undergoing empathic distress, and one 'becomes' her, then one replaces Anne's story with one's own and the resonance of Anne's life and death are lost. It is crucial to maintain distance between the audience member and Anne in order for the spectator to perceive their own similarities with her, but without substituting her suffering for their own.

Anne Frank was the first child protagonist of Anglophone Holocaust drama and, as outlined above, there are concerns pertaining to empathy in such a case. It is possible to locate the inherent issues arising from the use of a child protagonist in Holocaust drama, defined in the next chapter, as beginning with the initial stage representation of Anne Frank:

specifically, the consequences of the ease of empathy with a child protagonist coupled with historical misinformation or misrepresentation through artistic licence.

EFFECTIVE EMPATHY AND THE 'HOLOCAUST FAIRYTALE': CHILD PROTAGONISTS IN HOLOCAUST DRAMA

Introduction

In *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust* Carolyn J. Dean discusses the concept of “empathy fatigue”, in which spectators dissociate themselves from violent or traumatic events out of a need for self-protection, often resulting in “numbness” towards the suffering of others (2004: 1). Dean posits two “dimensions” as being central sources of this. The first is the effect of mass media upon human feeling (ibid, 7), with a dominance of visual images in the form of news ‘stories’ creating what Barbie Zelizer terms “moral habituation” – you see so much you don’t notice it – and in seeing more, you may even feel less.” (Ibid, 8) Such concerns are supported by Patrick Duggan (2012), who asserts that advances in communication technology enable the viewer to be placed directly “in the theatre of war and the immediate aftermath of social violence.” (51) Duggan notes that as a result such ‘traumas’ are ever-present and the viewer thus comes to perceive them as embodying a sense of reality or of being in history (ibid, 52). In this sense the viewer continually and vicariously witnesses traumatic events and their emotional reactions are flattened through over-exposure. The second dimension outlined by Dean is the rise of a ‘culture of victimisation’, in which a politics of identity based upon victimhood means that each social group that can claim such a status – from Holocaust survivors to war casualties and survivors of domestic or sexual abuse – does so to the extent that the suffering of others is related to only inasmuch as it can be compared to that of oneself (ibid, 11-12). Both of these aspects have contributed significantly to a gap in empathy towards the Holocaust, and with the approach of the post-survivor age it is important to develop an understanding of ways in which public empathy may be re-engaged in order to prevent what Gary Weissman (2004) calls ‘Holocaust dissociation’. Weissman locates this as a distinct possibility as the gap in time and memory from the Holocaust itself widens, positing that there will be “no special commitment to commemorating or ‘witnessing’ this part of the distant past.” (Ibid, 7)

In terms of Holocaust theatre, one method of engaging audiences with the subject is that of using child protagonists. As Mark M. Anderson observes in the context of American Holocaust awareness, public interest has been particularly aroused through representations that focus upon child victims:

For many Americans with little knowledge of European history, who are often baffled or bored when confronted with the maze of geographic locales, statistics, and [...] political ideologies [...], the figure of the persecuted child turns the Holocaust into a moving and accessible story (2007: 3).

Anderson asserts that the persecuted child “appeals to our own memories of childhood, our identities as parents, sisters, brothers: it speaks to us in existential and moral terms, and only secondarily in historical or political ones.” (Ibid, 3) A child protagonist is thus empathic through the universality of childhood, and spectators are not called upon to relate to them through a belief system or culture that may be alien to their own. This is supported by Martin L. Hoffman, who states that “observers are more empathic to victims who are familiar and similar to themselves than to victims who are different” (1987: 67). Similarly, in a discussion of indifference and the language of victimisation, Dean notes the argument of Elazar Barkan, who in a study of Holocaust victims’ claims for restitution contended that “empathy [...] depends increasingly on how one makes one’s case and who is willing to listen.” (2004: 76) Quite simply, the presence of the child protagonist inclines spectators towards empathy. Simultaneously, the use of child protagonists in plays about the Holocaust creates issues that are potentially greater than the positive aspects of doing so, primarily due to the reductive treatment of historical events generally used in such cases.

My argument in this chapter forms two parts and is interrogated through an examination of three case studies. In the first part of my argument I will examine how it is possible for child protagonists in Holocaust drama to effectively break through spectator indifference and evoke empathy. In the second I will interrogate such plays in the context of their teaching of Holocaust history and the inherent problems that arise from the conventions

utilised within them, through which I will develop a definition of what I term the 'Holocaust fairytale'. The first case study is *Number the Stars* (1996), adapted by American playwright Douglas W. Larche from the 1989 children's novel by Lois Lowry and in which two Danish sisters and their family help their Jewish neighbours flee from Nazi-occupied Denmark to safety in Sweden. In the second example, *Remember My Name* (1989) by American playwright Joanna Halpert Kraus, a young French-Jewish girl is sent into hiding alone and becomes involved with the Resistance before her father returns from the concentration camps to be reunited with her. In the third case study, *The Flight into Egypt* (1996) by British playwright Julian Garner, a teenaged Jewish artist flees her home in rural Poland after the murder of her family and is hidden in Krakow by a Polish caretaker. I will begin by discussing the efficacy of children in stimulating empathic and emotional responses in relation to the Holocaust. I posit that the ease with which spectators can empathise with children, through aspects such as the human mirror neuron system and primitive empathy, and the conventions inherent in theatrical representations of the child result in the willingness of audiences to engage with them. I will utilise the concept put forward by Alvin Rosenfeld (2011), of popular entertainment and culture as the predominant means for the public to obtain information about the Holocaust, in order to examine the evolution of the Holocaust fairytale as a trend within American theatre. I argue that it has arisen primarily through the American cultural values which inform the creation of theatre and American collective memory of the Holocaust, and is characterised by seven precepts ranging from the age and sex of the child protagonist to the representation of suffering and the ending of the narrative. Through an analysis of these precepts in the context of the three case studies, I will demonstrate the varying degrees to which the term 'Holocaust fairytale' can be applied to Holocaust plays that feature child protagonists and how such fairytales constitute a problem with the increase in temporal and spatial distance from the Holocaust and the approach of the post-survivor age. Finally, I propose that American Holocaust plays featuring child protagonists could adhere more to the British model for such plays in establishing empathic

and emotional responses without offering a simplified story or straightforward resolution, thus moving away from the paradigm of the Holocaust fairytale entirely.

The utilisation of children in the context of empathy and the Holocaust

The use of children to elicit emotional reactions in the milieu of the Holocaust is implemented both within and outside of the theatre. For example, children feature frequently throughout the museum exhibitions at Auschwitz-Birkenau, ranging from displays of shoes, toys and other artefacts belonging to children who died there to a life-sized statue of a small child, entitled *The Little Prisoner*, in the Czech national exhibition in Block 16 (Figure 1). The statue is affecting in its attitude and expression, which convey a sense of innocence, bewilderment and helplessness; its stature, which is a life-sized representation of a child; and in the fact that the visitor is able to touch it. While the statue indicates the history of Czech prisoners within the Auschwitz complex, most notably the existence of a 'family camp' at Birkenau, children are also a key feature of the Roma & Sinti exhibition in Block 13 (Figure 2). This is important considering the perception of the Roma & Sinti by many in contemporary Western society as 'undesirables' (Stahnke, LeGendre, Grekov et al., 2008) and continued discrimination against them (Kapralski, 2005). It is worth considering that children are emphasised here not just in the context of their suffering at Auschwitz – including the infamous 'medical' experiments conducted by Joseph Mengele – but as a way of engaging the visitor with a traditionally maligned social group.¹⁰⁶

There are various examples of English-language Holocaust plays that feature child protagonists, ranging from *Korczak's Children* (1983) by Michael Brady and *Letters To An Alien* (1996) by Robert Caisley to *And Then They Came For Me* (1999) by James Still and *Kindertransport* (1993/2008) by Diane Samuels. The main reason for the inclusion of a child protagonist is generally that the play is intended for a younger audience, and having a child

¹⁰⁶ The use of children as a means of engaging visitors in a museum context is also employed by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) (Anderson, 2007: 14).



Fig. 1: *The Little Prisoner*, Block 16, Auschwitz I. © Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, <http://www.auschwitz.org>.



Fig. 2: One of the numerous photographs of children featured in the Roma & Sinti exhibition, Block 13, Auschwitz I. © Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, <http://www.auschwitz.org>.

as the central character makes young spectators more likely to identify with that character, leading to (greater) emotional engagement. As Bruce McConachie (2008) asserts, spectators “do not wait to deploy empathy, but engage it unconsciously right from the start of every performance to help them figure out where to focus their attention, who these characters are, and what their story is about.” (72) A sympathetic protagonist in the form of a central child character eases this process and creates an obvious empathic vehicle. For both adult and child spectators there is an element of ‘safety’ involved: within conventional modes of storytelling and representation, child protagonists – from the traditional stories of Little Red Riding Hood and Hansel & Gretel to the contemporary narrative of Harry Potter – undergo dangerous, distressing and even life-threatening experiences but emerge safely at the end. The use of a child protagonist denotes that the audience will not be vicariously exposed to particular events of the Holocaust; for instance, no British or American Holocaust plays with a child protagonist feature a narrative that occurs within the concentration camps.¹⁰⁷ It can reasonably be deduced that the representation will not be particularly violent or graphic due to the presence of the child performer. Given this model, the use of child protagonists enables a breakthrough into potential spectator numbness/indifference with a representational paradigm that is already well-known in Western theatre, exemplified by productions such as *Oliver!* (1960), *Billy Elliott* (2005) and *Matilda The Musical* (2010). The commercial success of these productions illustrates the readiness of spectators to engage with the narrative of a child protagonist, particularly in the context of their overcoming all odds to reach a ‘happy ending’ (see Appendix 1, Note 4). Yet while a child protagonist is efficacious in engaging audiences, their implementation is problematic within the context of Holocaust theatre – epitomised by this conventional happy ending and resulting in the

¹⁰⁷ There are several plays which feature children in the camps, but none that have them as the central protagonist: for example, *The Grey Zone* (1998) by Tim Blake Nelson and *The Spirit of Life* (1999) by David F. Eliet (adapted from the book *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* (1999) by Yaffa Eliach). It should be noted that children were usually the first to be selected for extermination upon arrival at the camps.

creation of the 'Holocaust fairytale'. This is a story that functions in terms of what Gary Weissman (2004) refers to as "sweetening or sugar-coating" the Holocaust, in that the genocide is stripped of its horror and represented overall as a story with an ultimately joyful outcome (12).

Developing an understanding of audience empathy towards child protagonists: the human mirror neuron system and 'primitive empathy'

It is important to further define the role of empathy within the framework of the Holocaust fairytale. Empathy is not an emotion but leads viewers into emotional engagement (McConachie, 2008: 65), and so the action of a play has a pronounced impact on the evocation of audience empathy, the resulting emotional engagement of the spectator, and the subsequent 'lesson' derived from the performance. Further to the argument put forward by Mark M. Anderson in the introduction to this chapter, I posit that as well as empathetic and in-his-shoes perspective-taking, the ease with which child protagonists may be 'read' by spectators in the context of the human mirror neuron system and associated 'primitive empathy' is vital in terms of understanding audience empathy with these protagonists.

In relation to cognitive theories of performance, Evelyn B. Tribble and John Sutton have observed that there is an ongoing debate over mirror neurons, including questions surrounding how "settled and stable" research studies in this field truly are and the scepticism of some researchers relating to the very function of mirror neurons in humans (2013: 32). However, within this chapter I am going to limit my argument to the basic concept of mirror neurons. In 1992 a team of neuroscientists led by Giacomo Rizzolatti at the University of Parma discovered what are now called 'mirror neurons': cells that fire when the subject both performs an action, such as holding a banana, and sees that action performed by somebody else (Ehrenfeld, 2011; Cook, 2007: 587-88). The 'mirror neuron' is so called because its firing reflects an action witnessed in another or the action performed by the self (ibid, 588). The human mirror neuron system links the actions and intentions of others with

one's own perceptions and actions (ibid, 588). (In this one can see the original meaning of empathy: that is, the projecting of oneself into another object or person.) Cook notes that mirror neurons do not discriminate between a performed act and a witnessed act (ibid, 591), and as humans have a more highly evolved mirror neuron system than other animals, this allows them to access the emotions, as well as the actions, of others through direct simulation (McConachie, 2008: 71). This concept of 'direct simulation', also referred to as 'motor mimicry', forms the basis of 'affective empathy' or 'primitive empathy'. Nancy E. Snow (2000) defines motor mimicry as "imitating the physical movements and facial expressions of another" (72), but her emphasis on physicality does not allow for the possibility of what George Gunkle (1963) refers to as "*covert* motor mimicry" (16). While Gunkle defines the existence of "*overt* motor mimicry" (ibid, 16) in the same terms as Snow, 'covert motor mimicry' is the "inner imitation" (ibid, 16) of such expression, with the physical movement implied by 'motor' broadly rendered as the experiencing of feeling as a physical sensation (such as fear or nervousness). An audience member will not imitate Annemarie Johansen literally by running alongside her to her uncle's boat in *Number the Stars*, but they will undergo an *inner* imitation of her mental process and thereby embody the emotion that the actor/Annemarie is displaying. Various scholars suggest that this embodiment of emotional expression is crucial to empathy, and automatic in nature. For example, McConachie notes that our "muscular, chemical, and neurological responses" to the emotions of others are small to the point of escaping conscious recognition, but that our bodies are highly attuned to the emotions of others (2007: 563); while Gabriele Sofia defines the concept of "embodied anticipation" in terms of optimising all the processes of "interaction, exchange and collaboration" in order to immediately comprehend the intentions of others (2013: 174-75). Automatic mirroring by the spectator, then, means that what the actor/character shows through physical or vocal gestures dictates how the spectator will empathise with them, either through overt or covert motor mimicry, and whether the subsequent emotional engagement will take the form of sympathy or antipathy (McConachie, 2008: 65). The

formation of these emotions – which, in the context of a theatre performance, will happen in a necessarily short space of time – leads to a strong sensation of these emotions (when compared to everyday emotions in the real world, for example) and as such colours the experience of the spectator to reflect that of the character. Therefore, the strong emotional/affective aspect impacts upon how events are perceived by the spectator, especially if they are ‘sided’ with the protagonist and consequently view the events of the play through primitive empathy with them. I argue that this presents the simultaneous advantage and disadvantage of the use of the child protagonist. They are very easy to ‘read’, whether through motor mimicry or inner imitation, but this subsequently means that the critical engagement of the spectator and the questioning of what they are seeing is prevented *because* of this ease. The spectator is prepared to take what is being seen at face value because only their faculties of primitive/affective empathy are being utilised, and there is thus no perceived need on the part of the spectator to engage their analytical faculties. I suggest that if the events depicted are based upon history and are historically inaccurate, reductive, or simplistic, this can consequently lead to a distorting of fact and misinformation. A primary aspect of the Holocaust fairytale is simplified Holocaust history and, as I shall now discuss, this is problematic in terms of existing public information and education about the Holocaust in America.

The evolution and seven precepts of the Holocaust fairytale

The rise of the Holocaust fairytale is a phenomenon within American theatre, predominantly due to the fact that there are a far higher number of Holocaust plays in America than in Britain. Many of these American plays feature children as they are often utilised as a learning resource in high schools, with the students playing the characters in school productions. Examples include Robert Caisley’s *Letters To An Alien* (1996), in which a young girl goes back in time to revisit scenes from her Jewish grandfather’s past during the Holocaust; and Cherie Bennett’s *Anne Frank & Me* (1996), in which a teenaged Holocaust denier is

transported back in time to occupied Paris and experiences life as a persecuted Jewess. Within Britain there are almost no Holocaust plays that feature a child protagonist: the notable (published) exceptions are Bob Scanlon's *What Does Peace Mean?* (1992), Diane Samuels' *Kindertransport* (1993/2008) and Julian Garner's *The Flight into Egypt* (1996). More recently, devised productions have been created as a means of commemoration and education: *Suitcase* (2013), directed by Ros Merkin, memorialised the seventy-fifth anniversary of the arrival of the first kindertransport to the UK; and *Butterflies* (2013), by the Milton Keynes-based Holocaust theatre and education company Voices of the Holocaust, was based upon a published collection of drawings and poems created by children incarcerated in Theresienstadt called *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*. None of these British Holocaust narratives 'sweeten' the Holocaust, in direct contrast to the majority of American Holocaust plays where 'sugar-coating' is an especial issue as a result of American collective memory of the Holocaust.

Alvin Rosenfeld (2011) observes that the majority of the American public obtain their knowledge of the Holocaust from representations in television, cinema, theatre, literature and so on, rather than from the records of events established by professional historians (53). He notes that with a dependency upon popular representation and 'entertainment networks' to provide information comes the problem of "how the memory of the Nazi crimes has been represented within various national cultures." (Ibid, 53) Rosenfeld's analysis of how American remembrance of the Holocaust is informed by American "ideological tendencies" is worth quoting in full:

It is part of the traditional, mainstream American ethos to stress the prevalence of goodness, innocence, optimism, liberty, diversity, and equality.¹⁰⁸ It is part of the same ethos to downplay or at least not dwell on the dark and brutal sides of life and instead to place a preponderant emphasis on the saving power of individual moral conduct and collective deeds of redemption. [...] The tragic vision, therefore, is antithetical to the American way of seeing the world,

¹⁰⁸ This view is supported by Michael Berenbaum, who "suggests that Americans can relate to this tragedy [the Holocaust] because it contradicts everything America holds to be right and true." (Magid, 2012: 111)

according to which people are meant to overcome adversity and not cling endlessly to their sorrows. Because Americans are also pragmatic in their approach to history, they are eager to learn what 'lessons' can be drawn from the past in order [...] to prevent its worst excesses 'from ever happening again.' In short, one should take what one can from history and then move on, hopefully to a better day. (Ibid, 59-60)

This view is echoed by Shaul Magid (2012), who states that mass-media representations of the Holocaust in the contemporary moment are almost exclusively about interpretation, and that "The consumer interest that drives the market is largely about the way [that] the Holocaust can be used as a tool to deepen one's understanding of the power of evil in the world." (116) I argue that what is inherently problematic in Holocaust depictions arising from these propensities is that they do not encourage spectators towards critical thinking or further reflection, an argument illustrated by Alison Landsberg:

It is with good reason that one should look skeptically [sic] upon the mass media's engagement with history, not only because of the vast possibilities for historical revision, but equally because of the mass media's standard mode of address: a dissemination of predigested [sic] messages that require no active engagement or thought on the part of the individual consumer. (1997: 67)

A brief analysis of the status of Holocaust education within America highlights how gaps in knowledge reinforce wider dependency on mass media and creative representations as a way of learning about the Holocaust. According to a 2004 report by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA),¹⁰⁹ there is "no national curriculum or course of study on the Holocaust that has been created by the government of the United States", and only five states – California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey and New York – have enacted laws that require the teaching of the Holocaust.¹¹⁰ Ten other states have regulations that encourage or recommend such teaching and twelve states have established Holocaust

¹⁰⁹ The organisation was originally established in 1998 as the International Task Force for Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF), and was renamed in 2013.

¹¹⁰ International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (2004) 'Country Report on Holocaust Education in Task Force Member Countries: United States.' http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/holocaust_education_report-united_states.pdf [Accessed 12 December 2013].

commissions or councils that support Holocaust education, although the scope of these “varies widely from state to state”.¹¹¹ The IHRA report notes that a significant amount of teaching about the Holocaust is done “in English or language arts classes”, although the specified areas in which the Holocaust is taught range from history, government, social sciences and psychology to European history and English.¹¹² The amount of time spent teaching the Holocaust varies:

Taking into account the various manners in which the subject is taught in U.S. schools, one can estimate that one week or two is devoted to the teaching of the Holocaust in most social studies and/or English/language arts classes. This translates into 20 to 40 hours of classroom time, along with homework assignments that vary greatly.¹¹³

The report shows that there is a disparity between student knowledge of the Holocaust in that students in all regions within America have varying levels of Holocaust awareness and education, subject to the factors given above.¹¹⁴ The fundamental issue that this has created is that Holocaust education differs greatly both across and amongst different generations within American society. Rosenfeld cites a 1993 survey carried out by the American Jewish Committee (AJC), *What Do Americans Know about the Holocaust?*, in which thirty-eight percent of American adults and fifty-three percent of high school students either did not know what the term ‘the Holocaust’ referred to, or gave incorrect answers; and sixty-five percent of

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ In England, the Holocaust has been a compulsory part of the National Curriculum since 1991 (International Task Force for Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. ‘International Task Force: Country Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland’.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/206418/20121101_ITF_Country_Report_of_the_United_Kingdom_of_GB.pdf [Accessed 13 December 2013]). According to a comprehensive 2009 report conducted by the Holocaust Education Development Programme (HEDP), part of the Institute of Education at the University of London, the Holocaust is taught in history classes and teachers are “directed to teach about the Holocaust [...] within the first three years of students’ secondary education [...] [when students are] between the ages of 11 and 14.” (Pettigrew and Foster, 2009: 34) Concurrently, the National Curriculum does not stipulate how many hours should be spent teaching about the Holocaust, and subsequently the HEDP report states that the amount of time varies from one to twenty hours (ibid, 39).

American adults and seventy-one percent of high school students did not know that around six million Jews were killed by the Nazis (2011: 51). A subsequent survey conducted by the AJC in 2005 entitled *The Holocaust and its Implications: A Seven-Nation Comparative Study* indicated that Americans were the least knowledgeable about the Holocaust out of the seven nationalities polled, but the most sympathetic towards Jews (21); sixty-seven percent of Americans surveyed did not know the number of Jews killed by the Nazis (25). Importantly, the survey concluded that remembrance and teaching about the Holocaust is favoured by the better educated (ibid, 11), highlighting the inherent need for Holocaust education as a whole. I posit that if one considers the combined influences of variant Holocaust education and the fact that “we learn from the information and entertainment networks of our culture” (Rosenfeld, 2011: 53), then one can perceive the difficulties pertaining to spectators receiving correct – that is, historically accurate – information. This is particularly true in cases where artistic license has been evoked or, as discussed, the dominant cultural values placed upon Holocaust remembrance facilitate emphasis upon particular narrative modes. I suggest that if a play is utilised as a primary learning resource, especially when combined with high audience empathy with the main character, then it is difficult to redress the situation and ensure that the correct knowledge is imparted or received once the audience have left the theatre space.¹¹⁵ The presence of both the child performer and the child spectator generally lead to a reductive or simplified story in order to suit both, although this is not always the case. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2015)¹¹⁶ and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1955) are two such examples of reductive/simplified Holocaust stories, as are *Number the Stars* and, to a lesser extent, *Remember My Name*. I posit that a greater level of empathy – through easily being able to interpret the actions and speech of the child protagonist – and associative sympathy (resulting from the ease of empathy and leading to a consequent ease of

¹¹⁵ The interest of some audience members will be piqued into carrying out their own research into the subject; I submit that it is unlikely that this will be the case for the majority.

¹¹⁶ Adapted by Angus Jackson from the 2006 novel by John Boyne.

emotional engagement) is secured, but that a less complex and generally less accurate version of history is taught. It is this factor which presents the inherent problem of the Holocaust fairytale. While some might question whether it is the job of theatre to educate, I argue that in this context it is. As stated above, the fact that many people learn about history through popular entertainment networks means that theatre should be didactic and informative, especially when it seeks to represent an historical genocide and associated atrocities that changed the face of Europe and the rest of the world irrevocably. Organisations such as the United Nations, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) either would not exist or would not do so in their present form. Moreover, mandates such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1951) came about as a direct result of the Holocaust and are still in force within international law today. In order to understand the world around us, and particularly in the context of encouraging spectators to be critical and critically-thinking citizens, it is of vital importance to understand the roots of contemporary social, political, legal and cultural frameworks within the Holocaust itself. Given the fundamental importance of this lesson, the history taught should be 'accurate' in the sense that it does not distort the facts to the point of outright revisionism, either in a positive or negative way (i.e. from an insistence upon the wholly 'good' nature of so-called rescuers in general or emphasis on the 'closure' experienced at the end of the Holocaust to a dystopian view that the world cannot move forward at all after the Holocaust). While the three case studies that I examine within this chapter do not claim to be 'educational' in the sense that I have evoked, *Number the Stars* in particular is used for predominantly educational purposes. For example, the Theater School at DePaul University in Chicago marketed their 2014 production of the play as being suitable for families and young audiences, with a recommended spectator age of eight years and up. Their press release declared that the "Educational themes of *Number the Stars* include: Adaptation, Courage, Facing Prejudice, Family, Friendship, History and the Holocaust", and information

was offered regarding “pre-show and post-show educational activities and highlighted curriculum connections” along with teacher guides (Tichy, 2013). As I shall shortly discuss, it is interesting to note that *Number the Stars* is the epitome of the Holocaust fairytale.

The Holocaust fairytale is not comprised of wholly negative aspects, but as outlined above it is representative of the effectiveness of using a child protagonist alongside the resulting issues of doing so. It is characterised by the inclusion of the following seven precepts, which are grounded in dramaturgical decisions made by the playwright – primarily in terms of character and plot.

Firstly, the play will have a varying basis in fact or true-life events, such as the actions of the people of the French village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon as a foundation for *Remember My Name* and the rescue efforts of the Danish people as a source for *Number the Stars*. As discussed these historical events are not portrayed directly but form an underlying framework over which an appropriate artistic narrative is constructed, pertaining to the dominant cultural values in which the representation is taking place. As observed by Mark M. Anderson,

These ‘true’ [...] stories become [...] [a] form of entertainment that provides American audiences with the ‘thrill of the real,’ with the *impression* of bumping up against an authentic historical tragedy, when in fact they offer a simplified narrative of good and evil that does not necessarily lead to greater historical knowledge, critical awareness, or political commitment. (2007: 19-20)

The paradigm of the Holocaust fairytale has arisen from American cultural values, with their emphasis on ‘goodness, innocence, optimism, liberty, diversity, and equality’. The American ideological tendency towards remembering the Holocaust in terms of ‘learning a lesson’ and focusing on individual and collective efforts of morality and redemption ensures that many Holocaust plays are founded upon real-life examples that are seen to match these ideals. The ensuing application of artistic license and creative response not only places an unduly high emphasis on such aspects, but heightens the probability of audience misinformation through the fact that the play is ‘based upon a true story’: it is not always possible to distinguish fiction from fact.

The second and third precepts are interwoven: the play will have one or more child protagonists, usually female; and this protagonist is portrayed as typically child-like, in that she will be in a state of innocence and/or naivety that contrasts strongly with the impending 'evil' of the story. The Holocaust is popularly perceived as an atrocity perpetrated by adult males, and the rhetoric and language used to refer to the genocide is usually constructed in such a way as to unconsciously propagate this. For instance, in a promotional brochure the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles refers to the Holocaust as "the ultimate example of man's inhumanity to man" (Rosenfeld, 2011: 68); Peter Novick claims that "men will murder those whom they have been systematically taught to despise and regard as totally unlike themselves" (1999: 245); and Joan Ringelheim (1985) outlines the sexual abuse of female prisoners at Auschwitz by male SS guards. In turn, these male perpetrators are personified as uniform-wearing, merciless, and murderous: the stereotypical Nazi of popular imagination, embodied by characters such as the SS officer Amon Goeth in *Schindler's List*. The child protagonists of Holocaust fairytales contrast strongly with such conceptions: they are young, vulnerable and physically defenceless females. The anti-Semitic Nazi is the antithesis of the child protagonist, who cannot comprehend racism or discrimination and therefore cannot understand Nazi persecution. Just as the 'villain' takes the form of the Nazi, the 'heroine' embodies the American ethos, especially in the context of goodness and innocence. Their inherent innocence/naivety, coupled with their status as a representative of the values of equality and liberty, forms the basis of the lesson that Rosenfeld asserts Americans wish to take from the Holocaust in order to move on to a 'better day'; that is, that prejudice and bigotry are wrong and, as the next precept shows, can personally be overcome.

The fourth precept is that the child protagonist will face danger, usually the threat of, or actual, Nazi persecution of their loved ones and themselves. They handle that danger in a mature or 'adult' manner, often taking action on behalf of adults that results in the saving of all concerned. I posit that this strongly encourages the spectator to feel sympathy with the

child protagonist in that the latter must overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Within this can be located one of what Christopher Booker (2004) calls the 'seven basic plots', "Overcoming the Monster", which not only concurs with the prevailing American ethos but also forms the basis for many American narratives about the Second World War and in which the Nazi features as a metaphorical and literal 'monster' (34-35). As this monster was both the enemy of America during the war and the perpetrator of the Holocaust, these are mutually reinforcing reasons for the audience to want the child protagonist to overthrow them. In this context the child protagonist functions on two symbolic levels: firstly in illustrating the moral lesson that the struggle against prejudice happens at grassroots level and depends upon the actions of all (thus reinforcing the American focus upon individual and collective acts of 'goodness'); and secondly in being symbolically representative of the Holocaust, with an innocent 'victim' facing powerful forces of 'evil' that threaten destruction. The fact that the child protagonist overcomes such forces highlights Anderson's statement regarding the issue of how spectators perceive such a narrative as being authentic. Moreover, physical harm to the child is implied rather than actually occurring. 'Sugar-coating' of the Holocaust is especially prevalent in this context, and leads into the next precept.

The fifth precept is that the suffering of the child protagonist and other characters is not portrayed in detail. The suffering of the child protagonist is typically a threat to themselves through outer forces (usually Nazis), while the suffering of others ranges from a similar threat to interrogation, physical abuse (such as beatings or torture) and death at the hands of the Nazis. The key practicality of not directly portraying such suffering is the avoidance of trauma to the audience due to graphic representations of violence. Moreover, the audience will not be forced to dwell upon what they have witnessed and this correlates with Rosenfeld's assertion of the American rejection of 'clinging to sorrows'. Paradoxically, this means that the child protagonist will mirror the audience and vice versa; the spectator and the child protagonist will have a further empathic link in that both will have had the 'same' experience. It is then possible for the spectator to feel that they have experienced the

character's journey with them, implementing affective and empathic reactivity alongside primitive empathy. The threat to the child protagonist jeopardises the success of the 'adult' action described above but is overcome, either through the ingenuity of the child protagonist or the timely intervention of adult characters. This aligns with the safe storytelling conventions already discussed, as well as further demonstrating the capacity for acts of redemption and morality. Alongside the mainstream American ethos, a "characteristic American [...] longing for the 'happy end'" (Schumacher, 1998: 5) begins with the defeat of this threat and prevents suffering from being portrayed in detail, as to do so would violate the safety of the performance for the audience. (Furthermore, in the context of Carolyn J. Dean's argument an exposure to onstage violence risks distancing spectators through a return to 'moral habituation'.) This leads into the next two precepts, in which can be located Rosenfeld's observation of American disapproval of 'clinging to sorrows'.

The sixth precept is that the death of another character is usually referred to after the fact, typically once the life of the child protagonist has returned to normal, and is not dwelt upon at length once the knowledge is imparted. The use of verbal exposition negates the need for physical representation. As exemplified in both *Number the Stars* and *Remember My Name*, it allows for an appropriate reaction from the child protagonist (such as anger or distress) before moving on to the conclusion of the play and the restoration of emotional equilibrium via the realisation of the overall moral lesson and an optimistic forecast of the future.

The seventh and final precept is that the play will have a redemptive or reductive ending. Other characters die or are sacrificed, but the child protagonist survives and returns to their native state of innocence as portrayed before the main action of the play. This usually coincides with the end of the war and the downfall of the Nazis. While providing a non-depressing conclusion for the spectator,¹¹⁷ I posit that the ending is potentially the most

¹¹⁷ The notion of a 'happy ending' for spectators is even prevalent in news broadcasts, where "a piece or two of upbeat, good news" is "thought to provide 'a release from the deathwatch' that [...] defines

hazardous part of the Holocaust fairytale through its false implication that the end of the war and the liberation of the camps meant an outright end of suffering for those who survived, and that 'happy endings' were both automatic and prevalent. The redemptive deaths of Peter (*Number the Stars*) and Père Antoine (*Remember My Name*) mitigate "the meaninglessness of mass murder" (Isser, 1997: 14) as they have 'chosen' their own deaths, a consequence of saving Jews or enabling others to do so. The return of the child protagonist to 'life as normal' has reductive implications for the after-effects of the Holocaust upon its survivors, and stresses the particularly American dictum of 'taking what one can from history and moving on to a better day'¹¹⁸ – in essence, a sentimentalised form of catharsis. This view is supported by Arlene Stein: "[...] Most Americans assume that closure is desirable and necessary, and that grief is bad and must end in order for individuals to adapt and for life to resume. We are assured that 'someday things will just be a memory,' and are encouraged to 'move on.'" (2013) Moreover, the need for a 'happy ending' can be located in the status of America (and Britain) as a liberator. To imply that the end of the Holocaust – that is, the liberation of the camps – did not mean a 'happy ending' for survivors can be seen to detract from the status of the Allies as freedom-bringing rescuers, a popular cultural narrative of the Holocaust and the Second World War in America.¹¹⁹

I will now provide a close reading of the three case studies, beginning with *Number the Stars*. I argue that the play is an archetypal Holocaust fairytale through its inclusion of all

much of the news" (Zillman, Taylor & Lewis, 1998: 154). This reinforces Rosenfeld's argument as to how people learn from news and entertainment networks.

¹¹⁸ A recent example can be found in the reaction of visitors to the site of the 9/11 Memorial Museum in New York prior to its official opening: "It's proving a popular place for selfies,' says the architect Craig Dykers, watching visitors capture their reflected faces melding with the scorched structures inside. 'If we can get someone to smile or have a giggle at a place of such sorrow,' he adds, 'we've done our job.'" (Oliver Wainwright (2014) '9/11 museum: Emotional underworld at Ground Zero.' *Guardian*, 14 May: 1).

¹¹⁹ Shaul Magid (2012) posits that mainstream American interest in the Holocaust arose in the wake of America's involvement in the Vietnam War. The Holocaust began to be perceived as an event that had not just happened to European Jewry "but as one in which America had participated as liberator." (2012: 107) The complex question surrounding notions of good and evil that emerged from Vietnam, "where the nature of the enemy was often unclear", made the war against Nazi Germany easier to understand – with "the Holocaust being a part of that story" (ibid, 107).

seven precepts outlined above and its close adherence to the mainstream American ethos. As will be discussed, the play is also problematic in its stereotypical depiction of Jews as passive victims of the Nazis, underlining the status of the main child protagonist as typically 'American' in her efforts to uphold liberty, equality and diversity, and maintaining the lore of European Jews as wholly non-resisting during the Holocaust. In this, *Number the Stars* can be seen as a Holocaust fairytale that contributes to the dissemination of Holocaust myth.

***Number the Stars*: the archetypal Holocaust fairytale**

In Larche's play, adapted from the novel by Lois Lowry, fourteen-year-old Annemarie Johansen, her ten-year-old sister Kirstie and Annemarie's friend Ellen Rosen are living in occupied Denmark. It begins by establishing the friendship between Jewish Ellen and Lutheran Annemarie and sets the scene in Copenhagen in 1943, immediately before Nazi round-ups of Jews. Aware of the danger, Ellen and her parents go into hiding; Ellen stays with the Johansens and pretends to be Annemarie and Kirstie's sister Lise (who died in a car accident). Mrs. Johansen takes the girls to visit her fisherman brother Henrik and plans are set in motion to smuggle a group of Jews to Sweden in Henrik's boat, including the Rosens. Resistance leader Peter, who was engaged to Lise, assembles the group under the guise of a funeral. That night Peter and Mrs. Johansen lead them to the boat and Mrs. Johansen breaks her ankle on the return trip. Annemarie discovers a package, crucial to the safety of those on the boat, which has been accidentally dropped. She tries to take it to her uncle and is stopped by Nazi soldiers with dogs; she is forced to surrender the package but escapes detection. Henrik returns and reveals that the package was a handkerchief, treated with a mixture of cocaine and rabbit blood to temporarily destroy the German dogs' sense of smell. As the Nazis took the handkerchief, their dogs sniffed it and were unable to detect the hidden Jews: Annemarie unwittingly saved them all. At the conclusion, a year later and with the war over, the audience discover that Peter was executed by the Nazis and that Lise was in the Resistance and killed in a Nazi operation. The Rosens return from Sweden and Annemarie

and Ellen are reunited. The play is based upon the true-life efforts of the Danish Resistance and ordinary Danish people to smuggle the entire Jewish population of Denmark to Sweden in October 1943. The Nazis invaded Denmark in April 1940 and, while the Danes had no choice but to acquiesce, they resisted Nazi efforts to implement the Nuremberg Laws (Plunka, 2012: 63-65). The Nazis, in need of Danish resources such as foodstuffs and the use of factories to manufacture aeroplane parts and marine diesel engines, maintained a policy of co-operation and negotiation with the Danish authorities, and the Danish Jews stayed in relative safety for the ensuing three years (Gilbert, 1987: 614). But by August 1943 Denmark was in open revolt and the Nazis declared martial law, intending to use the opportunity to deport the Danish Jews (Gilbert, 1987: 614). However, both the Danes and the Jews were forewarned of the impending *Aktion*, which began on 30 September, and over seven thousand Jews were hidden by Danish citizens and subsequently smuggled to Sweden by boat, where the government had officially agreed to shelter them (Plunka, 2012: 65; Gilbert, 1987: 614). Only five hundred Danish Jews were captured by the Nazis and deported to Theresienstadt, and out of those, four hundred and twenty-three survived the Holocaust (ibid, 614). When the Jews hiding in Sweden returned to Denmark after the war, their homes and possessions were returned to them, having been safeguarded by their Danish neighbours and the authorities (Plunka, 2012: 67).

In accordance with the first precept of the Holocaust fairytale, *Number the Stars* establishes an immediate 'thrill of the real' through its fictionalised depiction of true events. The historical narrative of rescue and resistance is particularly suited to the American ethos in its demonstration of typically 'American' values through the actions of the Danish people, and fosters a perceived in-his-shoes empathic connection through the location of shared cultural values. While the Danish campaign to save Jews deserves approbation, I argue that *Number the Stars* is problematic in that it does not contextualise this by locating it within the wider history of the Holocaust, i.e. by references to concentration camps or consideration of the fate of Jews, or actions of non-Jewish citizens, in other occupied countries. I suggest that

for spectators with limited Holocaust knowledge it is possible to perceive the Danish experience as being predominant rather than exceptional in terms of Holocaust history, leading to a distortion of historical fact that is underpinned by the perception of mutual values.

Gene A. Plunka (2012) asserts that “Lowry and Larche have created a suspenseful tale for children that includes characters with whom they could empathize [sic], thus setting the stage for a poignant learning experience about the Holocaust.” (70) The novel and play are “written as children’s tales that teach a moral and ethical lesson” (ibid, 70) – the key value which Americans draw from history, according to Alvin Rosenfeld – and this is achieved through the encouragement of empathy with the child protagonist of Annemarie, from the initial physical positioning of the character in the audience (1.1) to the relationships of Annemarie with those around her, including her mother, younger sibling, and best friend. The authorial decision to place Annemarie, Kirstie and Ellen amongst the audience at the beginning of the play – “*They run wildly, happily through the audience, almost making their way to the stage when two German SOLDIERS appear as if out of nowhere*” (1.1) – can be seen as an attempt to position the audience and the characters physically and psychologically in the same locale. The evocation of empathy in the context of affective and empathic reactivity is brought about through the implication that each of the characters is ‘one of us’ and that each spectator could potentially become ‘one of them’, as demonstrated by the role that each girl assumes as the play progresses: a victim of persecution (Ellen), a bystander to oppression (Kirstie), or an active participant against it (Annemarie).¹²⁰ This physical proximity is significant in terms of inciting primitive audience empathy. Bruce McConachie (2008) notes that while bodies give general clues for “mind reading” (or inner imitation), faces give away more specific hints, with the eyes and the muscles around them being “especially revealing” (74). He asserts that most spectators will try to position

¹²⁰ The possibility of becoming a perpetrator is never suggested in the play, either from the point of view of the characters or the audience.

themselves as near to the action as possible in order to be able to watch the eyes of those onstage and thus catch their emotions and intentions (ibid, 74). The rapid movement of the girls through the audience space, especially as they run a race, perhaps does not allow much opportunity for the spectator to engage completely with their facial expressions. However, by reading the combined expression of both faces and bodies, the audience are able to gauge and thus overtly and covertly imitate the carefree happiness of the girls, especially when juxtaposed with the inference of positioning the characters and audience as belonging to the same group. When the Nazi soldiers suddenly appear there is an abrupt shift from a light-hearted game to the perception of a potential threat. This changes audience expectations, as well as initiating similar responses to that of the actors/characters through mirroring. The Nazis have 'invaded' the audience space and so the mutual space of audience and characters. In this way, the spectator is prompted to align themselves with the girls in terms of feeling menaced by the presence of 'enemy' soldiers within a territory that does not rightfully belong to them. This concept of the audience members having empathic commonality with the child protagonist through the use of the space is reiterated in the second act, when Annemarie again runs through the audience in attempting to get the essential handkerchief to Henrik (2.5).

In correlation with the second and third precepts of the Holocaust fairytale, the main child protagonist is Annemarie, who alongside her friend and sibling – all three being females aged fourteen and ten respectively – is overtly child-like and naïve: for instance, she encourages Ellen to run races on the way home from school (1.1) and play-act melodramatic love scenes (1.6). Annemarie cannot understand why the Nazis have closed Jewish shops – “[...] Is Mrs. Hirsch Jewish? Is that why the button shop is closed? Why have they done that?” (1.5) – and calls Ellen “lucky” for not having to go to school, even though this is a result of the impending Nazi danger (1.7). Annemarie’s non-recognition of the differences between Jews and non-Jews illustrates the Danish attitude of the time. Simultaneously, however, I suggest that the character sets an awkward example, especially in the context of

empathic engagement with younger audiences: namely, that interest in and coinciding ignorance of a situation is acceptable. *Number the Stars* draws heavily upon historical events, and when one compares the action of the play to accounts of the time, they are extremely similar. Yet within the play Annemarie is unaware of the situation within Denmark. This lack of knowledge is jarring given the widespread resistance throughout Danish society to protect the Jews even before 1943, and the ostensible aims of the play in presenting that story. Moreover, Annemarie is aware of prior acts of Danish sabotage and resistance, such as destroying their own ships in order to prevent the Nazis from commandeering them (1.6). Annemarie's example of ignorance implies that few were aware of the Nazi threat when this was not the case.

Annemarie is inherently 'normal': she has parents, a stereotypically annoying younger sibling, enjoys certain subjects at school, and tries to be brave in difficult situations. Her efforts to help Ellen demonstrate that even children can take action against oppression, and encourages spectators – both adult and child – to ask themselves how they would have behaved in similar circumstances. She is the physical embodiment of each of Rosenfeld's dictums for the traditional American ethos. Alongside her 'goodness' and 'innocence', she assists in the struggle to save Jews (enabling their 'liberty') and her friendship with Ellen denotes an embracing of 'diversity' and 'equality', as the two girls are opposites in everything from physical appearance to religion. The automatic deployment of spectator empathy in identifying the play as the story of Annemarie (leading to a pre-disposition towards sympathetic emotional engagement with her), alongside her simultaneous 'normality' and representation as the personification of 'American' principles, engages the audience empathically on personal (directly relatable) and idealistic grounds.

A particular issue that is exacerbated in *Number the Stars* but that does not form a precept of the Holocaust fairytale is the popular perception of outright Jewish victimhood in the face of the Nazis. This is represented by the character of Ellen, who is a passive victim and therefore a counterpoint to Annemarie's proactive efforts. As Annemarie represents the

Danish people, Ellen symbolises the European Jews and underscores the popular notion of them as being wholly unresisting victims to the Nazis,¹²¹ co-operative in their own slaughter and unable to act for themselves.¹²² Ellen embodies what Helen Freshwater calls the “passive innocent”,¹²³ who takes little or no action in order to control their own life and is completely dominated by the actions of others. While theatre audiences delight in certain types of passive innocents – the primary example being the title character in *Oliver!*¹²⁴ – Ellen comes across as a victim of circumstances, virtually unable to do anything to save herself and wholly reliant upon the intervention of others. She is (at least by virtue of her age) fully capable of helping others to help herself, but her temperament leaves her effectively unable to do so. When Nazi soldiers come to question the Johansens, suspicious that dark-haired ‘Lise’ is not the sister of the two blonde Johansen girls, it is Annemarie who answers:

SOLDIER.	Get up! Come out here! Your names?
ANNEMARIE.	Annemarie Johansen. And this is my sister –
SOLDIER.	Quiet! Let her speak for herself. Your name?
ELLEN.	Lise. Lise Johansen. (1.9)

Once the Nazis have left, unable to prove Ellen’s true identity, Ellen offers a childish apology: “I’m sorry I have dark hair. It made them suspicious.” (1.9) The child-like character of Ellen, with her naivety, innocence and passivity, is maintained throughout the rest of the play. For

¹²¹ Judith E. Doneson (1987) makes an interesting argument surrounding victimhood, the concept of Jewish image and the “fighting Israeli”:

[...] [N]ew criteria have been established for Jewish behavior; ‘weakness’ is intolerable, and the victim is judged guilty. [...] [A] viewer sharing the popular impression of a fighting Israel could also cite Israel as evidence of possible alternative Jewish behavior and then blame the victim for his inability to prevent his own destruction. (Enzer and Solotaroff-Enzer, 2000: 133)

¹²² This was not the case, as evidenced by Jewish initiatives such as the actions of the Bielski brothers in western Belorussia from 1942, resulting in the saving of around 1,200 Jewish lives (Tec, 1993); the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of April 1943 (Gilbert, 1987: 557-67); and the Sonderkommando revolt in Auschwitz-Birkenau in October 1944 (Rees, 2005: 322-24).

¹²³ Helen Freshwater (2012) ‘Sentimental Pleasures: Child Performers in Musical Theatre.’ Seminar. Central School of Speech and Drama, London. 11 December.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

instance, she cannot understand why she cannot go to school: “[...] I can’t miss two days in a row! My parents have always told me that no matter what happens, I must get an education” (1.10). At the end of the play when she returns from asylum in Sweden, there is no sense that her experiences have affected her at all (2.9). The structure of the play and the personality of the character evoke sympathy for her plight, but the focus for empathy is the frightened but active Annemarie, perpetuating the Holocaust myth of outright Jewish victimhood subject to the intervention of non-Jewish helpers.

The fourth aspect of the Holocaust fairytale comprises the danger faced by the child protagonist and other characters, and the ‘adult’ action that the child protagonist takes to avert disaster. In *Number the Stars*, this is the danger to Ellen and the Rosens; the threat to Annemarie and the Johansens in helping them; and Annemarie’s act of taking the scent-destroying handkerchief (which an entrusted adult has dropped) to her uncle, risking her life in doing so. As well as primitive empathy, the scene in which Annemarie runs to her uncle’s boat potentially arouses further audience empathy through ‘empathic parallelism’, which Bernard Beckerman posits in the following way: “Imaginatively we follow a path that runs parallel, not to the events themselves, but to the *shifts of tension* either *between characters* or *between ourselves and the performers*” (McConachie, 2012: 71; italics added). According to Beckerman’s theory, the outward expression of Annemarie’s fear and tension as she runs to the boat, “*breathless, encouraging herself as she goes*” (2.5), is mirrored imaginatively by the audience through their perceived connection between the character and themselves. Likewise, Bruce McConachie (2012) observes that “our facility for empathy encourages spectators to imitate the emotions and actions embodied by actor/characters” (72); the audience will accordingly imagine themselves in Annemarie’s position and this promotes the anti-discriminatory message of the play. However, when Annemarie is stopped and questioned by the Nazis, she “places herself psychically in a harmless fairy tale [sic] that she expects to have a happy ending, thus making it possible for her to react to the Nazi interrogation.” (Plunka, 2012: 74) Annemarie positions herself in the world of make-believe

that she has played at for years with her younger sister, pretending to be “nothing more than a [...] silly, empty-headed little girl” (2.4) and thereby escapes the Nazis, even though they seize the handkerchief. Paradoxically, the ‘adult’ action that Annemarie takes in attempting to deliver the handkerchief depends upon her ability to play-act at being a ‘child’, thus outwitting the Nazis through her ingenuity. Yet I argue that the fact that Annemarie sees the Nazis as ‘big bad wolves’ and herself as ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ (Plunka, 2012: 74-75) negates the severity of the Holocaust. There is an obvious problem in encouraging the viewing of Holocaust narratives through the lens of make-believe or fairytale. The Danish defeat of Nazi purpose was achieved through swift and effective action to physically assist Jewish escape and, as demonstrated by the scope of Holocaust history, this was the exception and not the rule. Furthermore, while Annemarie’s actions combine literal action and the use of her imagination to play-act, it is only by luck (imposed by artistic license) that the handkerchief actually achieves its required effect, as the Nazi soldiers who take it from her are the same ones who search Henrik’s boat.

When considering the extent to which audience members are encouraged to empathise with Annemarie, there are a number of ways in which her actions in this scene can be interpreted. Her use of imagination promotes that of the spectator in envisaging how it would feel to be in that situation. This potentially leads to empathic or advisory projection respectively, in the context of spectator satisfaction with the resolution, or spectatorial perception of a different method of resolving the situation. However, if audience members are being urged to empathise in the milieu of affective reactivity, namely locating aspects of Annemarie within themselves and vice versa, the character can be perceived as tacitly implying that ‘make-believe’ is an acceptable form of combatting real and immediate danger. In addition, Annemarie’s apparent success in outwitting the Nazis falsely infers that the Nazis as a whole were two-dimensional villains who could be outsmarted by a child, and this is inherently problematic in terms of contemplating the extent of the crimes that they perpetrated. I argue that while the ideology of the Nazis deserves condemnation, to portray

them as wholly 'stupid' suggests that it is safe to assume that one can always outsmart, and thereby escape, such people. The theoretical conclusion of this view in terms of a belief that such a situation could therefore never arise within the life of a spectator is to promote and perpetuate a parallel attitude to that espoused by the rest of the world that enabled the Holocaust to happen; namely, the misguided belief that a highly cultured and advanced country such as Germany would never perpetrate atrocity.

In the context of the fifth precept of the Holocaust fairytale, that the suffering of the child protagonist and other characters is not shown in detail, the threat to Annemarie is the appearance of the Nazis in Act 2 Scene 5, and this is resolved in the manner discussed above. In Act 2 Scene 2 Mrs. Johansen is struck across the face by a Nazi officer at the 'funeral'. While this constitutes a direct representation of violence, neither the characters nor the audience are made to dwell upon it for more than a few moments, as the Nazis leave and Peter reads a psalm that has evidently been chosen to comfort the Jewish 'mourners'. In addition, Peter's commendation to Mrs. Johansen – "You were very brave. I am proud to be your son." – makes her endurance of the Nazi's action redemptive, in that she is 'rewarded' for suffering it. By implication, and in contrast, Ellen does not undergo any suffering, in spite of her status as a persecuted Jew. The character who 'suffers' the most is Peter, in that he is executed by the Nazis for his Resistance activities, and this leads into the sixth precept.

The sixth and seventh precepts for the Holocaust fairytale are the death of another character (usually as a sacrifice for the greater good) and the reaction of the child protagonist to this; and the redemptive and/or reductive ending, in which the child protagonist returns to their native 'state of innocence' – usually coinciding with the end of the war. The death of Annemarie's sister Lise has already occurred prior to the action of the play and she is referred to throughout, from Annemarie talking to her dead sister (1.3) to the final revelation of Lise's death as a member of the Resistance (2.9). Lise is never seen or heard, and in the context of the Holocaust fairytale, in which a character known by the child protagonist undergoes a sacrificial or redemptive death, it is Lise's fiancé Peter who suffers this. The

final scene of the play is set on Kirstie's birthday a year later, and Mr. and Mrs. Johansen tell Kirstie and Annemarie the truth about their sister's death simultaneously to the family discussing Peter's execution:

MRS. JOHANSEN. I was so glad when the war was finally over. [...] Denmark was free.

ANNEMARIE. I wish I could have thanked Peter.

KIRSTIE. They shouldn't have done that to him. Peter was a hero.

[...]

PAPA. [...] [Lise] was part of the Resistance, too. [...]

[...]

ANNEMARIE. Oh, Papa! Mama! They didn't shoot Lise, did they? The way they did Peter, in the public square, with people watching?

PAPA. She was with Peter and the others in a cellar where they held secret meetings [...]. [...] [T]he Nazis [...] raided the place that evening. They all ran different ways, trying to escape.

[...]

[...] From the military car, they saw her running, and simply ran her down. (2.9)

The reactions of Annemarie and Kirstie are expressed in two lines, and Annemarie only refers to Peter's execution in terms of fearing that the same was done to Lise. Peter's death goes against Edward R. Isser's definition of the "redemptive sacrifice" in Holocaust theatre (1997: 14), in that Peter is not Jewish and has not willingly chosen martyrdom (although he cannot have been unaware of the consequences if caught by the Nazis). Even so, Peter is perceived as having died as a righteous gentile; his actions on behalf of the Danish Resistance were carried out both for the liberation of Denmark and the rescue of Denmark's Jews (who in Danish society were considered equal citizens, unlike other Nazi-occupied countries such as Poland). In this context the death of Peter constitutes a redemptive

sacrifice, in that the audience are brought to understand that he died specifically because of his efforts in saving Jews. However, unlike the redemptive sacrifices in other Holocaust plays, which are used by playwrights in an effort to mitigate the “arbitrariness, capriciousness, and [...] meaninglessness of mass murder” (ibid, 14), Peter’s death is both given meaning and marginalised by the return of Ellen and her parents. The safe return of the Rosens shows that Peter’s sacrifice was not in vain, but his death, already side-lined through Annemarie’s concern over that of Lise, is completely overshadowed by the celebratory reaction to the appearance of the Rosens:

(There is a knock at the door. KIRSTIE goes to answer it. At the door are MR. and MRS. ROSEN and ELLEN. KIRSTIE squeals with delight.)

KIRSTIE. It’s the Rosens! It’s Ellen! They came for my birthday! *(There are great hugs, handshakes, and tears of welcome and reunion.[])* [2.9]

The homecoming of the Rosens marks a simultaneously redemptive and reductive ending. The Jewish family have returned without having been harmed, proving the individual and collective efforts of the Johansens to have achieved their intended outcome. The redemptive ending is literal for the Rosens, in that they have been saved, and metaphorical for the audience, in that they are not exposed to a representation or recollection of the fate of the majority of the Jews. This contributes to the reductive nature of the ending, as does the fact that the Rosens’ experience of asylum in Sweden is not revealed or referred to, nor are Ellen’s feelings about her religion or persecution ever discovered. The audience do not hear anything from the Jewish point of view. It is implied that the end of the war equated an end to Jewish suffering, as illustrated by the general hubbub of celebration. Annemarie and Ellen leave the group and go into Annemarie’s bedroom. Annemarie returns Ellen’s Star of David necklace to her and Ellen gives it to Annemarie instead, calling Annemarie her “Star of David.” (2.9) The two girls do not discuss what has happened in the intervening year, nor is there a sense that either they or Kirstie have changed through their experiences. Kirstie refers to the heroism of Annemarie and expresses condemnation of the execution of Peter,

but her primary concern in the final scene is with ‘making a play’¹²⁵ and having pink cupcakes. Likewise, Annemarie is absorbed with remembering Lise and does not voice any views about her own actions or the whereabouts and well-being of Ellen; nor does she allude to her feelings over Peter’s death beyond a wish to have been able to thank him. The actions of the Nazis and the resulting peril to the fleeing Jews force Annemarie into taking decisive action, yet at the end of the play there is no sign that she has really changed, even though Gene A. Plunka refers to Annemarie as undergoing a ‘rite of passage’ from childhood to the adult world (2012: 75). Even Ellen has not been changed by her troubles; nothing has had a significant enough impact for the three girls to have been perceptibly altered by it.

Number the Stars shows its central characters as resuming normal life and functions as a ‘sweetening’ or ‘sugar-coating’ of the Holocaust, stripped of its horror (Weissman, 2004: 12). Gary Weissman notes that many depictions of the Holocaust deliberately avoid being too upsetting or depressing by emphasising themes such as “survival, martyrdom, heroism, rescue, redemption, spiritual up-lift, and the triumph of humanity over inhumanity” (ibid, 12), and *Number the Stars* is one such depiction. The survival of Ellen, the martyrdom of Peter, the heroism of Annemarie, the collective acts of rescue by the Johansens, and the ultimate naming of Annemarie as Ellen’s ‘Star of David’ all correspond with Weissman’s definition of a ‘sugar-coated’ representation of the Holocaust, as well as adhering to Rosenfeld’s delineation of the construction of Holocaust narratives through American cultural values. The ending of the play (and the novel), in its context as a ‘moral and ethical lesson’ for adolescents, places great emphasis on positivity, but I propose that the true meaning of the real-life ‘happy ending’ for the Danish Jews would be thrown into greater relief were there to be reference to the suffering of the rest of the Jews of Europe. *Number the Stars* highlights the possibility of positive action in the Holocaust, especially when compared to more typical Holocaust narratives (as well as historical events), but its adherence to the principles of the

¹²⁵ Even her father remarks upon it: “Every night it’s the same, as though there never was a war. A play. A story. A fairy tale.” (2.9)

Holocaust fairytale is problematic, particularly when one considers its intended use as a 'poignant learning experience'. The lack of a prominent Jewish perspective or any references to the fate of the Jews, coupled with the romanticising of the characters and their situation, presents difficulties in the context of the play's intended function as a learning resource through its reductive and overly-redemptive qualities. Without simultaneous Holocaust education, placing the events of the play in their historical context, I posit that *Number the Stars* is a Holocaust fairytale that risks trivialising its subject matter and presenting a skewed view of history to its audience, perpetuated by the ease of audience empathy with the play's main character.

***Remember My Name*: a 'darker' Holocaust fairytale**

Joanna Halpert Kraus' play is set in wartime France and tells the story of Rachel Simon, a young Jewish girl who is sent by her parents from Nazi-occupied Marseilles to a distant village in the hope that she will find someone to take her in until the end of the war. Under the assumed name of Madeleine Petit Rachel is taken in by Madame Barbière, a middle-aged widow who suspects that 'Madeleine' is a Jew but does not ask questions. Rachel's new schoolteacher, Suzanne Fleury, boards with Madame Barbière and is a messenger for the French Resistance. When Suzanne's partner in the Resistance, Julien, is arrested it falls to Rachel to deliver an essential message on his behalf. Schmidt, a Nazi officer based in the village, is constantly suspicious and almost uncovers Rachel's true identity, but the message is successfully delivered and Rachel is allowed to go free. At the end of the play the war is over and Rachel's father returns, alone, to claim her.

Like *Number the Stars*, *Remember My Name* is based upon true events: in this instance, the collective efforts of the French town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, under the guidance and leadership of its priests, to save Jewish refugees from the Nazis. The priests, Pastors André Trocmé and Édouard Theis, are reflected in the character of Père Antoine, a Jesuit priest who meets Rachel on a train and guides her safely to Madame Barbière. Just as

the Johansens are representative of the ordinary Danes, Madame Barbière stands as a symbol of the villagers of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, who undertook what Philip Hallie calls a “kitchen struggle” – a non-violent struggle against the Nazis, which “began and ended in the privacy of people’s homes” (1979: 8-9) – to hide Jews within their community and even to help them reach the border of neutral Switzerland, three hundred kilometres away.¹²⁶ It is estimated that throughout the Nazi occupation twenty-five hundred Jewish refugees of all ages came to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon itself (Hallie, 1979: 190), with a total of five thousand people being saved thanks to the efforts of the village and its surrounding communities.¹²⁷ The history of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon itself greatly influenced the actions of its residents during the Vichy regime and Nazi occupation. The villagers were Huguenot (Calvinist) Protestants, and their ancestors had been persecuted by the Catholic authorities in France from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, with those ancestors later providing shelter to fellow Protestants escaping discrimination and persecution.¹²⁸ The basis of *Remember My Name* in the history of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon fulfils the first precept of the Holocaust fairytale, but while elements of the other six aspects are visible in the play, I contend that they do not prevail as much as those within *Number the Stars*. As with *Number the Stars*, *Remember My Name* carries an anti-discriminatory and optimistic message, and its theme of ‘hope in the Holocaust’ makes it particularly suited to younger audiences. The play features a hidden child and her rescuers, but in this instance the central viewpoint is that of the Jewish protagonist and the content is darker than that of *Number the Stars*. It includes physical injury to the main character, the death of her mother, the visible effects of the concentration camps upon her father, and a prolonged campaign of harassment and threats by a Nazi antagonist. Akin to Larche’s adaptation, the actions and gestures of the characters are easy for the audience to mirror and imitate, inciting a heightened emotional engagement with the

¹²⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. ‘Le Chambon-sur-Lignon’. *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007518> [Accessed 4 September 2013].

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

characters and allowing a simple rendition of Holocaust history that does not call for in-depth questioning or challenge the spectator's perception.

The ten-year-old protagonist in *Remember My Name* is female, but Rachel Simon is Jewish and not as naïve as Annemarie Johansen. However, I suggest that her age and the fact that she is sent alone to a village over two hundred miles away, with no guarantee of refuge, evokes a similar sense of innocence to contrast with the impending Nazi malevolence. This threat is made clear from the beginning, with Rachel being beaten up offstage by a gang of Nazi schoolboys and the sounds of gunfire and heavy boots accompanying the news that the Nazis have entered Marseilles (1.1). The Nazi peril to Rachel is maintained throughout the play, from the shooting of a Jewish man while Rachel is on the train into hiding (1.2) to the omnipresent Nazi officer, Schmidt, in the village where Rachel finds shelter.¹²⁹

Hans Schmidt is the personification of the danger to Rachel, as well as to Madame Barbière and Suzanne. At various points Schmidt comes close to discovering the Nazi-outlawed actions of the women, such as listening to foreign radio broadcasts (1.6) and assisting the French Resistance (2.1). The threat that Schmidt poses to Rachel is compounded through the actions of Yvette, neighbour to Madame Barbière. Yvette's behaviour throughout the play borders upon collaboration: for example, she brags about being able to obtain sugar from the Nazis, implying that she has been rewarded for helping to find Jews (1.6). The presence of Yvette as a Frenchwoman ready to denounce others to the Nazis blurs the lines between 'good' and 'bad', adding further dramatic tension as well as additional danger to Rachel. I posit that the notion of the collaborator, which is not mentioned at all in *Number the Stars* (and is tacitly implied in the character of Mrs. Kober in *The Flight*

¹²⁹ The innocence of Rachel is underscored by the false name that her father chooses for her: Madeleine (Hebrew) and Petit (French). The name literally means 'small woman of Magdala', and the Biblical connotation of Mary Magdalene, who is traditionally seen as an 'undesirable' before being redeemed by Christ, coupled with the French word for 'small', posits Rachel as someone vulnerable and deemed 'undesirable' by the Nazis but who will one day be 'redeemed' and take her place in the world.

into Egypt), gives depth and reality to the historical events, thereby lessening the Holocaust fairytale element and contextualising the actions of the villagers. (It must be noted, however, that none of the villagers of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon or the surrounding communities ever betrayed the Jews who came to them for help.)¹³⁰

Rachel takes action on behalf of the adults when Julien is arrested and imprisoned, preventing him from delivering a message for the Maquis in Le Puy, another village. With Suzanne unable to go without arousing the suspicion of Schmidt, and Madame Barbière suffering from arthritis, Rachel offers to go and Suzanne eagerly accepts as no-one will suspect a child (2.2). When Rachel gets to Le Puy she encounters Yvette, who does not believe that 'Madeleine' is selling lace, as she claims, but that she is playing truant from school (2.3). Rachel is able to locate the Resistance contact and pass on the message, but Yvette reappears with Schmidt. It becomes clear that Yvette has denounced 'Madeleine' as a Jew under the guise of reporting that she is riding a stolen bicycle:

HANS [Schmidt]. The bicycle isn't hers. It's stolen.

[...]

GÉRARD. (*Disbelieving.*) Stolen? [...] She doesn't look like a thief.

YVETTE. (*Smugly.*) Looks can deceive.

[...]

HANS. If she's who you think she is, Frau Reynaud, you'll get your reward. Now, leave us. [2.3]

At this point audience empathy is heightened through empathic reactivity, in that while it may be presumed that none of the spectators will have undergone this experience of 'betrayal', it can likewise be assumed that most spectators will have faced someone 'telling tales', especially in childhood. The message that Rachel delivers therefore places her in danger,

¹³⁰ Chambon Foundation (2013) 'Onetime Le Chambon Museum Project.' 24 July. http://www.chambon.org/lcsl_museum_en.htm [Accessed 5 September 2013].

and implicates Julien, Suzanne and Madame Barbière as well. The 'adult' action by Rachel is necessary in order to save the Resistance efforts, but does not have any direct bearing upon saving Rachel herself. Whereas the deeds of Annemarie Johansen have a clear and noticeable impact, the consequences of Rachel's actions are never fully specified.¹³¹ Instead Rachel is saved by the intervention of Père Antoine. Schmidt questions her but Père Antoine swears to the identity of 'Madeleine', able to do so as he met her by accident at the start of the play and, guessing that she was concealing her Jewish identity, told her not to reveal her real name to him:

HANS. Do you swear that she is Madeleine Petit?

PÈRE ANTOINE. I know her by no other name.

HANS. You swear?

PÈRE ANTOINE. I swear. (2.3)

Schmidt believes the priest and lets 'Madeleine' go free. Père Antoine tells Rachel that she must forgive Yvette's 'stupidity' for the sake of her soul, but Rachel retorts, "You can forgive stupidity for your soul. But I have to fight it, for my life!" (2.3), highlighting her struggle for life as a child against Nazis like Schmidt and collaborators like Yvette. However, I argue that the automatic empathic positioning of the audience as siding with Rachel against Schmidt and Yvette does not advocate spectator querying of why Yvette behaves in such a manner, nor raise questions over the attitude of ordinary people in France towards Jews either before or during the Nazi occupation. Yvette is presented as a two-dimensional character that functions on both sinister and comic levels through covert and overt motor mimicry. The audience reaction to Schmidt arises through a combination of empathic modes: the automatic deployment of spectator empathy, resulting in antipathy, as a direct consequence

¹³¹ Later on, however, it is revealed in conversation that Rachel has been used as a look-out for a Resistance mission, unrelated to the message in Le Puy, to halt a train destined for the concentration camps (2.4).

of audience pre-conceptions of Nazis; empathic reactivity, occurring for the same reason; and inner imitation that stems from the vocal and physical gestures of Schmidt, in spite of the author's directive that "*He is not a caricature villain*" (1.4) and which nevertheless evoke the stereotypical image of a Nazi. During his first encounter with Suzanne he tells her, "You are young, spirited, I like that. If you cooperate, I will see to it you have a real school to teach in...in our New World" (1.4); and when interrogating Rachel in Le Puy he casually draws his gun in a subtle threat and later strikes Rachel across the face (2.3). Schmidt is easily 'readable', yet his stereotype infers that racism only manifests in certain 'types' – unlike Yvette, who despite her peripheral role is just as dangerous in terms of her unwitting prejudice as her deliberate efforts to secure rewards for her anti-Semitic actions.

The suffering of Rachel at the hands of Schmidt is juxtaposed with the suffering of others, which takes the form of threats made onstage, violence committed offstage, and conversations referring to violence or death after the fact. In direct contrast to both *Number the Stars* and *The Flight into Egypt*, the child protagonist is physically mistreated onstage, with Rachel being slapped across the face by her father (1.1) and Schmidt (1.5; 2.3). Such incidents distance the play from its Holocaust fairytale qualities and give it a darker, more sinister tone. The spectator is outraged on her behalf due to the perceived violation of her 'safe' status as both a child and a performer. Patrick Duggan (2012) calls this 'mimetic shimmering', in which the spectator recognises the violence and experiences it as alien: "The reality of the images as representation shimmers, constantly and rapidly in and out of focus with the perception of the representation as violent reality." (73) While the spectator knows that Schmidt slapping Rachel is *imitated* violence, their overt motor mimicry and inner imitation of Rachel's response provokes a mirrored reaction from the spectator that is parallel to if the slap had been real. Simultaneously, the "resourceful" and "idealistic" qualities of Rachel mean that such moments are not necessarily forgotten, but certainly not lingered upon by either the character or the audience. Empathic parallelism means that the audience will imaginatively undergo the same experiences as Rachel but will not dwell on them as the

character quickly appears to overlook them, prompting the audience to do the same. This attitude is reflected in Rachel's response to incidents that happen both to her and to others, even though her immediate reaction is frequently one of strong emotion. For example, when Rachel is on the train into hiding, a Jewish man is pursued and shot by Nazis offstage, causing Rachel to scream and bury her head (1.2). The suffering of others adheres to the Holocaust fairytale in that it takes place offstage, although the effects of Nazi persecution are made manifest in the appearance of Léon at the end of the play. In Act 1 Scene 6 Yvette tells Madame Barbière about the shooting of a man who concealed a Jew. Later in the same scene Julien, "frenzied and worn" after being imprisoned by the Nazis, recounts how he was beaten, interrogated and denied food and drink; he also brings a Resistance newspaper containing news of the concentration camps, resulting in Rachel's distress as she realises what fate may have befallen her parents (1.6). In a discussion between Suzanne, Père Antoine and Madame Barbière, following the re-arrest of Julien by Schmidt for Resistance activities, references are made to the shooting of three hostages in Paris, the arrest of the Bishop of Montauban and the need to rescue Julien from prison before the Nazis kill him (2.4). All of these instances happen offstage,¹³² as does the death of Père Antoine, who is shot for visiting Julien in prison and secretly changing places with him, allowing Julien to escape disguised as a priest (2.5). At the end of the scene Julien leaves his cell and in the ensuing blackout a gunshot is heard, signalling that one of the men has been killed. The audience do not know which one until the next scene, when Julien is seen preparing food for celebrations to mark the end of the war.

The death of Père Antoine meets the criteria of the Holocaust fairytale in that it is spoken of after the fact simultaneously to the exposition that the war is now over (2.6). His death is a redemptive sacrifice in the sense that he died instead of Julien, placing Père Antoine as a righteous gentile as his death enables the Resistance to continue acts of

¹³² The audience can see the after-effects of his imprisonment upon Julien as he collapses upon reaching the house of Madame Barbière.

sabotage that include halting trains bound for the concentration camps. The death of Rachel's mother Pauline from typhus in the camps is handled in the same way. Rachel eagerly awaits the return of her parents, but only her father arrives. The news of her mother's death distresses Rachel – she turns violently on her father and sobs in Madame Barbière's arms – but this distress turns to curiosity about her father's experiences, before she pleads with him to stay with her and Madame Barbière and joyfully, finally, reclaims her real name (2.6). In this sense the life of the child protagonist returns to 'normal' and she re-assumes her native 'state of innocence'. Her jubilation at being able to reclaim her name outweighs her sorrow at the death of her mother and negates all of the suffering, including that of her father, into a final moment of elation. When Léon arrives at the end of the play, he "*stands there, gaunt, grey haired. His clothes are army hospital surplus. HE is a shattered man, a shadow of himself.*" (2.6) The physical changes are matched by stage directions that refer to his manner of speaking as "Far away", and Léon's own admission that "I...can't...cry." (2.6) The ending of the play reflects the experiences of many Holocaust survivors:

[...] [A]t last they could speak [...]; at last they would be heard. But the world (their families, their friends) refused to listen – they were told that their ghostly physical appearance was eloquent enough – and the survivors came up against an unexpected and insurmountable obstacle. (Schumacher, 1998: 2)

With the pre-existing if superficial knowledge of the spectator in relation to Léon's "history, personality, circumstances and situation" (Howe, 2013: 14), the spectator is well-placed to utilise empathetic perspective-taking and imagine what it is like to be him – specifically in terms of imagining what he has undergone in the camps. However, the spectator is not given a real opportunity to employ this perspective-taking as the play ends with the image of an emotionally and physically shattered Léon eclipsed by the ecstatic sentiments of Rachel:

(LÉON is seated, his head down. RACHEL stands behind him, her arms on his.)

RACHEL. It's over, Papa. The war's over. We can stop hiding! I can have my name back. My own name. RACHEL SIMON! [2.6]

Remember My Name depicts the aftermath of the Holocaust in a way that *Number the Stars* does not, yet it is not the child protagonist who has been markedly affected. The journey of the spectator with her from the start of the play dictates that it is the viewpoint of Rachel, and emotional engagement with her, that the spectator will take away with them, rather than the suffering of Léon.

Remember My Name functions as a Holocaust fairytale, although not to the same extent as *Number the Stars*. Key aspects such as the female child protagonist and the basis in historical events fulfil the tenets of the Holocaust fairytale, while others – like the portrayal of suffering – are less ‘sugar-coated’ and move towards a representation that corresponds with a less closed and more questioning view of the Holocaust by the spectator. I suggest that the play is not wholly a Holocaust fairytale, but nor does it accurately portray the wider issues of the Holocaust, in spite of the depictions of violence and the aftermath for the victims. The historical events that *Remember My Name* is based upon promote ideals of hope and compassion, and this is certainly reflected in the play. Nevertheless the spectator is not placed in any doubt that the story will have a happy ending; even the visible trauma of Léon is overshadowed by the happiness of Rachel. I argue that the ending of the play counteracts the notion of learning more about the Holocaust through its inference that in spite of hardships, suffering and death, a ‘happy ending’ was always the outcome.

The Flight into Egypt: against the Holocaust fairytale

In Julian Garner’s play, Beile is a fourteen-year-old Jewish artist living with her parents and brother Ya’acov in rural Poland. The family is visited by Ryszard, a Polish art academic working nearby, who buys eggs to make paint and some of their traditional Jewish food. Beile’s parents, Friedel and Yoineh, are fearful that Ryszard is a Nazi provocateur. The next day Ryszard returns for more food; Yoineh comes home, badly injured, and says that a pogrom is beginning. Beile and Ya’acov are sent to hide in the forest and that night visit Ryszard. He reassures them and reveals himself to be a Jew posing as a Polish Catholic. He

asks Beile to send some of her artwork to him in his new teaching post in America before sending them home. Later that night Beile returns, traumatised and alone, and offers Ryszard all the money the family has if he will take her away with him; he refuses but tells her that he will do everything he can to help. In the second act Beile arrives at the home of Krasinski, a Polish caretaker. She implores him to help her and he refuses, but in the next scene Beile is hiding in a wall cavity and it becomes clear that Krasinski is taking care of her, including keeping her presence hidden from his neighbour, Mrs. Kober. When the war is over Krasinski continues to look after her but Mrs. Kober, now aware of her, urges him to send Beile away. Ryszard returns and tries to persuade Beile to go back with him to New York to study art. Krasinski feels that he has been the one to keep Beile safe and that Ryszard has no right to claim that she will have a better life with him. Beile initially chooses to go with Ryszard, but ultimately decides to stay and the play ends with her unpacking her belongings.

In the context of the first precept of the Holocaust fairytale, and unlike the other two case studies, *The Flight into Egypt* is not based on a specific historical event, but the circumstances surrounding Beile as a Jewish adolescent in hiding reflect the real-life experiences of Jewish children who were hidden in Poland during the Holocaust and survived (Smith, 2005: 184-94; Hochberg-Mariańska, 1996: 115-94). While Beile's experiences are broadly similar to accounts of life in hiding – for instance, before Krasinski's apartment she has hidden in places ranging from a cellar to a hen house (2.1) – she is not subjected to the physical and emotional abuse that many other children endured from their 'protectors', varying from the withholding of food, bullying, and intimidation to extortion, beatings, and slave labour (Hochberg-Mariańska, 1996: 119-25). The representation of Beile in hiding, concealed within a tiny wall cavity, contrasts strongly with the more widely understood concept of Jews in hiding enshrined in *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I suggest that it offers a new perspective, shying away from the more typical Holocaust narrative of life in hiding that Anne Frank epitomises.

In accordance with the second and third precepts, the child protagonist in *The Flight into Egypt* is female, and – like Annemarie in *Number the Stars* – an older child, aged fourteen when the play begins in 1939; by the final scene, set in 1946, Beile is actually in her early twenties. However, she remains child-like – there is no sense of her having ‘grown up’ in the intervening years – and, were it not for the stage directions setting the play across several years, it could easily take place within a one- or two-year time span. In the context of my definition of the Holocaust fairytale, Beile is not typically child-like in terms of being stereotypically naïve or dependent: in the opening scene she takes an active role in helping to cook for her family and silently supports her brother in a quarrel with their father. Her family life is not perfect and while she is idealistic, drawing illustrations to accompany stories that Ya’acov has written (1.1) and refusing to believe that Ryszard could be a provocateur (1.2), she is not blind to the danger from Nazis and Polish anti-Semites: “Why should he be a provocateur? They don’t need provocateurs, do they?” (1.2) I posit that the status of Beile as a child is fixed by the fact that the audience see her within her family unit and then she suddenly comes to Ryszard alone, portending the fate of her parents and brother (1.5) and highlighting her plight (and therefore her ‘innocence’) as a lone Jewish girl in a Nazi-occupied country.

Until this point spectator empathy is encouraged in its most basic form through mirroring of the onstage action and McConachie’s assertion of the automatic deployment of empathy in order to ascertain whose story the play is about. However, the usefulness of mirroring in determining the intentions of the actor/character is undermined in Act 1 Scene 2, when Ryszard comes to buy more food. He sits at the kitchen table to eat, and Beile excuses herself and leaves the room. Mirroring cannot help the audience to determine what Beile intends to do as she does not indicate her intentions to Ya’acov, either by speech or gesture. After she has left “a wood-knot falls out of the wall and hits the ground” (1.3), but it is not until Friedel berates her daughter from offstage that it is clarified: Beile has been spying on Ryszard through the hole in order to sketch his portrait. The primary function of the mirroring

system is of no help to the audience as they are unable to divine the intentions of the child protagonist. I suggest that this introduces the need for spectators to engage in perspective-taking in the context of placing themselves in the position of the character in order to attempt to ascertain both the character's objectives and the overall situation, particularly as the uncertainty arising from not being able to 'read' the characters through mirroring lasts and even strengthens as the play continues. In Act 2 Scene 1 Krasinski rejects Beile's plea for help and "[h]erds her towards the door". The next scene begins with an extended sequence of him arriving home and dealing with domestic matters before he "*goes to the wall and quietly removes a section of panelling to reveal BEILE sitting in a tiny cavity, wrapped in a blanket.*" (2.2) Krasinski helps Beile to move around and regain sensation in her cramped limbs before replacing the bucket that functions as her toilet, giving her privacy to wash, providing food and washing her clothes. The audience are forced to reconsider their initial judgement of Krasinski, first through the surprise of seeing Beile in the wall, and secondly through witnessing the extent of the care that Krasinski provides to her.¹³³ The need for both mirroring and perspective-taking by the audience are highlighted again when, later in the same scene and while Beile is eating, there is a knock on the door. Beile conceals herself behind the door as Krasinski opens it to Mrs. Kober, who asks for a light bulb. After she has gone he helps Beile back into the cavity and goes to take some fish and lamp oil up to Mrs. Kober: "*He [...] smiles quietly to himself then goes out, closing the door behind him.*" (2.2) His intentions and the reason behind his smile are unclear: he could be smiling in relief because Beile is safely hidden; it could be self-satisfaction because he has been deceiving Beile and has malevolent intentions; or it could be irony at the fact that even though Beile is hidden, he must still take great precautions to keep Mrs. Kober 'sweet' and unsuspecting, such as giving her what was evidently his portion of fish. The reason and intent behind

¹³³ On a metaphorical level, this functions as a reflection of the experiences of Jews, not just children, in hiding: help could come from unexpected quarters and likewise be denied, and it was often difficult to know whom to trust.

Krasinski's smile is never made clear, but it is obvious throughout the rest of the play that he has no wish to cause harm to Beile.

I argue that *The Flight into Egypt* is therefore different to the other examples within this chapter as it calls for a simultaneous deployment of both affective and cognitive empathy. Audience empathy is not fixed with Beile, but begins with her point of view and changes to Krasinski and vice versa. This is especially so when Beile is telling him about the murder of her family (2.5): both Krasinski and the audience are hearing it for the first time. In this way the play is more effective as a piece of Holocaust theatre, as the audience have empathic and emotional commonality with Krasinski through jointly being witnesses to Beile and are not confined to the victim/survivor point of view (Krasinski has an active, participatory role as a rescuer and yet he is still only a witness to Beile's suffering). This shift in audience empathy between Beile and Krasinski allows them to take the perspective of each character without causing detachment from either them or the story. Contemporaneously the shift in perspectives coupled with the action of the play itself promotes both cognitive and affective empathy, potentially enabling heightened spectator engagement.

In terms of the fourth precept for the Holocaust fairytale, relating to the danger that the child protagonist and other characters face, it is made clear that Beile and her family are in danger from the start of the play:

FRIEDEL. They're practising so they can ring [the church bells] all through *Pesach* without having to pause for rest. Why bother? [...] Why don't they just come in and break a few heads? (1.1)

FRIEDEL. Who was that man?

YOINEH. A messenger. His message was trouble!

[...]

[...] This is what happens. I've heard of this. You'll see, they'll be here, tonight perhaps, saying how we tricked him, how we fooled him, robbed him!

[...]

Or he'll feign illness and they'll say we poisoned him! They're just looking for trouble! (1.1)

When Beile visits Ryszard with Ya'acov, only to return alone and begging for help (1.5), the audience are made aware that something terrible has happened to her family, and that Beile herself is still in danger, through affective and empathic reactivity. Ryszard cannot help her without endangering himself but promises to do "everything I *can*" (1.5). Yet when Beile finds Krasinski she has been in hiding in several other places and it was not Ryszard who gave her Krasinski's address, raising questions as to just how much help Ryszard did give and indicating, though not confirming, that Beile has had to take adult action – as will be discussed – to find places to hide for herself. At no point in the play does Beile commit an outright 'adult' action in terms of the threat that she faces; rather, she is reliant upon adults, particularly Krasinski, to take action in looking after her. Even though Beile is older than the other child protagonists, she is more 'child-like' as she truly cannot take care of herself without the help of others.

While the suffering of others is not portrayed in detail in *Number the Stars* or *Remember My Name* in accordance with the fifth precept, in *The Flight into Egypt* the suffering of Beile's family is depicted in the aftermath of a vicious offstage attack on Yoineh, when he staggers home with a head wound:

(The church bells suddenly stop ringing. Silence.)

YOINEH. It's a *pogrom*.

(He lays his head down on the table. [...])

FRIEDEL *(low, to YA'ACOV)*[.] I want you to take your sister and go into the forest. Do you understand? Take her there and hide. Hide.

YA'ACOV. Aren't you coming?

FRIEDEL *(glances at YOINEH)* [.] I can't.

YA'ACOV. But they'll kill you!

[...]

FRIEDEL (to YA'ACOV, urgent)[.] Go now.

[...]

(Pause. YA'ACOV and BEILE [...] go out onto the street. FRIEDEL locks the doors [...]. She pulls the curtains [...] then sits opposite YOINEH at the table. Sound of rain, outside.) [1.3]

The emotional suffering of all four characters, as well as the physical injury to Yoineh, is visible, and the audience are able to 'read the minds' of those onstage through their actions. Ya'acov and Beile are sent off to relative safety while Friedel, unable to leave her husband, waits helplessly for his attackers to return. Again, this mirroring is correct in its reasoning but ultimately wrong: the perpetrators do return, but late at night. Ya'acov and Beile are not safe but, having been reassured by Ryszard, return home, resulting in the death of Ya'acov alongside his parents. As I will now discuss, the murders are not directly represented but referred to after the fact, and rather than negating the effect (as with the other two plays in this chapter) this gives the revelation additional emotional power through concurrent affective and cognitive empathy with the character.

The suffering of Beile herself is primarily psychological/emotional. At no point in the play is she injured or in direct physical danger, although there is a sense of jeopardy through the appearances of Mrs. Kober: Beile will be denounced to the Nazis if seen, and in this capacity Krasinski is also in danger. Unlike the other two plays there is no sense that the 'ingenuity' of Beile or the 'timely intervention' of Krasinski will somehow prevail, and the careful actions of Krasinski in securing the apartment and keeping every trace of Beile hidden add an undercurrent of tension. Beile's emotional suffering centres upon the trauma of witnessing the murder of her family while she was hidden behind a door. The killings are referred to after the fact through Beile testifying to what she has seen and heard. On a practical level this device does away with the need for a graphic representation of violence and works as a simple method of exposition. Whereas the deaths of Lise and Peter in

Number the Stars are referred to in simple terms, as are the deaths of Pauline and Père Antoine in *Remember My Name*, the suffering of others in *The Flight into Egypt* is described in detail by Beile. Yet in strong contrast to the revelation of the deaths in the other two case studies, which closely adhere to the sixth precept of the Holocaust fairytale, Beile's testimony is illustrative of the psychological impact that the deaths of her family have had:

BEILE. We heard them coming. My mother pushed us behind the bedroom door, my brother and I, and [...] then she went into the kitchen. They broke in from the yard. She screamed at them to get out [...] but then they must have hit her on the head, because she [...] just stopped, in the middle of a word. Ya'acov burst out from behind the door. I couldn't move. He ran into the other room, [...] he [...] and our father [...] shouting and screaming at them to get out [...]. [...] I couldn't move. [...] They hit them with hammers, smashed their heads, my mother's first, then Ya'acov's, lastly my father's, where he lay in bed [...]. I couldn't...

(Pause.)

[...] Then it was quiet. It was over quite quickly. I don't know how long it lasted. I don't know how long I stayed there, holding onto the door handle. Holding it, not moving. I couldn't move. I just stood there, holding onto the handle, the door against my face...
[2.5]

In *Number the Stars* and *Remember My Name*, the child protagonists are either aware of the deaths of others (Peter and Père Antoine) or learn the details of them for the first time (Lise and Pauline). Beile has carried the knowledge of the killing of her family with her since going to Ryszard for help, and when she reveals this knowledge to Krasinski, coupled with a drawing that she has done showing the murders, it is evident that she has been trying to keep the emotional trauma suppressed and 'work it through' with her art. As Ryszard later observes of her paintings:

RYSZARD. The point about these pictures is that they make present recalled events with such alarming clarity.

[...]

[...] The colour schemes, the compositions, are indicative of a determination to arrest time. To hold it, forever. These events are

not seen as [remembrances], but as experiences, occurring now, directly onto the canvas. [...] These images are not considered, not reflected upon. There is no distance. They are offered to us as evidence might be offered to a tribunal. What they represent is a refusal to let [...] experience [...] be swept aside. (2.6)

In this way it is plain that Beile's emotional trauma is deeply entrenched and continues to impact upon her, unlike the child protagonists of the other two plays, who do not continue to dwell upon the deaths of others once the news has been imparted to them. That Beile is traumatised is illustrated prior to her revelation by her behaviour: continued distancing from Krasinski; speaking and eating little; a preference for solitude; immersing herself in her artwork; and, as affirmed by Krasinski, suffering from nightmares, all of which constitute "perceptual cues" (Snow, 2000: 67). The audience can 'read' a traumatic event in Beile's past through affective and cognitive empathy with these behaviours. As with the character of Léon in *Remember My Name*, the spectator can take the perspective of Beile through their knowledge of her history – including the attack on her father and the implication of her family's deaths when she goes to Ryszard – and her circumstances and situation. Unlike Léon, however, the spectator is left with a strong and lasting impression of what Beile has suffered, especially as the ending to *The Flight into Egypt* is neither redemptive nor even fully resolved.

The final aspect of the Holocaust fairytale, which is the redemptive or reductive ending coupled with the return of the child protagonist to 'life as normal', does not happen in *The Flight into Egypt*. The deaths of Beile's family do not function as redemptive sacrifices for the greater good but directly represent the senselessness of the Nazi genocide; no positive meaning can be derived. The traumatised behaviour of Beile continues after she has disclosed to Krasinski, although there are signs that she is slowly coming to terms with what has happened: after her disclosure, she thanks Krasinski (a thanks which is not given specific context) and slices and eats a large piece of cake (2.5). Despite this Beile cannot –

and does not – return to the emotional equilibrium seen at the start of the play.¹³⁴ I argue that the empathy and sympathy of the audience are not rendered cathartic by a ‘happy ending’ (in the sense of being weakened by experiencing emotion that remains intact only as long as the spectator is witnessing the performance). The child protagonist does not find ‘happiness’ or demonstrably move on with her life, and this in turn is illustrative of the fate of Jews returning from hiding or the concentration camps at the end of the war.

The attitude of Mrs. Kober towards Beile is significant as, according to contemporary accounts, it represents a widespread view of Poles towards Jews who survived the Holocaust. One Jewish girl who survived Auschwitz and returned with her mother to their hometown observed:

Every time we ran into neighbors who recognized us from before the war, their reaction was the same: ‘Why are you back?’ ‘How come you’re alive?’ ‘We thought the Germans killed you!’ Rumors came back from cities like Warsaw and Kraków and even Lodz about anti-Semitic gangs that threw rocks at Jews returning from the camps. (Nieuwsma, 1998: 34)

Mrs. Kober does not display an explicitly anti-Semitic attitude but contemporaneously perceives Beile to be ‘other’ and resents that ‘otherness’, especially when Beile shows no signs of wishing to integrate with Mrs. Kober or other tenants in the apartment building. In Act 2 Scene 2 Mrs. Kober comes to ask Krasinski if he will play his accordion for a celebration that the tenants are having for the end of the war. She tries to entice Beile to join them, with the obvious intention of discovering more about her, but to her chagrin Beile declines. Later on Mrs. Kober brings Krasinski a cake and in the ensuing conversation urges him to make Beile leave:

MRS KOBER. [...] The war’s been over a year, now, Mr Krasinski, she can’t stay here forever.

[...]

¹³⁴ This can partly be attributed to the fact that the action of the play takes place across several years, and by the end of the play Beile is a young adult rather than an adolescent or child.

There are places they can go: the Red Cross, they take care of them, find them homes.

[...]

I don't only speak for myself, Mr Krasinski. It's *you* we're thinking of.

(KRASINSKI gently herds her towards the door.)

You risked your life for that girl.

KRASINSKI: Thanks again, Mrs Kober.

[...]

(MRS KOBER goes out.[]) [2.5]

The audience are made unpleasantly aware that Beile's troubles are still not at an end, as she must now face the apparent anti-Semitism and prejudice of the wider population. Beile pretends to be asleep during the above exchange but cannot prevent herself from recoiling at Mrs. Kober's words. I submit that the mirroring of Beile's alarmed reaction and pre-existing empathy/sympathy with her, coupled with the obvious actions of Krasinski in refusing to pay attention to Mrs. Kober, spurs the spectator into 'siding' with Krasinski and Beile. The scene poses further questions to the audience by offering a perspective of how the suffering of the Jews did not automatically end with the liberation of the concentration camps: the non-resolution of Beile's story incites the non-resolution of audience consideration. Beile finally chooses to stay with Krasinski, but again there is no indication of what will happen to them or how their relationship will evolve. Their relationship throughout the play is ambiguous. It is implied, although not stated, that Krasinski is an older man in his forties or fifties.¹³⁵ The pair do not have a father-daughter relationship, demonstrated in the way that he always calls her 'Miss Abramovitz' and never by her first name; nor is there any romantic connotation. When

¹³⁵ When he is telling Beile about his dream of becoming a musician and coming to Krakow in his late teens, she asks why he did not return home when he realised it would not come true and he replies: "Pride? Hope? Fate. Someone had to be here when you knocked on the door." (2.7) This implies that the events he relates took place just before the war, and that Krasinski is not that old after all.

Beile decides to stay there is no clear hint to the audience of how she and Krasinski will move forward. This reinforces the questions raised by the attitude of Mrs. Kober and the non-resolution for Jewish survivors, as well as furthering cognitive empathy in the need for spectatorial perspective-taking in attempting to guess how the story of Beile and Krasinski will ultimately end.

Conclusion

Holocaust plays that feature child protagonists are generally intended as a tool for teaching children about the Holocaust, particularly in America, although this does not preclude their use as learning resources for adults as well. As I have demonstrated with the three case studies in this chapter theatre is an efficacious educational means, but it is important that it is implemented alongside proper teaching of history in order to contextualise the events seen in the play and provide a broader view of them, especially if the play is explicitly based on real-life happenings. Theatre enables the facts and figures of history to be understood through the medium of personal stories, related by characters with whom it is possible for the spectator to connect. I argue that the use of child protagonists enables emotional engagement through a greater capacity for spectator empathy, particularly in the context of the human mirroring system.

However, I contend that the innate risk in using Holocaust plays with child protagonists is that such plays are frequently Holocaust fairytales, exemplified by *Number the Stars*. The reductive or simplistic version of Holocaust history employed,¹³⁶ coupled with readily empathic characters with which both adult and child spectators can emotionally engage, leads to misinformation and the false belief that the Holocaust had a 'happy ending' (when the legacy of the Holocaust was anything but 'happy'). Child protagonists permit spectators to mirror their bewilderment, fright, etc. as the character attempts to make sense

¹³⁶ Reductive or simplified history/narratives are not confined to Holocaust plays that feature child protagonists: *Resort 76* by Shimon Wincelberg (1981), *Throne of Straw* by Harold and Edith Lieberman (1982) and *A Shayna Maidel* by Barbara Lebow (1988) are all examples.

of what is happening in their world and often questions the reasons behind it, which I suggest in turn inspires the spectator to ask questions themselves. Such questions are less likely to be asked if the action onstage effectively resolves the situation in the mind of the spectator, such as the ending to *Remember My Name*. Out of this arises the responsibility of playwrights and practitioners to construct Holocaust narratives that are more complex and not necessarily easily resolved, epitomised in *The Flight into Egypt*. Such a narrative is demonstrated by Voices of the Holocaust's *Butterflies* (2013). All of the characters in *Butterflies* are Jewish children, aged from seven to fourteen, and they try to cling to their hopes, ideals and culture in spite of their worsening situation within the walls of Theresienstadt. The play alternates between ensemble scenes with the children in their classroom and monologues from the viewpoints of the children and Allied liberators of the concentration camps. At the end of the play the actors return to the stage to write key facts about the camps (ranging from Auschwitz-Birkenau to Majdanek) on blackboards at the back of the performance space. The play toured to schools where the ages of the pupils corresponded with those of the characters, and was incorporated into a day of workshops and related teaching about the Holocaust run by the company. *Butterflies* is notable both for its range of empathic child characters and its representation of Holocaust events without resorting to 'sugar-coating' or a Holocaust fairytale. Simultaneously the play presents grimmer aspects of the Holocaust in a way that emphasises the fate of Jewish victims without causing distress or trauma.

As can be seen from *Butterflies* and the three case studies examined, I propose that it is therefore not the presence of the child protagonist that causes problems: it is the way that Holocaust narratives are constructed around such characters. It is reasonable to simplify such stories to an extent, given the scope and complex nature of the genocide. Yet if theatre is to fulfil a role in engaging the spectator with the Holocaust through personal stories (particularly as the number of Holocaust survivors, who are able to tell their stories and offer human interaction, continues to lessen), then the plays need to encourage both adult and

child spectators to think and reflect upon the past and its contemporary resonance, rather than being numbed by Holocaust fairytales. This is supported by the Holocaust Education Development Programme (HEDP) report, in which teachers identified the necessity and challenge of giving students “enough space [...] to be mature enough and think it through for themselves’.” (Pettigrew and Foster, 2009: 96)

Out of the three case studies in this chapter, only *The Flight into Egypt* raises multifaceted questions. These centre upon the dangers of being in hiding (such as long periods in silence in cramped conditions and possible discovery), the complexities facing both Jew and rescuer, and the post-war fate of surviving Jews. The play is ‘closer’ to the real experiences of Holocaust survivors, particularly when Beile discloses the murder of her family. Her decision to paint a picture of it and reveal this to Krasinski only later mirrors those survivors who either did not want to speak about what had happened or were unable to. The second act of the play involves fewer words, more stage directions and revolves around the central character being in hiding, followed by an ambiguous ending which reflects the uncertain outlook for Jews immediately after the Holocaust. In direct contrast, *Number the Stars* and *Remember My Name* promote narratives of hope and resolve; although *Remember My Name* is darker in content, both plays end with an uplifting resolution that does not necessarily urge further consideration from the spectator. In this the plays mirror the true-life events upon which they are based, which do have relatively happy endings when compared to the majority of Holocaust narratives and events. A positive outcome is to be expected within most plays for younger spectators in order to avoid a dominance of fear or distress. Yet I argue that it is wrong to assume that either adult or child spectators will be aware of the truth of the Holocaust, and it is also false to presume that by ‘protecting’ younger spectators they will come to question the Holocaust, and the circumstances leading to it, for themselves. By exemplifying Holocaust fairytales as the overriding narratives of the Holocaust, the risk is run of not encouraging children to become critically-thinking citizens

and of negating atrocity. Child protagonists are crucial to eliciting empathy and emotion, but the narratives in which they appear in Holocaust theatre need to be rethought.

As the above chapter has demonstrated, the evolution of Holocaust theatre – particularly as the temporal distance from the Holocaust increases – calls for a re-evaluation of Holocaust narratives that have arisen from cultural convention. This is especially necessary in the context of plays that function predominantly in the context of Holocaust education, where there is a danger of distortion. Yet as I will interrogate in the next chapter, it is possible for ‘new’ Holocaust narratives – specifically, the representation of a ‘Holocaust minority’ or non-Jewish victims – to be problematic, particularly if the historical events in which these narratives are grounded are unknown by the spectator.

BENT AND THE STAGING OF THE QUEER HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCE

Introduction

There can be no doubt that *Bent* caused controversy when it opened at London's Royal Court on 3 May 1979. Written by Martin Sherman, a gay, Jewish-American playwright, the play was the first of its kind to deal with the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. While *Bent* has subsequently been hailed as 'ground-breaking' and viewed positively for its exposition of an unexamined element of queer Holocaust history, the play was widely attacked by British theatre critics when it premiered in 1979. But upon *Bent's* revival in 1990, its critical reception was completely reversed. What was it about *Bent* that caused such critical derision in 1979, even while it achieved commercial success? A decade after Stonewall, why did a play based upon historical fact bring about such outrage? And why was it received so well eleven years later? In order to answer these questions, I will examine the critical responses not just in terms of the British socio-political climates of 1979 and 1990, but in the context of what Shoshana Felman calls "precocious testimony" (Felman and Laub, 1992: 21). I posit that the concept of precocious testimony as that which is delivered "ahead of knowledge and awareness" (ibid, 21) is intrinsic to an understanding of the 1979 critical reception of *Bent*, in that by its very nature, posited within the context of Holocaust theatre, it contributes to preventing empathy within some audience members. I will begin by outlining queer oppression during the twelve years of the Third Reich, from the implementation of the first anti-gay laws in the mid-1930s to the enforced silence of gay men liberated from Nazi concentration camps in 1945. I will explore the socio-political impact of the post-war years upon the gay community, including the watershed moment of the Stonewall Riots, which eventually led to the writing of *Bent*. I will discuss the play's production history, particularly the struggle for a London production in 1979 and the subsequent reactions of British theatre

critics.¹³⁷ *Bent* will be considered in the context of Felman's theory of precocious testimony, using the critics' responses to support the argument that the play should be perceived as such a piece of testimony (particularly in the context of the 1979 production). I will investigate how the critical response changed in 1990 following the implementation of Section 28 and the onset of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, demonstrating *Bent's* evolved status as a piece of precocious testimony. Ultimately I propose that *Bent* as precocious testimony was unsuccessful in evoking empathy, either in an affective or cognitive sense, from British theatre critics in 1979. However, this was reversed in 1990 due to contemporary frames of reference, including governmental oppression, that enabled the evocation of empathy predominantly through comparisons between historical and contemporary queer suffering.

The play in its historical context

Bent focuses on gay hedonist Max, living in 1930s Berlin until he and his lover Rudy are hunted and finally captured by the Nazis. Rudy is beaten to death by the guards en-route to Dachau, who force Max to take part. Max meets Horst, a gay prisoner marked with a pink triangle on his jacket, who tells him that homosexuals rank lowest in the concentration camp hierarchy. Max and Horst meet again in Dachau where Max is pretending to be Jewish (committing necrophilia with a teenage girl on the train to Dachau to prove that he is not 'bent') in order to get better treatment from the guards. As Max and Horst work together moving rocks, they fall in love – although Max refuses to admit it. At the end of the play Horst is murdered by the guards. Max finally admits his love for him before donning Horst's jacket with its pink triangle and committing suicide on the electric fence.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, it was on Hitler's promise of creating a stronger Germany; few could have foreseen the policies of widespread persecution that would 'officially' begin two years after Hitler came to power. While the Nazi persecution of the

¹³⁷ It must be noted that due to the condition and quality of some archival resources page numbers are not available for all newspaper articles.

Jews has been well-documented, relatively little exists in relation to the persecution of non-Jews. This absence is reflected in the theatre; there are no English-language plays in existence that deal with the experiences of Jehovah's Witnesses or the Roma & Sinti, for instance, and there are only a handful of plays in English that deal with the queer Holocaust experience. The lack of theatre dealing with this subject is directly related to the lack of information in a wider context; for example, it is a little-known fact that in 1935 the Nazis passed anti-gay legislation before anti-Jewish legislation.¹³⁸ The implementation of the anti-gay laws deliberately coincided with the first anniversary of the murder of Ernst Röhm, the openly homosexual leader of paramilitary group the SA and, by all accounts, Hitler's right-hand man. The murder of Röhm – and the elimination of the SA – is better known as the Night of the Long Knives (in *Bent*, Max's one-night stand, Wolf, is an SA man; Rudy remarks, "You called him your own little storm trooper." [1.1]). Hitler publicly made it clear that Röhm's removal had been necessary to begin 'cleansing' the state. This was a policy rigorously enforced by SS leader Heinrich Himmler; while Hitler's main objective was the extermination of the Jews, Himmler's personal campaign was a war against homosexuals and sexual 'deviancy'. He used Paragraph 175, the now-infamous piece of anti-gay German legislation, to devastating effect. Where the law had once governed only those men caught committing homosexual acts, legislation grew increasingly constrictive over time. Gay rights groups were proscribed; the "intent" to commit a homosexual act became a crime; homosexuals and other "deviant criminals" were to be "put to death 'if they threaten the health of the German people'"; and it even became a criminal offence for one man to look at another in a way that might be construed as 'lewd' or 'sexual' (Plant, 1986: 209-222). Concentration camps became mandatory 'prisons' for men convicted of homosexuality, as evidenced in Heinz Heger's autobiographical account *The Men With The Pink Triangle* (1980/2010). As

¹³⁸ The new anti-gay laws were implemented on 28 June 1935 (Plant, 1987: 212). The anti-Jewish Nuremberg Laws were implemented on 14 September 1935, depriving all Jews of civil rights and citizenship (ibid, 212).

portrayed in *Bent*, gay men were sent to the camps under the guise of 'protective custody', and it was the final destination for many.

The very first concentration camp – and the setting for *Bent* – was Dachau, established in 1933. Initially used to hold 'political opponents', Dachau developed into the model for all Nazi concentration camps. According to Richard Plant (1986), Heger (1980), and Sherman in *Bent*, homosexuals were treated even worse than Jews and condemned to the bottom of the concentration camp hierarchy; one particular measure meant that severe punishments were given for a gay man sleeping with his hands beneath his blanket (Plant, 1986: 164). Alongside the hundreds of thousands of others imprisoned by the Nazis, gay men suffered and died until the end of the war in 1945 and the Allied 'liberation' of the camps. Liberation should have been a time of profound joy for men imprisoned under Paragraph 175, as for other prisoners. However, homosexuality was still illegal in Germany and the Allies upheld Paragraph 175; any man who had been sent to a concentration camp for homosexuality could find himself incarcerated once more. Plant recounts one incident where an American colonel, encountering a gay man in a concentration camp, gave him "a stern lecture [...] informing him that the United States also considered what he had done criminally offensive." (1986: 181) Thus faced by new imprisonment, many gay men who survived the camps – and there were comparatively few – chose to disappear into oblivion:

Families frequently refused to take back a homosexual ex-inmate. And former gay friends were usually displaced or dead. Although they were no longer compelled to wear the stigmatic pink triangle, they felt marked for life. And like so many victims of the Third Reich, most gays never recovered emotionally from the Nazi boomtowns of hell. (Ibid, 181)

The resulting lack of queer survivor testimony, coupled with a dearth of Nazi documentation – due to poor record-keeping and frantic attempts by the SS to eliminate evidence – meant that the queer Holocaust experience became virtually non-existent, especially in the face of the overwhelming testimony from predominantly Jewish survivors. This 'queer silence' lasted for well over twenty years; long enough for the queer Holocaust experience to be forgotten

amongst ensuing world events, including restitution by the German government to the majority of other Holocaust survivors and the foundation of Israel in 1948. Yet awareness of the queer Holocaust experience started to seep into wider public consciousness from the latter quarter of the twentieth century; according to Richard Plant, *Bent* was the catalyst: “*Bent* opened the forbidden closet a crack and put the world on notice that [...] gays had been classified with criminals, asocials, and Jews as deviant sub-humans, the cosmic lice that Hitler and Himmler had vowed to exterminate.” (1986: 14-15)

***Bent* begins: ignorance, Stonewall, and the ‘private and the political’**

It is primarily because of the ensuing silence after the events of the queer Holocaust experience that *Bent* came to be written and staged more than forty years later. The silence – and ignorance – surrounding the queer Holocaust experience was not only prevalent in the general populace, but also in the queer community. Decriminalisation of homosexuality in several countries in the late 1960s (the UK and Germany in particular) meant that the testimony of queer survivors was now permissible and they could rightfully bear witness. However it was not until 1972 that the first autobiographical narrative of the queer Holocaust experience, *The Men With The Pink Triangle*, was published in German and it was not until 1980 that it was published in English. The book was written by Josef Kohout (under the pseudonym of Heinz Heger) about his experiences and imprisonment by the Nazis as a gay man, and is regarded as the most well-known account of its kind.

According to a review written after *Bent*’s premiere in 1979, Sherman first became interested in the play’s subject after working with the prestigious theatre company Gay Sweatshop – known for their highly politicised queer theatre – “as an ‘American accent advisor’ on their recent historical play ‘As Time Goes By’”.¹³⁹ The play depicted gay men living in three different periods: Victorian England, Weimar and Nazi Germany, and New York

¹³⁹ Steve Grant (1979) ‘The Homosexual’s Holocaust.’ *Time Out*, 4 May.

during the Stonewall Riots. Tish Dace (2012) asserts that at the conclusion of the German segment in the play, a lyric that referred to the pink triangles worn by gay inmates of concentration camps caught Sherman's attention and inspired him to write *Bent* (45). He was additionally spurred on by the lack of knowledge about the subject. In one article, written the day after *Bent*'s London premiere, Sherman gave an account of a revealing encounter:

What really decided me [...] was going to the Wiener Library [an extensive Holocaust library and archive in London] to do some research, simply because I was so ignorant of the period. [...] And I asked one of the librarians [...] if I could look up references to persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis and she replied that in fact [...] most of these rumours weren't really true and that there was more evidence to show that the Nazis were homosexual themselves. [...] [W]hat she was saying was just completely at variance with all of the material which I found in the library. Her attitude showed [...] a reluctance to admit that homosexuals were persecuted by the Nazis because by admitting that you [...] were diminishing the dignity of every other kind of victim.¹⁴⁰

The apparent readiness of 'experts' to denounce the Nazis as 'homosexual' is crucial in highlighting the vilification of, and anti-empathic views towards, gay men. The widespread equating of homosexuality with persecution, violence and murder – but ironically with gay men being the oppressors instead of the oppressed – illustrates the vital importance of changing such attitudes, as demonstrated by the example of the librarian above. According to Aldrich and Wotherspoon (2001), the fact that Ernst Röhm "was homosexual, and promoted a number of other homosexual men to leadership positions in the SA, has given rise to the belief that the Nazi movement was riddled with homosexuality" (378). This has led to continued assertions that Hitler and other Nazi leaders were homosexual, with the regime's "taste for black leather, fancy uniforms and male *Kamerads[c]haft* [comradeship]" cited as evidence (ibid, 378).¹⁴¹ But this mythology arose from wartime anti-Nazi propaganda,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ In *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party* (1995), Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams argue that homosexuality was intrinsic to the Nazi state. Jonathan Littell's 2010 novel *The Kindly Ones* perpetuates the myth of the debased 'homosexual Nazi' through the protagonist, an SS officer, forcing younger soldiers into homosexual encounters in order to obtain gratification from his own sense of power.

Christopher Isherwood's Berlin novels and – crucially, given the time of *Bent's* premiere – “a misreading of Nazi symbolism from the perspective of 1970s gay male fetishism.” (Ibid, 378)¹⁴² When even ‘experts’ knew virtually nothing, how could the public at large? More than thirty years after the end of the Holocaust, it was time to “put the world on notice” (Plant, 1986: 14). In order to change the prejudiced attitudes of many in relation to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, it was essential to find a commonality between the characters and audience of *Bent* and thus to enable the evocation of empathy.

Another crucial factor was the 1969 Stonewall Riots. What began as a ‘routine’ police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York’s Greenwich Village, turned out to be the spark that ignited the international gay liberation movement.¹⁴³ Despite the decriminalisation of homosexuality across Europe and a tolerance for homosexuality in metropolitan cities like New York and San Francisco (although homosexuality was not officially decriminalised in the States until 2003), Sherman asserted that he wrote *Bent* out of a need to make people realise that the personal and the political are inextricably linked. Talking about living in New York at the time of *Bent's* creation, Sherman stated that:

[...] [T]here was a surface idea of some kind of freedom [...] that had nothing to do with reality. It was all commercial. In the Village there were all kinds of shops that catered to gay people and gay people were very visible [...] and it was a time of outrageous promiscuity but there [...] was no political freedom. All [...] the laws [...] of New York [...] were completely anti-gay, and they tried [...] to have the laws repealed and changed and they couldn’t, and nobody – none of the people on the street and [...] in the shops – were remotely interested in politics and the changing of the laws. And so because I had a perspective from this

¹⁴² This is not to say that no Nazis at all were homosexual (the graphic murder of Wolf in *Bent* is illustrative of why such men would have kept their sexuality concealed), but what is particularly significant in this context is that virtually all references to the homosexual behaviour of Nazis ostensibly occur in parallel to the suffering of others. This is demonstrated in *The Kindly Ones*, as already described; Heger (2010) recounts how an SS officer masturbated while prisoners were being flogged (55); and in *Bent*, Max performs oral sex on an SS captain in order to obtain medicine for Horst (2.5). But Plant (1987) notes that many gay men “rushed to join the Nazi Party in the belief that they could vanish among the uniformed crowds [...] [;] many realized [sic] that their existence was threatened, and they lived in constant fear of discovery.” (108)

¹⁴³ Ironically, Sherman was walking past the Stonewall as the riots erupted and later confessed to being totally ignorant of what he had witnessed: “I had no idea that the scene playing in front of me would change [...] attitudes forever. [...] I had stumbled across history. And I didn’t know it.” (Healey and Mason, 1994: 2)

country [the UK] [...] I *knew* that ‘personal’ was meaningless unless there was political action to allow the personal to flourish in a truly free atmosphere.¹⁴⁴

The implication is that Sherman wrote *Bent* long before Stonewall, as he remarks that there were those – quite whom, he does not make clear – who believed that it could only “be directed by a gay director”, going on to talk about the Royal Court directors “of the late Fifties and Sixties who happened to be gay, and who were all utterly appalled by the play, and very frightened of it, and thought these were things that shouldn’t be spoken about in public”.¹⁴⁵ The fact that homosexuality was still a criminal offence at that time is one possible reason as to why the Royal Court directors were so reluctant. However, it is still surprising that in spite of the Royal Court’s reputation for staging plays thought too risqué for mainstream theatre – it was a private theatre club during the days of the Lord Chamberlain’s censorship – even its directors refused *Bent*. British theatre censorship ended in 1968 with the watershed moment of Edward Bond’s play *Saved* and the Stonewall Riots took place the following year. It was still not enough to persuade directors – at the Royal Court or elsewhere in London – to produce the play. It is significant that it took another decade after Stonewall, long enough for the gay liberation movement to be proven as more than a passing social whim, for *Bent* to reach the professional stage.

Another potential reason for directorial aversion to *Bent* can be found in an assertion by Dan Clancy, author of *The Timekeepers*, a play about the relationship between a Jew and a gay man in a concentration camp. Clancy offers several possible reasons for the lack of queer Holocaust theatre, both now and in the post-Second World war context leading up to *Bent*. He states that, in America at least, queer theatre “was situated in the year of the play’s production” (Clancy, 2011) – meaning that queer theatre was set solely at the time in which it was written, and that a play set during the Holocaust would therefore have been automatically disregarded for production. Clancy also provides a thought-provoking insight:

¹⁴⁴ National Theatre (1999) ‘NT2000 Platform Discussion: *Bent*.’ Tape recording. 23 July.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

“It [the gay community] is perhaps looking forward to integration in so many ways, that it – or its artists – do not want to reflect back too frequently on such a dark and horrible period.”

(Ibid) Clancy’s theory is supported by the fact that there are very few plays about the queer Holocaust experience, with *The Timekeepers* and *Bent* numbering among this minority. The unwillingness of directors to stage *Bent* may have arisen from a desire quietly to disregard past persecution in an effort to promote assimilation into mainstream society.

Following the Royal Court’s refusal, Sherman approached Gay Sweatshop. The company had a profound impact upon him, as well as being aligned with his own views: “...it was a group of theatre professionals [...] who were dedicated to bringing a really adult, moving, gay theatre to life [...] [and] they [...] understood the need for [the] political to be personal, and for the personal to be political.”¹⁴⁶ But Gay Sweatshop turned *Bent* down on the grounds that it could reach an even bigger audience than they could attract. Sherman had originally written *Bent* with Ian McKellen in mind for Max and with the somewhat complimentary refusal from Gay Sweatshop, he sent a copy to McKellen to see if he would be interested in playing the part. When McKellen first read the play – while on tour with the Royal Shakespeare Company – he was in bed with Sean Mathias, who would direct the 1990 revival of the play and later the film.¹⁴⁷ Mathias’ encouragement allied with McKellen’s own strong personal feelings towards playing Max, and McKellen accepted Sherman’s offer: “[I had] enjoyed reading the play, been exceptionally moved by it, educated by it, alarmed by it and very, very nervous about participating in it”.¹⁴⁸ One suspects that McKellen’s apprehension had something to do with his status as a closeted gay man: by playing Max, he could very well have invited investigation and ‘outing’ by the media. Such an intrusion never occurred, but eleven years later it would be an ‘out’ and proud McKellen who led the rallying cry for queer activists upon *Bent*’s revival.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Yet despite McKellen's enthusiasm it proved difficult to find a producer. The play was finally brought to the attention of Eddie Kulukundis, a Greek shipping magnate and philanthropist, whose patronage extended into theatre and athletics. According to McKellen, Kulukundis was the "hero" of the production; he was "a great force in West End theatre and liked the play [...] but felt it should open away from the commercial theatre."¹⁴⁹ It was with the Royal Court's reputation as a 'risk-taker' in mind that Kulukundis sent the play there again (to Artistic Director Stuart Burge): "...and word came back that they were not interested [...] until Eddie said 'Well I will pay for it all – all I'm doing is hiring the theatre.' And with that guarantee the Court dropped its reserve, its nervousness [...] and agreed to do it; it sold it out [sic] every single performance".¹⁵⁰ Directed by Robert Chetwyn and designed by Alan Tagg, the production even had electricity running through the barbed wires of the Dachau fence in the second act.¹⁵¹ References to electricity abounded: "The tension is electric as society's outcasts try to survive under Nazi rule";¹⁵² "Ian McKellen's Max [...] [is] a powerful role right to its electrifying end".¹⁵³ The critics, too, were electrified – but not always for the 'right' reasons.

1979: Socio-political attitudes towards homosexuality and the resulting influence upon the critical response to *Bent*

At a 1999 platform discussion hosted by the National Theatre, Sherman summed up the general attitude towards *Bent* in 1979: "The critics [...] basically hated the play".¹⁵⁴ According to Sherman, "some of the really, really vicious reviews were written by gay men, who were very closeted and very, very angry. And basically what they said was that I couldn't write."¹⁵⁵ While this is not to imply that all who wrote disparagingly about Sherman's craft were

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ned Chaillet (1979) 'Bent.' *Plays and Players*, June issue: 23-24.

¹⁵² Untitled review (1979) *News of the World*, 20 May.

¹⁵³ 'Stage and Screen Reviews' (1979) *London Weekly Diary of Social Events*, 20-26 May.

¹⁵⁴ National Theatre (1999) 'NT2000 Platform Discussion: *Bent*.' Tape recording. 23 July.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

automatically gay, it is interesting to note just how many critics deplored *Bent* on the grounds of its writing. Many declared that the play's subject was a worthy one but undermined their own words by averring that Sherman's shortcomings as a playwright ruined his own work, demonstrating exactly how much they had failed to realise *Bent's* socio-political value. Critics such as David Nathan of the *Jewish Chronicle* complained that "What is absent is language to match the theme. [...] As a result, what should have been tragedy is merely horror."¹⁵⁶ The *Chelsea Post's* Colette Marshall stated: "The persecution, torture and imprisonment of homosexuals by the Nazis – whatever else it was – should provide a powerful theme for the dramatist. Alas we can only speculate as to how a more skilful [sic] and perceptive writer than Martin Sherman would have treated it".¹⁵⁷ Yet Sherman was 'perceptive' enough to be the first playwright to deal with the queer Holocaust experience. At no point does Marshall apparently consider the subject, 'whatever else it was', as anything more than good dramatic material – a glaring demonstration of *Bent's* missed resonance.

More substantial in its criticism due to its acknowledgement that *Bent* is 'based upon fact', John Walker's review in the *International Herald Tribune* ended scathingly:

Throughout the second act the two [actors] shift huge rocks from one side of the stage to the other. And [...] they also have to contend with the heavy unfeeling dialogue that Sherman provides.

The play is based on fact. That is, it emphasizes that homosexuals were among the victims in Nazi concentration camps, made to wear pink triangles on their clothing and mercilessly persecuted. But, from then on, the play is fantasy, combining sadism and sentimentality. It fuses both in McKellen's death by electrocution [...] as he throws himself [...] onto a high-voltage fence just after publicly declaring his homosexuality. Those who died deserve a better memorial than this.¹⁵⁸

This review demonstrates that Walker has learnt something from the play and that he has at least engaged with the historical aspect, accepting that *Bent* 'is based on fact'. However, I

¹⁵⁶ David Nathan (1979) 'The other victims in the camps.' *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 May.

¹⁵⁷ Colette Marshall (1979) 'Bent: The Royal Court.' *Chelsea Post*, 11 May.

¹⁵⁸ John Walker (1979) "Services Rendered": Anyone for Acid?' *International Herald Tribune*, 11 May.

suggest that his comment regarding a 'better memorial' for the dead invites multiple interpretations: a disparagement of the play's writing, without any real reference to the dead; a demonstration of Walker's pre-existing frames of reference surrounding the Holocaust, specifically the suffering of the Jews (as such, a fusion of the Jews and other Holocaust victims into one group and thus a judgment of the play on its ability to memorialise Holocaust victims as one entity, instead of separate groups); or a true engagement from Walker with the play's queer resonance and an identification of its dramaturgical shortcomings. Walker's statement about 'a better memorial' is thought-provoking when one considers that before *Bent* there was no memorial to the gay victims of the Nazis at all.

Milton Shulman of the *Evening Standard* found the play "dramatically banal. Without the gift of language [...] Mr. Sherman has written merely a theatrical shocker relying on violence and sensation to achieve its effects."¹⁵⁹ *Bent's* principal aim of bringing the queer Holocaust experience to wider attention was missed by critics like Shulman, who sought a play that fit in with their own cultural frames of reference – hence the focus upon Sherman's craft as a writer. I argue that overall the critics were reluctant or unable to see the play's significance and resorted to discussing it in its dramaturgical context. However, it is worth noting that the predominant frames of reference regarding the Holocaust were in relation to its status as, primarily, a mass-murder of the Jews. With no first-hand accounts or documented evidence in English of the queer Holocaust experience in the public domain at the time, one can begin to qualify such critical views and reviewing attitudes.

The epitome of the negative criticism received by *Bent* in 1979 was written by Kenneth Hurren for *What's On*:

[...] The situation within the camp [...] seems spurious and pat, belying the programme assertion that the play is "based on fact". What we have, indeed, is fiction masquerading as fact, and loaded fiction at that. [...] Ian McKellen and Tom Bell [...] are puppets on the author's string, serving some piece of special

¹⁵⁹ Milton Shulman (1979) 'Horror story of the gay kind.' *Evening Standard*, 4 May: 15.

pleading that remains mysterious to me. [...] It is, in fact, hard to say exactly where Sherman thinks he is going with this one.¹⁶⁰

The final sentence shows to what degree Hurren missed the point of the play – whether from feigned or genuine ignorance it is difficult to determine. But Hurren goes on to question whether *Bent's* subject is even worthy of representation – comparing it to a “mislaidd telegram”:

[...] [T]hough clearly the persecution of any minority is deplorable and anyone of sensibility is bound to feel some retrospective indignation over the German unfortunates who were rounded up and incarcerated just because of their sexual proclivities, their situation has now somewhat the urgency of a mislaidd telegram discovered years later, and it does take something more to make a play.¹⁶¹

Hurren's tone is patronising; the review displays an awareness of the prevalent social attitudes towards minority victims but does not demonstrate any attempt at empathy on the part of the reviewer. Hurren's antipathy towards *Bent* continued even after its revival, which shall be discussed later on.

A small number of critics did applaud *Bent* in 1979. Nicholas de Jongh called it “a play of importance, power and pathos which should concern us all”, even while he criticised the ‘stereotype’ of Rudy (an effeminate dancer) and the majority of the actors’ performances.¹⁶² Michael Billington wrote in the *Guardian*:

[...] *Bent* [...] strikes me as a work of considerable dignity and passion. It opens one's eyes to a little-known aspect of the subject (the Nazi persecution of homosexuals) and it does so without indulging in special pleading¹⁶³ or gratuitous sensationalism. [...] At its most basic it is a fascinating historical document [...]. [...] Some scenes work better than others [...]. But I have no wish to carp at a play that deals in historical persecution without an ounce of facile self-pity. [...] Admittedly the play makes its demands on its audience; but I admire the way it puts the case for the declaration of one's sexual feelings in such a sane, measured and eloquent way.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Kenneth Hurren (1979) ‘Never less gay.’ *What's On*, 11 May: 36.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Nicholas de Jongh (1979) ‘Bent.’ *Guardian*, 12 July: 11.

¹⁶³ One cannot help but notice Billington's reference to ‘special pleading’, which only days later Kenneth Hurren used to attack *Bent*.

¹⁶⁴ Michael Billington (1979) ‘Bent.’ *Guardian*, 4 May: 10.

The intended effect of *Bent* had obviously been received by Billington on several levels: most notably through its exposition of history, but also in the more human terms of its representation of gay men as both giving and deserving of love. In this context, Billington's criticism of the play means that the reader is able to take both the criticism itself and his praise of *Bent* more seriously, consequently having a greater effect.

In *Time Out*, Steve Grant was forthright about both the play's subject and the dramatic ability of its writer; he declared that *Bent* was:

[...] the first stage attempt [...] to deal with the theme of homosexual oppression in an unashamedly explicit manner (not only because the piece comes out powerfully in favour of sexual honesty but because of the emotional intensity it conveys). [...] [I]t impressed me as much by its qualities as a finely-written and constructed 'Royal Court play' [...] as by its seemingly familiar and potentially modish subject matter. [...] The term 'Royal Court play' used to signify a cultural *and* political event of the first order. Sherman's truthful and shattering love story may well render it newly fresh and pertinent.¹⁶⁵

For critics such as Billington and Grant, *Bent* was not only a play about the past, but was relevant to the contemporary moment. However, *Bent's* relevance to British society would not be fully realised until its 1990 revival.

Towards an understanding of the critical response: *Bent* as 'precocious testimony'

I argue that the negative critical reviews did not emerge merely from a dramaturgical context, although I will presently discuss how dramaturgical frames of reference were relied upon by those critics unable to comprehend the wider implications of *Bent*. Instead, the critics' responses arose through the notion of *Bent* as what Shoshana Felman refers to as 'precocious testimony', resulting in an inability to empathise in either cognitive or affective terms. *Bent* is not a literal testimony in the widely understood or legal sense; it is not a

¹⁶⁵ Steve Grant (1979) 'The Homosexual's Holocaust.' *Time Out*, 4 May.

straightforward representation of a first-hand account. The events of the play, while based on fact, cannot be directly attributed as happening to real, specific individuals; the characters are fictitious. However, by making a necessary adjustment to one's understanding of the term, *Bent* can still be understood to be testimony in that it speaks for the thousands of very real gay men who lived and died under the Nazis. Moreover, if one posits *Bent* as a literal piece of precocious testimony – that is, a narrative of information that is given in contribution towards greater knowledge on the part of the listener, leading to an informed opinion – then the play becomes crucial both in the context of memorialising those who perished and in establishing empathy within the spectator.

Felman calls precocious testimony a piece of testimony which is given “in advance of the control of consciousness” (Felman and Laub, 1992: 21). According to Felman, precocious testimony “speak[s] ahead of knowledge and awareness and break[s] through the limits of its own conscious understanding.” (Ibid, 21) She illustrates her point using the example of French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé and a lecture that he gave at Oxford shortly after witnessing an accident, describing the effect that it has had upon him:

[...] Mallarmé suggests that he speaks too soon, before he is quite ready, before he quite knows what his subject is about. And yet, since he has been a witness to “an accident known,” since he does know that an accident has taken place, and since the accident ‘pursues him,’ he has got to speak “*already*,” almost compulsively, even though he has not had as yet the time to catch his breath. He thus speaks in advance of the control of consciousness; his testimony is delivered “in breathless gasps”: in essence, it is a *precocious testimony*. (Ibid, 21)

Precocious testimony, therefore, is that which is known by only one or a few and has yet to become wider knowledge. To use a Holocaust metaphor, precocious testimony is the British officer who stumbles across the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen with his driver; urgently reports it back to the authorities; and results in the advance of British forces that liberate the camp three days later (which was actually the case with the discovery of Bergen-Belsen). The officer witnesses events that he himself does not entirely understand,

describing it to others at a point before it becomes common knowledge. Could *Bent* really be accorded the status of 'precocious testimony' – the first play to blow apart the 'secret' of queer persecution by the Nazis? As Felman argues, it can:

Such precocious testimony in effect becomes [...] the very principle of poetic insight and the very core of the event of poetry [...]. By its very innovative definition, poetry will henceforth speak *beyond its means*, to testify – precociously – to the ill-understood effects and to the impact of an accident whose origin cannot precisely be located but whose repercussions, in their very uncontrollable and unanticipated nature, still continue to evolve even in the very process of the testimony. (Felman and Laub, 1992: 21-22)

Bent cannot make sense of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals (any more than one can make sense of the persecution of the Jews), even while the play gives a fictionalised account of what happened. Through *Bent* Sherman offers a testimony of historical events that, in 1979, were either unknown or ignored. I posit that as *Bent* was the first play to portray its subject, it then became a precocious testimony: telling of events that had come before; unable to make sense of those events; open to interpretation by 'witnesses' of the performance event; and thus 'speaking ahead' of the audience's 'knowledge and awareness' and 'breaking through the limits of the audience's own conscious understanding.' The critics' overall responses to the play indicate that something had indeed escaped their conscious understanding: they rejected *Bent* outright as they could not make sense of it from their own cultural frames of reference. According to Michael Bernard-Donals (2010),

[...] [H]istorical consciousness and collective memory have played against one another at least since rabbinic times [...] [.] [B]etween history and collective memory fall moments of individual memory related to witnessing or seeing, moments that are themselves a structural part of memory, but that evidence precisely the loss of the event rather than its recuperation. [...] [This is] the crux or void of memory, the presence of events that are irrecuperable [sic] because they did not, for our purposes, occur as 'experience' at all. They precede our ability to know them, though we see them, and they register on us and result in [...] precocious testimony that is so maddeningly difficult to map onto history. (176-177)

While the critics were at least ready to accept that homosexuals had been persecuted by the Nazis, the overwhelming flood of Jewish survivor testimony after the war, coupled with the immense numbers of Jewish dead, meant that it was extremely difficult for many to integrate the notion of queer persecution with, or alongside, that of the Jews – to ‘map it onto history’. I contend that *Bent* was precocious testimony in that it attempted to bring queer suffering from obscurity immediately into the same perspective as the persecution of the Jews, without gradual stages of introduction into collective awareness. It is perhaps of little wonder that most British theatre critics vehemently disliked the play, as arguably it was difficult, if not impossible, to learn an entirely new chapter of Holocaust history and accept this as fact, simultaneously to locating commonalities and empathising with the characters portrayed as suffering within this context, in the space of a single theatre performance. The subjective perceptions of Sherman’s shortcomings as a playwright, coupled with the issue of the critics viewing the play “too narrowly”, were mutually responsible for the hostile critical reception. According to Freud, “to explain a thing means to trace it back to something already known” (2001: 511); the fundamental error in most critics’ responses was that they attempted to ‘explain’ *Bent* in the context of their existing (incomplete) knowledge. Significantly, most of the negative reviews that deal with dramaturgical aspects of *Bent* are somehow more lucid than other reviews that attempt to grapple with its subject.

In twenty-first-century Britain it is difficult to appreciate the real impact of *Bent* as precocious testimony, since information and education about the Holocaust, and about homosexuality, is much more widespread than it was in 1979. For example, in England and Wales the Holocaust became a compulsory topic for all schoolchildren in September 1991;¹⁶⁶ the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) opened in Washington D.C. in

¹⁶⁶ Holocaust Educational Trust. ‘Holocaust Education in the UK – A Brief History.’ <http://www.het.org.uk/media/downloads/History%20of%20Holocaust%20Education%20in%20the%20UK.pdf> [Accessed 17 July 2013].

April 1993;¹⁶⁷ and the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London opened a permanent Holocaust exhibition in June 2000.¹⁶⁸ While the Holocaust continues to be seen predominantly as the genocide of European Jewry, there is now a greater awareness and acknowledgement of what I call 'Holocaust minorities': the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis. Definitions of the Holocaust by internationally-recognised institutions, such as the USHMM and the IWM, now include Holocaust minority groups. As well as the Jews, these definitions take into account those persecuted on the grounds of 'racial inferiority' – such as Poles and Roma & Sinti – as well as those oppressed on 'ideological' or 'behavioural' grounds, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals.¹⁶⁹ ¹⁷⁰ I suggest that Bent could loosely be termed as a piece of precocious testimony in the contemporary moment if, for instance, it was being performed to students, or others who were as yet unfamiliar with the queer Holocaust experience. Key moments within the play that occur as exposition for the characters also serve a didactic purpose for the audience. The first example of this is Act 1 Scene 2: Max and Rudy have fled to the nightclub where they work after the Nazis have murdered Wolf, Max's pick-up from the night before. Perplexed and worried, the pair quizzes their transvestite boss Greta over the events surrounding the killing; he reveals the incidents of the previous night, which identify it as the Night of the Long Knives:

GRETA: [...] Just about anyone who's high up in the SA is dead. [...] It was a bloody night. The city's in a panic. Didn't you see the soldiers on the streets? The SS. [...] The talk is that Rohm [sic] and his storm troopers – Von Helldorf, Ernst, your blond friend, the lot – were planning a coup. I don't believe it. What the hell, let them kill each other, who cares? Except, it's the end of the club. As long as Rohm was around, a queer club was still O.K. [...]

¹⁶⁷ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 'Frequently Asked Questions.' <http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/faq/details.php?lang=en&topic=06#01> [Accessed 20 July 2013].

¹⁶⁸ British Broadcasting Corporation (2000) 'Queen opens Holocaust exhibition.' 6 June. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/778774.stm> [Accessed 20 July 2013].

¹⁶⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 'Introduction to the Holocaust.' *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005143> [Accessed 29 December 2012].

¹⁷⁰ Imperial War Museum. 'The Holocaust.' <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-holocaust> [Accessed 29 December 2012].

[...]

[...] You know, you queers are not very popular anyhow. It was just Rohm keeping you all safe. Now you're like Jews. Unloved, baby, unloved. (1.2)

This revelation of the massacre and the news that “queers” are no longer safe – ‘Now you’re like Jews’ – marks a pivotal moment for Max and Rudy, who must now go into hiding, and discloses to the audience the real-life Nazi campaign of brutality against gay men. This exposition of real events continues alongside the fictional story, such as Horst’s explanation of the symbols on concentration camp uniforms while he and Max are on the train to Dachau:

MAX: Pink triangle? What’s that?

HORST: Queer. If you’re queer, that’s what you wear. If you’re a Jew, a yellow star. Political – a red triangle. Criminal – green. Pink’s the lowest. (1.5)

The second act maintains the intertwining of fact and fiction, as Max and Horst discuss happenings in Dachau while moving rocks back and forth. These include the ‘hat trick’, which ultimately plays a part in Horst’s murder (48); the notion of ‘moslems’, which was a word used in the concentration camps to describe those who had given up and were waiting to die (58-59); and the punishments meted out to other inmates when a prisoner committed suicide (58). While these facts were true for the majority of concentration camps and their inmates, not just homosexuals, the element of queer Holocaust history that marks *Bent* as precocious testimony comes from the characters themselves and the death of Horst at the play’s end; ‘pink triangle’ Horst is murdered by the guards as ‘yellow star’ Max is made to watch, demonstrating the truth of Horst’s assertion that ‘pink triangles’ are treated the worst. When one compares the difference between the information available about the Holocaust in Britain in 1979 and in the current moment, it is not difficult to see how *Bent* may be better understood in its 1979 context as a piece of precocious testimony. While knowledge about the Holocaust may not have been instrumental in bringing about a revival of *Bent* eleven

years later, by the time of the play's 1990 production both Section 28 and the AIDS crisis were the new cultural reference points that incited the play's revival and helped it to be a critical success. This led to a new acceptance of *Bent* that enabled people to perceive this 'precocious testimony' as, quite simply, a testimony of past events that, through the new frames of reference, had immediate relevance to the contemporary time and enabled a new-found empathy from the critics that had not been accessible in 1979.

1979: audience reactions against the homophobic socio-political climate

I will not confine the discussion of *Bent* in 1979 to critics alone, but now locate it within audience reactions and the broader socio-political climate. Despite critical negativity, and perhaps swelled by the ranks of the gay community who now lived in a society where it was legally permitted to be themselves, *Bent* achieved extensive audience popularity.¹⁷¹ Perhaps the negative reviews meant little to most gay audience members – had they not been pilloried for centuries for having a way of life that was, to them, perfectly acceptable? In addition, some audience members may have been enticed to see the play precisely because of the negative reviews, wishing to see whether the critics' reactions were justified or hyperbolic. In order to gain an insight into spectator perceptions, specifically those who chose to see the play rather than those who were professionally obliged to, I conducted an online survey. This was initiated by a post on the electronic listserv of the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD), in which I requested any audience members of the 1979 production, who would be willing to answer some questions about it, to contact me. There were twelve respondents and to these I sent an online questionnaire asking about their experience of seeing *Bent* (see Appendix 2). Seven spectators completed the questionnaire¹⁷² and there are broad similarities between their experiences of the play, although just one – and the only spectator to self-identify as a gay man – disliked *Bent*

¹⁷¹ One anonymous reviewer called *Bent* "The most-harrowing play in London" while "attracting the biggest audiences" (Untitled review [1979] *Evening News*, 11 May).

¹⁷² For reasons of confidentiality initials have been assigned at random to all respondents.

outright. It must be noted that the number of respondents constitutes just a small fraction of the overall number of original audience members, and so their answers cannot be assumed to speak for the majority. However, the survey is significant in terms of contextualising the critical response and lending additional clarification to the notion of *Bent* as having enjoyed popular success. Out of those who responded, five are currently university lecturers in drama, the arts, or English; one is a theatre practitioner; and one is a former actor. The age range for all the respondents when they saw *Bent* was 18-26. Their reasons for hearing about the play and deciding to see it were diverse, ranging from its subject and knowledge of the quality of the actors to word of mouth, media advertisements, a pre-existing interest in the Holocaust, the fact that *Bent* was a new production at the Royal Court, and a slight personal acquaintance with the playwright.

In terms of scenes or aspects of the play that had a particular resonance, all seven respondents identified the scene in which Max and Horst talk each other to orgasm (2.2) as having a positive resonance. One respondent, Y.G., stated that it was “vital” that such a scene was included (although she did not give her reasons for this).¹⁷³ Three other respondents cited further aspects that had a positive resonance for them: S.E. called Max’s suicide at the end of the play “particularly memorable”,¹⁷⁴ which points to a reception of it as a gesture of gay defiance; A.Z. recalled being “horrified at the idea of the pointless slave labour involved in moving rocks” throughout the second act,¹⁷⁵ indicating that the play evoked a vivid realisation of conditions within the concentration camps; and A.P. referred to his enjoyment of the performance of Tom Bell as Horst.¹⁷⁶ However, A.P. was the only respondent to locate aspects that had a negative resonance: he did not like Ian McKellen’s performance as Max, even more so when considering that “the part of Max is a tricky and

¹⁷³ Email from Y.G. to Samantha Mitschke, 2 August 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Email from S.E. to Samantha Mitschke, 23 August 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Email from A.Z. to Samantha Mitschke, 9 September 2013.

¹⁷⁶ Email from A.P. to Samantha Mitschke, 1 August 2013.

pretty unsympathetic role”.¹⁷⁷ A.P. also describes what he felt were the flaws within *Bent*: while he thought that the “second half of the play was fantastic”, he found the first act to be “far too bitty, and I felt it was poorly directed.”¹⁷⁸ Interestingly, he believes that the violence in the first act – the onstage slitting of Wolf’s throat (1.1), and the on-/offstage beating to death of Rudy (1.5) – was “too tame”: “[...] and that annoyed me, because it felt like the play was not really exploring the issues.”¹⁷⁹ A.P. did not specify what he felt those issues to be, although it is possible that they were related to homophobic violence and attitudes at that time.

When asked about their overall view of the play, six respondents answered that their perception of *Bent* had been a positive one. Four respondents emphasised the “emotive”¹⁸⁰ and “moving”^{181 182} nature of the play. B.B. reported that she had enjoyed it due to its portrayal of the “triumph of human sexuality in inhuman conditions”,¹⁸³ and this view was echoed by F.T. in his perception of *Bent* as an emotive piece about the triumph of love and humanity over inhumanity.¹⁸⁴ Three respondents made interesting observations in terms of the play’s theme of homosexual love. Echoing Michael Billington’s opinion about the play’s expression of sexual feelings, Y.G. called it “An amazing love story ‘documented’ in an excellent play.”¹⁸⁵ Her overall view of the play was that it was “shocking and tasteful and thought provoking [sic] and educative.”¹⁸⁶ Her use of the word ‘educative’ underscores the play as precocious testimony; although she does not specify in what terms the play is educative (either through its exploration of gay relationships or its representation of the queer Holocaust experience), it is implied that *Bent* provided an insight that was not otherwise

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Email from A.Z. to Samantha Mitschke, 9 September 2013.

¹⁸¹ Email from I.N. to Samantha Mitschke, 23 August 2013.

¹⁸² Email from Y.G. to Samantha Mitschke, 2 August 2013.

¹⁸³ Email from B.B. to Samantha Mitschke, 19 August 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Email from F.T. to Samantha Mitschke, 13 August 2013.

¹⁸⁵ Email from Y.G. to Samantha Mitschke, 2 August 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

available, especially in terms of its being 'an amazing love story'. S.E. stated that the play was "excellent" and went on to say: "The subject then was considered somewhat daring. It seemed to be a period of rediscovering Gay [sic] history/narratives through theatre. I think the audience was complicit in seeing themselves as being part of an 'event'."¹⁸⁷ This view potentially accounts for the 'draw' for many audience members. In an interesting parallel to Martin Sherman's argument about 'the personal and the political', A.P. did not see the play as representing the humanity of gay men or a celebration of love overcoming oppression, but instead as an implication that gay men 'deserved' persecution through a lack of political awareness or activism.¹⁸⁸

The respondents were asked if their initial response to *Bent* had changed over time or remained broadly the same. Five replied that their response had stayed the same. The opinion that A.Z. had of *Bent* changed over time due to the fact that she taught the play as part of an undergraduate module centred around representations of the Holocaust:

Until then, I had shared the students' confusions about the relationship between the events of the play and those of the Holocaust – it takes place before the war, and implies a hierarchy of suffering in which gay men are at the bottom. Perhaps that was true in 1934, but seems a bit polemical to me now.¹⁸⁹

What makes A.Z. different to the other spectators is the fact that in 1979 she associated *Bent* with the Holocaust, and yet was confused by the insistence of the play on the 'hierarchy of suffering'. Out of the seven respondents, she is the only spectator to identify *Bent* as not taking place within the 'Holocaust proper' (1939-1945). Her own confusion, and that of her students, arose in relation to how the play and the Holocaust are thereby related, and this correlates with a common acceptance that the Holocaust only occurred during the years of the Second World War and that Nazi persecution (either of Jews or non-Jews) did not really begin from the point of Hitler's ascension to power, marking another cultural frame of

¹⁸⁷ Email from S.E. to Samantha Mitschke, 23 August 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Email from A.P. to Samantha Mitschke, 1 August 2013.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

reference in relation to the Holocaust. Furthermore, the change in opinion of A.Z. has interesting connotations in the context of precocious testimony and shows that this was not just specific to the critics.

The opinion of A.P. also changed in relation to the play. In 1979 he was “wary” about seeing a play about the Holocaust, as he had a familial connection to the genocide in that his grandmother died in a concentration camp and his father had escaped occupied Europe: “I guess I didn’t want to think about it. This was borne out later by the fact that now I cannot watch anything to do with it, as it just upsets me too much.”¹⁹⁰ In relation to his feeling that the play implied that gay men ‘deserved’ to suffer, at the time he felt that this “was a very difficult thing to accept” and “rejected it ferociously”.¹⁹¹ It is of note in the context of this chapter that A.P. believed that the main problem with *Bent* “rested with the lack of Empathy [sic] with the main character.”¹⁹² He states that he now thinks *Bent* is a “great milestone” (he does not stipulate the reasons why), although he did not think so at the time, and still perceives the first half of the play to be dramatically flawed.^{193 194} In addition – and, as with A.Z., in the context of precocious testimony – he states: “Now I am older I can accept that being unpolitical [sic] and dealing simply with your own egocentric desires can cause catastrophe.”¹⁹⁵

The survey answers above confirm the overall acceptance and enjoyment of *Bent* by audience members. In addition, the survey confirms that the experience of the play as precocious testimony was not confined to the theatre critics. However, the responses of the two spectators who can be perceived as having experienced *Bent* as precocious testimony show that only one (A.P.) had a negative reaction. The other (A.Z.) still enjoyed the play and was able to appreciate its underlying message later in life, having learned more about Nazi

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ These will be discussed in the next section, “A discussion of the dramaturgical issues within *Bent*”.

¹⁹⁵ Email from A.P. to Samantha Mitschke, 1 August 2013.

persecution, and this correlates with the positive reception of the play once the historical events were no longer deemed as 'precocious'.

The over-riding positive response to *Bent* from the spectators above supports the assertion of Ian McKellen that the reputation of the play

[...] was made by the audiences, who took it to their hearts – and critics could puzzle over this play and take exception to [...] it [...] but nothing can deny the experience that the audience have. And to have a standing ovation every night [...] just proves the point I'm making.¹⁹⁶

The fact that *Bent* was allowed on to the West End stage, albeit with much protest from other theatres, is indicative that the British public was ready for a discussion of the play's subject – whatever the government and West End managers might have made of it. McKellen notes one particular event: "There were questions in the House of Commons during the run of *Bent* at the Royal Court, saying was it appropriate [...] that public money via a grant through the Arts Council to the Royal Court should be spent on a play which clearly intended to corrupt."¹⁹⁷ Policy makers were therefore arguing against *Bent*, despite bringing about the laws that had permitted it to go ahead. In 1967 the Sexual Offences Act had been passed, meaning that two consenting males aged twenty-one or over could engage in homosexual activity in private, which effectively decriminalised homosexuality. But whilst this act effectively repealed previous legislation criminalising homosexuality, this did not automatically equate to a repealing of widespread prejudices, including those of gays themselves. Surprisingly, a decade after Stonewall, there were gay men – especially those who were older – who objected to *Bent*, feeling that it was preferable to ignore or forget its topics, rather than bring about further scrutiny. This element of self-loathing perhaps stemmed from the fact that their sexual preference had not previously been legally or publically permissible, meaning that they had to not only live a large part of their lives in

¹⁹⁶ National Theatre (1999) 'NT2000 Platform Discussion: *Bent*.' Tape recording. 23 July.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

secret, but lay themselves open to discrimination or worse (blackmail, desertion of family and friends, loss of job and home, even suicide) if discovered.

As well as self-loathing from within the gay community, what Hugh David describes as “homosexuality’s brief golden age” was coming to an end: “[...] [T]he late 1960s and early 1970s were [...] the start of a fifteen-year Indian summer which began with legalization in 1967 and ended [...] in a welter of lurid antagonistic press reports about the first British AIDS death in the early 1980s.” (1997: 231) However, David states that by that time “‘ordinary’ gay men were growing in confidence and [...] public opinion was also beginning to change” (ibid, 231). While some attitudes were still yet to metamorphose, the majority already had: “Perhaps the most graphic illustration of this new public broadmindedness was the manner in which West End theatre audiences were prepared to accept the depiction of explicitly homosexual lifestyles [...] on stage.” (Ibid, 232) Years before *Bent*, Charles Dyer’s 1966 play *Staircase* (about a gay couple in London’s East End who face an uncertain future after one is prosecuted for propositioning a police officer) and Mart Crowley’s 1969 play *The Boys in the Band* (set in a Manhattan apartment, where a group of gay friends throw a birthday party for one of their number with mixed results) had been produced without any mass backlash from audiences (ibid, 232-233). *Staircase* had been produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company before either theatrical censorship or homosexuality as a criminal offence had been abolished. This accepting socio-political climate goes some way to accounting for the apparent readiness of audiences, as a whole, to embrace *Bent*. However, judging by what was to come in the shape of Section 28 and the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, this apparently tolerant and ostensibly empathic society was just a veneer: the tolerance of a society for a recognised minority that has not otherwise posed a substantial ‘problem’ – yet.

A discussion of the dramaturgical issues within *Bent*

While it would certainly be possible to dismiss as ignorant or prejudiced those critics who denounced *Bent* through their perception of Martin Sherman as lacking in craft and aptitude,

I contend that there are weaknesses within the text which do warrant criticism. In the American entertainment magazine *Variety*, a reviewer named as “Simo” complained that “the plot [...] lurches from one meandering stretch of dialog [sic] to another by dint of violent events at the end of each scene”.¹⁹⁸ This is demonstrated in the very first scene; in the space of a page the action moves from a wordy and semi-comic speech by Max, attempting to “scrounge” money from Wolf, to the slaying of the latter by the Nazis who have burst into the apartment (1.1). While it can reasonably be argued that the suddenness of Wolf’s murder is representative of how quickly the Nazis began persecuting homosexuals, as well as how violent that persecution was, the shift in pace and tone from Max’s speech to Wolf’s brutal death – coupled with the almost slapstick comedy surrounding the arrival of the Nazis – is too swift to truly be efficacious. There is no hint of impending danger, and after Wolf is killed he is referred to only in terms of being a device to introduce the exposition of the Night of the Long Knives; none of the characters express particular concern or sorrow at his death. I suggest that this discourages audience empathy with Wolf or the other characters, as the latter – especially Max and Rudy – neither articulate grief nor appear afraid of being killed in the same manner.¹⁹⁹ Sherman could refer back to the murder but, except for Greta’s explanation of the Night of the Long Knives (1.2), never does and this negates the impact of the onstage violence.

Another shortcoming relates to critical complaints over the quality of the language. Milton Shulman’s declaration that the play lacked ‘the gift of language’ and, perhaps more aptly, John Walker’s condemnation of “the heavy unfeeling dialogue”,²⁰⁰ are supported by examples such as Act 2 Scene 1, set within Dachau. The dialogue between Max and Horst as they carry rocks back and forth is repetitious and slow-paced; it takes too long for relevant

¹⁹⁸ ‘Simo’ (1979) ‘Shows Abroad.’ *Variety*, 23 May.

¹⁹⁹ Max’s indifference could be taken as indicative of his own self-loathing and his callous treatment of others (including Rudy), but in a play that seeks to illustrate that homosexual love is no different to that of heterosexuals, such disinterest is not conducive to that message.

²⁰⁰ John Walker (1979) “Services Rendered’: Anyone for Acid?’ *International Herald Tribune*, 11 May.

information – such as Max’s bribing a guard to have Horst transferred – to be revealed, and this leads to a feeling of monotony. While this may be seen as a reflection of the nature of their task, I argue that it consequently poses the risk of distancing the audience from the characters instead of engaging with them more closely. Similarly, Act 1 Scene 4 – where Max and Rudy are in hiding in a forest near Cologne – begins with the pair discussing how Rudy has managed to obtain food. But then the conversation seemingly begins to ramble:

MAX: I don’t want to eat. You shouldn’t have to dig ditches. I want some real food, for Christ’s sake. (*Takes the cheese.*) Look at this. It’s lousy cheese. You don’t know anything about cheese. Look at all these tents. There’s no one to talk to in any of them. (*Eats a piece of cheese.*) It has no flavor [sic]. [1.4]

Both Max and Rudy allude to respective attempts that they have been making to find a way for them both to escape, and then little more of any real consequence is said. The conversation becomes a bickering exchange that continues almost until they are arrested at the end of the scene. As with the first scene of the play, the trifling conversation suddenly yields to the overdramatic; the pair is singing one of Greta’s songs when voices from the darkness, accompanied by a bright light shining on Max and Rudy, pronounce them to be under arrest. The plot advances in this scene by dint of the arrest, but arguably the play could be tightened by cutting the scene altogether and incorporating the arrest into the previous scene, in which Max meets his uncle to try and arrange false identity papers and tickets to Amsterdam. In this scene the audience are given all of the necessary information relating to Max and Rudy’s circumstances, and I suggest therefore that the rest of the next scene is rendered superfluous. A similar pattern of ‘ordinary’ conversation abruptly followed by the sensational continues in Act 1 Scene 6, when Max unexpectedly divulges to Horst that he has committed necrophilia to avoid being given a pink triangle. None of the violent events that take place onstage appear to have any noticeable, long-term personal effect upon Max, and even though this could be seen as being indicative of his personality, the resulting

disengagement of the character does nothing to encourage the engagement, or empathy, of the spectator.

Taking all of the above points into consideration, I posit that some of the censure that the 1979 critics levelled at *Bent* was justified. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that the relatively simple dramaturgical aspects – that, from a playwright’s point of view, can be revised without much difficulty – were exaggerated to the point of denouncing the play altogether. As discussed above, there are indeed some sections within *Bent* that are weaker in their writing than others. However, this does not obliterate the fact that the play is interesting and engaging; as already noted by Richard Plant, *Bent* ‘put the world on notice’ regarding the queer Holocaust experience, but additionally it is the simple, relatable story of a selfish and manipulative man who is forced, through events, into the realisation of his own worth, the worth of others, and finally into love. It is this aspect of the play that principally invites audience empathy:

HORST: [...]. There *are* queer Nazis. And queer saints. And queer
 mediocrities. Just people. (2.5)

Edward R. Isser (1997) recognises that the play “is intended to create sympathy and empathy” by representing homosexual love as being no different to heterosexual love (158). Simultaneously, Isser argues that “On some points Sherman can be accused of hyperbole, bad taste, and misdirection” (ibid, 155), and declares that his “assumptions and conclusions [...] are apparently historically valid, but they are inherently limited by their narrow focus” – specifically, the question of whether homosexuals were treated worse than Jews (159). This ‘narrow focus’ contributed to the breaking of the “sense of trust between playwright and audience” that Robert Skloot asserts must exist in all Holocaust plays (1988: 122). As Skloot notes, if that trust is jeopardised by inappropriate textual or production decisions, it cannot be easily restored; and while it is easy for a playwright or director to break it, it is difficult for some audience members to even grant that trust:

[...] because they have expectations and prejudices about the Holocaust material before they encounter it on stage [sic]. The problem of not being prepared to receive the dramatic material or to fairly acknowledge the author's perspective, [sic] afflicts all people to some degree and is an especially prevalent condition in the reception of Holocaust drama. (Ibid, 122)

This notion of such a relationship of trust, especially the expectations and prejudices of audience members, is important in the context of the 1979 critical response to *Bent*, as both the play's dramaturgical weaknesses and the pre-conceptions of the critics regarding the Holocaust content were factors. Moreover, such aspects are intrinsic to the notion of *Bent* as a piece of precocious testimony.

The 1990 revival: Section 28 and the AIDS crisis

Bent's 1990 revival was more than a play; it was a political event. The preceding eleven years had changed the queer socio-political landscape forever. The first British AIDS death was reported in British medical journal *The Lancet* in 1981: "Doctors at the Brompton Hospital in London reported a case of pneumocystis pneumonia and cytomegalovirus in a previously healthy man. Three months of weight loss were followed by death after ten days in hospital. The patient was gay [...]" (Berridge, 1996: 15). This and subsequent AIDS cases sparked a media frenzy, re-igniting homophobic attitudes as gay men were widely believed to be responsible (David, 1997: 261). In 1983 Chris Smith, then MP for Islington South and Finsbury, publicly 'came out' in Rugby at

A rally [...] against the local council who had declared that they were removing sexual orientation from the list of attributes they would not discriminate against in employment. [...] I had agreed to speak [...] and when I arrived to find a hall packed with about a thousand people [...] I decided [...] to make a statement about myself.

'My name is Chris Smith, I'm the Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury, and I'm gay,' was all I said. The rest was drowned in the most amazing standing ovation I have ever experienced. (Healey and Mason, 1994: 63)

Smith thus became the first openly gay MP in British Parliament. In 1988, McKellen also 'came out' while being interviewed on BBC radio; indeed, he was surprised that those who had seen his 'queer' performances onstage – including that of Max in *Bent* – had not previously realised: "The dimmest theatregoer could have drawn the correct conclusion." (Ibid, 47) Any lingering doubts that McKellen might have had about 'coming out' were eliminated by the passing of Section 28 by the British government in May 1988, which "proscribed the promotion of homosexuality by local government and the teaching of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship'" (ibid, 4).

Section 28 led directly to the revival of *Bent*, beginning with a one-night performance of the play at London's Adelphi Theatre in 1989, with McKellen again playing Max. It was intended as a fundraiser for "a permanent lobby group [Stonewall, named for the 1969 riots] [...] to point out the disadvantages that the law [Section 28] puts upon gay people in this country and get those laws repealed."²⁰¹ McKellen describes that period as being the most important of his life, as he "completed" his "coming out journey" and, for the first time, "spoke to the media about being gay".²⁰² A preponderance of articles, many featuring interviews with McKellen and his new co-star, Michael Cashman (who then owned the rights to *Bent*), gave equal coverage to their gay identity and publicity for the play. Headlines included "TV soap star demands equal rights for gays",²⁰³ "Duo's stand against sexual intolerance"²⁰⁴ and "Portrait of the actor as a gay man".²⁰⁵

The 1990 revival of *Bent* took place at the National Theatre. Richard Eyre saw the 1989 Stonewall benefit performance and immediately wanted it for a season at the National, much to McKellen's delight. McKellen later asserted that it was *Bent*'s production at the National which accorded it "classic status" and that the play's run there was "a wonderful and

²⁰¹ National Theatre (1999) 'NT2000 Platform Discussion: *Bent*.' Tape recording. 23 July.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ 'TV soap star demands equal rights for gays' (1990) *Evening Leader*, 8 February.

²⁰⁴ 'Duo's stand against sexual intolerance' (1990) *Bristol Evening Post*, 28 February.

²⁰⁵ Brian Appleyard (1990) 'Portrait of the actor as a gay man.' *Independent*, 22 February: 18.

political thing, and an appropriate thing for a national theatre to be doing.”²⁰⁶ In this new production, directed by Sean Mathias, the playwright, director, and two lead actors were all gay, a fact that the press made much of. McKellen, completely renouncing a statement that he had made in 1979 – “It is certainly no Gay Lib [sic] play or agit-prop play”²⁰⁷ – used *Bent* to call attention to the fact that Section 28 was potentially the forerunner of Germany’s Paragraph 175. After all, the German government had actually voted to repeal Paragraph 175, but before it could be removed from the statute books Hitler had been swept into office and subsequently set about using it as a deadly political weapon (Plant, 1987: 209-12). Martin Sherman argued that all it took was a little-used law for a very real persecution to take place:

‘I abhor Clause [Section] 28. It’s psychologically very dangerous although in practical terms it doesn’t have too many teeth. When Hitler came into power all he had to do was implement a totally dead law that made homosexuality illegal. Nobody had ever taken any notice of it. When Hitler came in all he had to do was reactivate it.’²⁰⁸

The historical parallel between *Bent*, the queer Holocaust experience and Section 28 meant that the play had never been so pertinent, as one newspaper headline proclaimed: “‘Bent’ Is Back, Chillingly Relevant”.²⁰⁹ This was further emphasised by Ian McKellen, who – not content with merely giving interviews to the media – stepped up the political pressure by writing his own articles, exemplified by the following:

Martin Sherman’s fictional characters embody the variety of problems gays universally have to deal with. In pre-war Berlin they were outlawed by a uniquely oppressive tyrant. Yet we can still recognise them as our contemporaries. [...] In our country, a man old enough to die for his country, [...] to marry and vote, is not legally old enough to make love to another man of his own age. He must wait

²⁰⁶ National Theatre (1999) ‘NT2000 Platform Discussion: *Bent*.’ Tape recording. 23 July.

²⁰⁷ Michael Owen (1979) ‘Silence at Court – McKellen warns of a new sensation.’ *Evening Standard*, 20 April: 26.

²⁰⁸ Clare Bayley (1990) ‘Bent but unbowed.’ *What’s On*, 10 January: 37.

²⁰⁹ Sheridan Morley (1990) “‘Bent’ Is Back, Chillingly Relevant.’ *International Herald Tribune*, 24 January: 7.

until he is 21. Even then, if he kisses a male friend in public he can be charged with inciting a breach of the peace. Legalised queer-bashing.²¹⁰

The grounding of *Bent* as being not just about the queer Holocaust experience, but representative of universal queer suffering, opened up the play to a less confined view. In his article McKellen openly invited spectators to draw comparisons between Nazi Germany and contemporary Britain. Alongside socio-political comparisons, the onset of the AIDS crisis and the resulting mass hysteria, and anti-gay discrimination meant that the resonance of the play had changed (Isser, 1997: 160). In a literal sense *Bent* was no longer a piece of precocious testimony, as it had previously been staged, but contemporary events invited a new consideration of *Bent* within the frames of reference pertaining to queer oppression and suffering within the contemporary moment.

1990: the enabling of critical empathy through new frames of reference

The views of McKellen, particularly in the context of his linking of Nazi Germany and the Britain of 1990, were echoed by critics like Jeremy Kingston, who wrote in the *Times* that “the time feels right for reviving Sherman’s powerful drama”.²¹¹ However, Sherman did not believe that it was right to draw too close a comparison between contemporary Britain and the Third Reich, despite Section 28. While agreeing that all Hitler had had to do was ‘implement a totally dead law’, Sherman argued that:

[...] [T]here are certain levels on which one doesn’t want to make comparisons with Hitler and Nazi Germany, ever. Because that was probably more [...] terrible than anything that has ever happened [...]. At the same time I can’t keep you from seeing in our own society levels of danger that have aspects of that, and which create enormous suffering, enormous pain.²¹²

It appears that Sherman was keen to deflect the cries of sensationalism that had plagued *Bent* in 1979. However, now that Section 28 and AIDS had come into the public eye, there

²¹⁰ Ian McKellen (1990) ‘Out with your lies.’ *Evening Standard*, 4 January: 23.

²¹¹ Jeremy Kingston (1990) ‘An image of confidence.’ *Times*, 8 January.

²¹² *Ibid.*

were more urgent reasons for the play to be staged that had not existed in 1979. At last, with a definite statute that openly discriminated against homosexuality, critics started to rise in favour of *Bent*; they were finally able to receive the play as testimony in its 'proper' context.

John James of the *Times Educational Supplement* declared, "More than a 'gay play', its implications [...] and its timely relevance are clearly apparent. [...] With *Bent* the National Theatre performs a national service: reminding, warning."²¹³ In the *International Herald Tribune*, Sheridan Morley deemed *Bent* to have "acquired a new and terrible relevance that makes its current revival [...] all the more timely", pronouncing it to be "as chilling as anything in the modern theater [sic]."²¹⁴ The references to the new British "homophobic climate" were caught up by the *Tribune's* Caroline Rees, who wrote that: "[...] [I]t's good to see the National acting as an oasis for a play by an openly gay writer, with an openly gay director and two openly gay leading actors. *Bent* doesn't bash you over the head with its politics [...] but they're as clear as a bright spring morning."²¹⁵ Michael Coveney ("Loving men to death")²¹⁶ and Gerard van Werson ("Leading by example")²¹⁷ added their voices to the approving critical chorus. Michael Billington, who commended *Bent* in 1979, was full of praise again for the revival:

[...] *Bent* [...] reappears [...] in a Britain in which many freedoms have been eroded and in which the level of sexual intolerance is once again rising [...]. In such a climate, the revival of *Bent* takes on an extra importance. [...] It is not a flawless play, but a refreshingly humanist one that argues that homosexuals are [...] simply members of the human race. [...] But it remains a good play partly because it opens up a neglected aspect of the Nazi nightmare and partly because it stresses the political importance of coming out. [...] [T]he important thing about *Bent* is that it reaches beyond the specialist appeal of gay drama to offer a sane and timely warning about the brutality of sexual intolerance.²¹⁸

²¹³ John James (1990) 'Genuine guts.' *Times Educational Supplement*, 2 February: 31.

²¹⁴ Sheridan Morley (1990) "Bent' Is Back, Chillingly Relevant.' *International Herald Tribune*, 24 January: 7.

²¹⁵ Caroline Rees (1990) 'Timely revival.' *Tribune*, 26 January: 9.

²¹⁶ Michael Coveney (1990) 'Loving men to death.' *Observer*, 28 January.

²¹⁷ Gerard van Werson (1990) 'Leading by example.' *The Stage*, 1 February.

²¹⁸ Michael Billington (1990) 'Carrying the torch.' *Guardian*, 22 January: 38.

Another, even more encouraging sign – and one that must have had Sherman wondering just why the critics had not ‘got it’ eleven years before – came in the reviews of critics who had seen the play in 1979, abhorred it, and who were now, albeit cautiously, praising it. Charles Osborne of the *Daily Telegraph*, whilst still not approving the play outright, drew comparisons between the fate of the characters and the fact that “their plight could be that of men or women of any race, religion or sexual preference”.²¹⁹ Jack Tinker of the *Daily Mail* wrote:

It is almost 11 [sic] years since I roundly resisted the attempts of this play to manipulate both our sympathy and our outrage. Of its moral courage I never had the slightest doubt. [...] Just how much the climate of liberal opinion has changed [...] may be judged by my own reluctance now to dwell upon any of its dramatic defects. [...] For, in the backlash of intolerance which is now raising its head in the distinctly ugly guise of moral rectitude, the play takes on a fresh and vivid clamour. It stands [...] as a metaphor for all witch-hunts, whether they involve the human horrors of the concentration camp or simply the mindless trampling of careers and social standing [...].²²⁰

Benedict Nightingale of the *Times* also saw the original production, and his opinion of *Bent* did not differ greatly in 1990:

[...] *Bent* [...] was always an intelligent, feeling play, and time has actually sharpened its edge. True, only an extreme few are so far wondering if homosexuals should be siphoned from society, before their blood contaminates the rest of us. But it is still worth remembering where not wholly dissimilar thinking once led. [...] Sherman has evidently done his homework on the deathcamps [sic], and knows how satanically homosexuals were treated there. [...] It is a rich performance; an eloquent play.²²¹

Yet not all of the critics who had censured *Bent* in 1979 revised their opinions of it. Kenneth Hurren, who had compared *Bent* to a “misaid telegram”, wrote in the *Sunday Mail*:

Ian McKellen, the fervent street campaigner, is back at the National Theatre. But actually still campaigning – for his play is a revival of *Bent* which has spun off from a charity performance given on behalf of his ‘gay rights’ activists. Since there is a touchy tendency to interpret any criticism of a play about homosexuals

²¹⁹ Charles Osborne (1990) ‘Acts of violence.’ *Daily Telegraph*, 22 January: 13.

²²⁰ Jack Tinker (1990) ‘A metaphor for all the cruelties of man.’ *Daily Mail*, 20 January: 3.

²²¹ Benedict Nightingale (1990) ‘A glimpse of hell.’ *Times*, 20 January: 41.

as an assault on the entire gay community, I hesitate to say that this one is grindingly boring. I do not hesitate for long. Martin Sherman's play is about the hard times of homosexuals in pre-war Nazi Germany, but even the brutalities they endure are so theatrically set up that the horrors are submerged in tedium. The piece also tendentiously implies that the lot of 'queers' was even worse than that of Jews. Really? But, protracted though they are, its Dachau scenes [...] are at least more bearable than the banal preliminaries in decadent Thirties' Berlin. [...] Forget it, Ian. It's a cringe-maker.²²²

Quite why Hurren has taken such a dislike to *Bent* is never made clear in any of his reviews of it; in the example above, he seems to resent McKellen's turning theatre into a form of protest. While socio-political protest is not the only function of theatre, the high number of positive reviews demonstrates that *Bent* was a successful example of it. While other critics such as Billington and Tinker were at the very least able to see the play's new-found relevance even while acknowledging its shortcomings, Hurren appears unable to even entertain this as a notion. *Punch*'s Rhoda Koenig also attempted to ridicule the play, complaining about "the dullness, the triteness, and the emptiness"; "The characters are stereotypes, the arguments are bogus, and the premises phony".²²³ The apparent antipathy of Koenig towards the play is reflected in her use of character names: she repeatedly refers to 'Wolf' (Max's one-night stand who appears in just one scene) instead of 'Horst' (one of the main characters, who is onstage for forty-five of the play's seventy-six pages).

Milton Shulman disparaged *Bent* for arousing "anti-German prejudice just when Europe is in no mood to be reminded of the Nazi past"²²⁴ (it would be interesting to discover Shulman's views on Holocaust remembrance as a whole). Shulman begins his *Evening Standard* article by referring to Ian McKellen as having "become a sort of Billy Graham of gaydom [sic] [...] in his evangelical zeal on behalf of a better understanding of homosexuals", and the piece ends with a quote from his 1979 review, calling *Bent* a "theatrical shocker

²²² Kenneth Hurren (1990) 'Pall of Berlin and brutality.' *Sunday Mail*, 21 January: 32.

²²³ Rhoda Koenig (1990) 'Camp cliché.' *Punch*, 2 February: 42.

²²⁴ Milton Shulman (1990) 'Moral shocker.' *Evening Standard*, 22 January: 33.

relying on violence and sensation”.²²⁵ Shulman ends by stating: “I see no reason to change that judgement.”²²⁶

The real change in critical responses can be seen in the review by John Gross of the *Sunday Telegraph*. Gross questioned the true depth of *Bent*'s historical veracity, using research to back up his argument – the first and possibly only critic to do so – while at the same time praising the quality of the acting. Gross accurately sums up *Bent*'s purpose and how it ‘should’ be received:

Homosexuals were brutally persecuted by the Nazis. Thousands of them were tortured and murdered. There is something to be said for any half-way decent play that draws attention to this dreadful campaign, both on its own account and as a warning against bigotry in general. If we aren't entirely happy with *Bent* as a work of art, surely we can give it an unreserved welcome as a history lesson. Or can we?²²⁷

It is this concern with historical truth that troubles Gross: he notes how Max ‘chooses’ to be Jewish instead of gay and asks, “Was it true that the plight of a pink [triangle] was plainly worse than the plight of a yellow [star]?”²²⁸ Gross answers his own question in a manner that strongly evidences that he has researched the subject, citing “Steve Katz of Cornell University, whose paper on the subject can be found in [...] *Remembering for the Future*”.²²⁹ The fact that Gross was able – and willing – to carry out research at all is a testament to the fact that the cultural frames of reference had indeed evolved, and that information about the queer Holocaust experience was more readily available.

In addition some critics were willing not only to self-identify as gay but to relate to *Bent*. In *The Listener*, Jim Hiley was the first critic to identify himself as one of those who had had a problem with *Bent* even being staged in 1979. He described how he “stayed away from *Bent*” in 1979 and “avoided it altogether” until the revival: “That might seem an odd

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ John Gross (1990) ‘The yellow star and the pink triangle.’ *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 January: 49.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

confession from a gay man who loves the theatre [...]. But, back in 1979, I felt I needed no reminding of a particularly vile chapter in gay oppression.”²³⁰ In *Time Out*, Rupert Smith complained that the play was ‘too polite’ (“Perhaps the company was concerned not to offend or embarrass”), calling for a return to the production values that had caused such uproar in 1979:

It may have been a tactical decision to play down the shock value [due to the homophobic attitudes of the ‘gutter press’ at the time] [...] and ‘Bent’ will always remain a great source of pride and inspiration for gay people. But still it’s hard not to wish that instead of speaking politely of our troubles, ‘Bent’ would swear, sing, take wings and fly.²³¹

I posit that Smith’s use of ‘our troubles’ is a further sign of the evolved (and evolving) cultural frames of reference, as well as being an explicit demonstration of the empathic viewpoint. Whereas gay critics had seen *Bent* in 1979 and hated it precisely because (according to Sherman) they were ‘closeted gay men’ and the play dared to openly talk about queer persecution, gay critics in 1990 felt able to not only discuss *Bent* in freer terms – they ‘dared’ to like it – but also felt able to identify themselves as belonging to the gay community in connection with it. By being able to identify and connect, they were therefore able to empathise within the context of the play and its resonance. It had become possible for them to take John Gross’s view: while they may have criticised *Bent* as a ‘work of art’, they were still able to welcome it as a ‘history lesson’.

Conclusion

With the immense socio-political changes that took place in the eleven years between the 1979 and 1990 productions of *Bent*, the play became as much about contemporary oppression as historical oppression. The dearth of queer Holocaust survivors’ testimony meant that there was a resultant absence of awareness. The sheer number of Jewish

²³⁰ Jim Hiley (1990) ‘Sherman’s March.’ *The Listener*, 1 February: 43.

²³¹ Rupert Smith (1990) ‘On ‘Bent’.’ *Time Out*, 24 January: 37.

survivors meant that the Holocaust became perceived in the public consciousness as almost totally a genocide of the Jews. Upon *Bent's* 1979 premiere, the cultural frames of reference that had arisen meant that few British theatre critics were able to comment constructively about it, either in a dramaturgical or historical context. The prevalent socio-political conditions for the contemporary gay community, and the scarcity of 'active' queer oppression in legal or political terms, meant that *Bent* lacked immediate relevance to the cultural moment. Additionally, cultural frames of reference surrounding the Holocaust did not permit so-called 'Holocaust minorities' to be broadly considered. *Bent* was therefore 'precocious testimony', in that it relayed true events through dramatic fiction to a wider audience *before* those events were generally known. The status of *Bent* as precocious testimony consequently led to the inability of the majority of British theatre critics to empathise, either with the characters or in a wider socio-political context. As such, these critics deplored *Bent*, unable to learn its 'history lesson' or relate to it in contemporary socio-political terms, instead casting doubt upon Martin Sherman's playwriting ability.

By 1990 the advent of AIDS and the enactment of Section 28 meant that there was a new form of queer oppression; gay men were blamed for the spread of the disease, and local authorities were forbidden from presenting homosexuality in a positive light. *Bent* suddenly acquired a new relevance, leading to the 1990 revival. The fact that *Bent* became more of a political event and rallying cry for the gay community, led by Ian McKellen and Michael Cashman, emphasised this relevance. New cultural frames of reference meant that critics were able to receive the play as both a warning from history and a 'passionate plea for justice'. The critics were able to empathise based upon comparison between the play and what they were witnessing within their own contemporary cultural and socio-political moment. No longer a piece of precocious testimony, unable to be comprehended by its witnesses, *Bent* became instead a testimony that bore witness to what gay men had endured in Nazi Germany through the medium of empathy with the suffering of the gay community in 1990s Britain.

Yet there is a postscript to *Bent* and the overall question of the theatrical representation of Holocaust minorities. *Bent* underwent a change of status – from precocious testimony to a ‘testimony’ that called for attention and justice – and this in turn reflects the change in social and political status of the gay community. While the 1990 production of the play took place amidst the threat of rising homophobia, the gay community is now no longer merely ‘tolerated’ but actively accepted in mainstream British society.²³² However, other Holocaust minorities – such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Roma & Sinti – are still widely seen as ‘undesirables’. This is reflected in the lack of theatrical representation of their persecution during the Holocaust. I suggest that some of this may arise from the persecuted groups themselves – the Roma & Sinti, for example, do not have a ‘fixed history’ that is written down, and elect instead to pass on their own history via word of mouth through the generations. Much like homosexuals after the Holocaust, it may be that they have suppressed parts of their history in order to maintain a strong and positive heritage, as well as shying away from the image of a persecuted people in order to avoid attention and to focus on integration while still maintaining a separate identity.

Is the fact that there are still no plays in English that deal with the Nazi persecution of such groups because such a theatrical testimony would be too precocious, as *Bent* once was? When these groups are traditionally and continually maligned, just as the gay community once was (although I do not suggest that homophobia no longer exists), does the lack of theatrical representation reflect society’s rejection of them? Or will it take a Holocaust play to change the status quo and bring society round to acceptance? Again, while I do not claim that *Bent* was responsible for changing social attitudes towards the gay community, I argue that *Bent* drew attention to their historical plight and thus caused those who saw it to compare the oppression that they witnessed onstage with the plight of gay men in their own time. Indeed, perhaps a stage representation of the persecution of Holocaust minorities is

²³² As exemplified by the Civil Partnership Act (2004) and the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act (2013).

exactly what is needed in order to begin the journey towards a total social rethink of prejudicial attitudes. I argue that only when the testimony of such groups is no longer perceived as 'precocious' but actually straightforward 'testimony' can we truly say that the lessons of the Holocaust have, at last, been learned.

Bent marked a shift in Holocaust theatre towards what was at that time an avant-garde treatment of both the Holocaust and queer history. In the final chapter of this thesis, I turn to an analysis of the new Holocaust avant-garde, balagan and Holocaust cabaret, and the implications that this has in terms of challenging 'Holocaust etiquette' and accepted modes of Holocaust representation and reception.

'BALAGAN', 'EMPTY EMPATHY' AND 'HOLOCAUST CABARET'

Introduction

A matter of increasing concern is that of 'Holocaust fatigue' which, as described in the Introduction, is a term used to denote the disinterest of the general public when faced with the Holocaust. As Barry Gewen (2003) observes:

[...] [S]ome critics complain that the basic plot line of the Holocaust has become too familiar by now to permit genuinely original work. We all know it: first the arrival of the Nazis, then the initial terror, then the rounding up into ghettos, then the shipment to the camps, then the gassing and death or, alternatively, the humiliation, degradation, starvation, torture, gassing and death.

In the context of the theatre, Holocaust fatigue often arises from the misguided perception that once one Holocaust narrative has been told or heard, then so have all others.

Unfortunately, the prevalence of what Terrence Des Pres (1988) defines as 'Holocaust etiquette' within society and the arts means that representations of the Holocaust often fall within prescribed boundaries. This precludes any possibility of a different treatment and perpetuates the idea of the 'too familiar'/singular Holocaust story.

In addition, the occurrence of what I call 'empty empathy', in which audience members acknowledge the historical reality pertaining to what they are seeing onstage but deliberately distance themselves emotionally from it, or engage with it in a manner that betokens catharsis over true empathic effect, poses a significant problem. The simple and most obvious answer is to expose the spectator to the horror of the Holocaust in a way that prevents empathic distancing or dissociation by encouraging a realisation of the terrors of an atrocity from which the world is distanced temporally by seventy years.

But it is not a matter of 'simply' representing the horrors of the Holocaust. The immediate problems of Holocaust representation are bound up with ethical and aesthetic questions, ranging from the boundary between 'necessary' and 'gratuitous' violence to the physical appearance of actors who are supposed to be playing starving prisoners.

Furthermore, the conventions of British and American Holocaust theatre that have arisen from such questions demand that the Holocaust be represented in a manner according to the boundaries of Holocaust etiquette. In this chapter I will interrogate this issue of Holocaust etiquette within the theatre through an examination of what I term 'Holocaust cabaret'.

Holocaust cabaret refers to those plays that have been written post-Holocaust in, or including aspects of, the cabaret form. The three case studies that I will explore are *How We Danced While We Burned* (1990) by American playwright Kenneth Bernard, *Camp Comedy* (1999) by British playwright Roy Kift, and *Sammy's Follies: A Criminal Comedy* (2003) by American playwright Eugene Lion.

I posit that the crucial importance of cabaret in relation to the Holocaust is that its history as subversive entertainment from its inception in 1880s Paris means that urgent and controversial topics can be considered in terms of a scathing and pertinent analysis. The traditional politicised cabaret song or 'chanson', the satirical wit of the master of ceremonies or 'conférencier', and cabaret's creation as a show devised by a group of artistic collaborators to comprise monologue, poetry, sketches, song and dance is intended as a performative way of stimulating the audience socially and politically through mockery, cynicism and satire (Appignanesi, 2004). The very medium of cabaret consists of a framework in which no subject is taboo and where the unthinkable is not only thought but shouted, sung and scrutinised. Cabaret is thus an ideal form through which to explore the horror of the Holocaust through radical new ways in a theatrical milieu.

In this chapter I will analyse specific examples of scenes from *How We Danced While We Burned*, *Camp Comedy* and *Sammy's Follies* in the context of their achievement of 'balagan' as a means of preventing empty empathy from the spectator. The word 'balagan' originates from Russian farce and was initially used as a term in twentieth-century theatre by Vsevolod Meyerhold (Clayton, 1993; Braun, 1998). In the framework of Holocaust theatre, balagan is what Israeli scholar Gad Kaynar (1998) defines as the inversion of Holocaust signs to re-imbue them with some of their original horror. I argue that this is a critical point in

the concept of bringing about a (re-)consideration of, and new engagement with, the horror of the Holocaust by audiences.

The case studies examined are not 'cabarets' in the strictest sense of the term.²³³ As stated, written by individual playwrights rather than comprising a series of mini-performances devised by a group of performers, the plays are instead written in a style resembling the traditional cabaret form. Aspects of cabaret employed within the three plays include the use of a 'master of ceremonies' (the Commandant in *How We Danced*, the Imp in *Camp Comedy* and Sammy in *Sammy's Follies*) who oversees and contributes to the action onstage, and addresses the audience directly, often in the form of satirical commentary; music and song, corresponding with the concept of the chanson; comedic devices including wordplay and physical comedy; the use of episodic or self-contained scenes; and the interrogation both of an urgent subject and the audience's treatment of or reaction to that subject – in this instance, the Holocaust.

Aside from aspects of cabaret, the most notable similarity that the plays share is the use of metatheatre. In *How We Danced While We Burned* the waiters, waitresses and patrons intermingle with the audience, and towards the end of the play a number of audience members are led away with the patrons towards the waiting gas chamber. In *Camp Comedy* the Imp 'feeds' lines to the other characters and they too play a multitude of roles: the character list states that "Where possible, all of the characters from Olga [the protagonist's wife] downwards must be doubled by the cabaret artists" (Skloot, 1999: 43). In *Sammy's Follies* the characters constantly refer to their scripts and all play more than one person, often assuming their different personas before the audience's gaze. Another significant parallel is the use of metaphorical or fantasy sequences, such as the appearance of a Jewish corpse, Frau Schwarz, with her own ashes in *Camp Comedy*, and the re-enactments of events at Auschwitz-Birkenau in *Sammy's Follies*; the whole of *How We Danced While We*

²³³ As will be discussed, *Sammy's Follies* is actually written in the style of American burlesque.

Burned is a metaphor for life in the concentration camps. It is these latter aspects of the plays that constitute balagan and, beginning with a discussion of the concepts of empty empathy and balagan, this chapter will address the varying efficacy of balagan in the three case studies.

'Empty empathy', 'Holocaust etiquette' and 'Holocaust piety'

Carolyn J. Dean (2004) and Patrick Duggan (2012) have identified the problem of 'numbness' or indifference towards the suffering of others, and representations of it, in global society. Dean in particular notes that numbness or distancing oneself from an event functions as a means of self-preservation through dissociation, an action which psychologists and other scholars concerned with trauma studies have termed 'empathy fatigue' or 'compassion fatigue' (2004: 1). Similarly, Duggan's discussion of the current "structure of feeling" suggests a worrying trend towards a lack of connection on the part of a 'traumatised' society (2012: 31-57). Through an exploration of Raymond Williams' concept of the structure of feeling – defined as the social, political, cultural and artistic conventions of a particular historical moment, in turn influenced by and emerging from the structures that have come before it – Duggan proposes that the current structure is one saturated by images of trauma via a media-dominated society (ibid, 35-36). Duggan's argument concurs with a 1998 study conducted by Zillmann, Taylor & Lewis, in which was included an examination of the content of news broadcasts, consumer reactions and the opinions of news directors. Incidences of 'bad news' ("mishaps, setbacks, dangers, tragedies, and catastrophes that threaten or that have been suffered by people of all walks of life") were shown to exceed those of 'good news', to the extent that sixty-four percent of news consumers felt that "the media 'put too much emphasis on negative news'" (Zillmann, Taylor & Lewis, 1998: 153). News directors were "cognizant of, but also able to justify and defend, the disproportional selection of bad news", arguing that bad news is more "newsworthy" (ibid, 153). Crucially, however, "most of them believe that *bad news desensitizes* and depresses news consumers." (ibid, 153; italics)

added) I argue that it is a combination of the constant bombardment and vicarious experience of trauma, and the numbness that arises as a result, that produces empty empathy. It is a direct result of the current structure of feeling in a world that is currently engaged in a global 'war on terror' and that exists after two world wars, genocides known simply by the names of the countries in which they have taken place – Rwanda, Kosovo, Darfur, Bosnia and so on – and, of course, the Holocaust.

Terrence Des Pres' seminal essay "Holocaust *Laughter?*" (1987) gives additional context as to how the phenomenon of empty empathy has arisen in the milieu of the Holocaust. Des Pres identifies the existence of what he insightfully terms "Holocaust etiquette" and which comprises three "prescriptions":

1. The Holocaust shall be represented, in its totality, as a unique event, as a special case and kingdom of its own, above or below or apart from history.
2. Representations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason – artistic reasons included.
3. The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn or even a sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonor [sic] its dead. (Lang, 1988: 217)

Even though Des Pres states that such rules are not "tyrannical" he concedes that they "foster strong restrictions" (ibid, 217). The dictum that Holocaust representations shall be 'accurate and faithful' insists upon the implementation of set conventions when portraying the Holocaust in the theatre. Namely, these are: the portrayal of victims as martyrs, innocent sacrifices (akin to 'sainthood'), or long-suffering tragic figures; sympathy for the victims; the portrayal of perpetrators as 'evil'; and the representation of the Holocaust in the 'tragic' mode (Isser, 1997: 14).²³⁴ ²³⁵ These conventions are not confined solely to the theatre and are

²³⁴ The inherent problems of defining 'tragedy' in the contemporary cultural moment are discussed more fully by Patrick Duggan in *Trauma-tragedy: Symptoms of contemporary performance* (2012).

²³⁵ Isser locates the imposition of religious iconography in Holocaust plays to provide "climactic moments of exultation" and "moral exemplars", as well as attempts by playwrights to bring meaning to

entrenched within the socio-political-cultural view of the Holocaust in British and American society. The issue with these 'facts and conditions' is that they arose almost immediately after the Holocaust and have changed little since. Bearing in mind the scale of the Holocaust, and the revelation of the suffering inflicted, it is easy to see how strong conceptions and stereotypes came about. As the playwright and performer Lisa Kron observes:

[...] [T]he Holocaust [...] [is] a subject an audience approaches with a tremendous amount of emotional assumption. [...] [I]n this age of Holocaust museums and memorials we have developed a way of responding to this most horrible of tragedies that, in fact, protects us from ever approaching its horror. We come to it with a prescribed attitude of reverence and awe. (2001: xiii)

Likewise, the perpetrators of the Holocaust were the aggressors and instigators of the Second World War and thus the enemies of the Allies; the contemporary structure of feeling, and those subsequent to it, were influenced as such. The resultant structure of feeling surrounding the Holocaust has remained broadly the same until now. While plays such as *Bent* (1979) and *Perdition* (1987) challenged the established Holocaust structure,²³⁶ it has lasted through what Edward R. Isser (1997) outlines as the three 'waves' in the development of Holocaust theatre: during the 1950s, throughout the 1960s, and from the late 1970s into the 1980s (21-22). The first wave in the Fifties was relatively small and dominated by *The Diary of Anne Frank* (ibid, 21). The second began after Adolf Eichmann's trial in Israel in 1960, which in turn was closely followed by the American publication of works by authors such as Levi, Wiesel and Hilberg – publications that consequently brought Holocaust studies into mainstream intellectual discourse (ibid, 21-22). The second wave reached its zenith following the Six-Day War of 1967, resulting in an outpouring of American Holocaust plays including the canonical works *The Man in the Glass Booth* (1968) by Robert Shaw and *The*

the genocide, usually in the form of the 'redemptive' death of the hero or heroine on behalf of the community (1997: 14).

²³⁶ The 1987 premiere of Jim Allen's play *Perdition* at the Royal Court was cancelled at the last minute due to a storm of controversy raised by the play's subject: namely, the alleged conspiracy between Zionists and the Nazis to exterminate the Jews of Hungary in order to help establish the state of Israel.

Cannibals (1968) by George Tabori (ibid, 21-22). The third wave of the Seventies and Eighties came about after various, historically-resonant, socio-political events (such as the trials of John Demjanjuk in the United States and Israel throughout the 1980s and the resurgence of fascist political parties in Europe) and growing awareness of the mortality of Holocaust survivors (Isser, 1997: 22).

I suggest that the influence of Des Pres' third 'prescription', that the Holocaust shall be approached 'solemnly, seriously and even sacredly', provides a further barrier to the provocation of spectator empathy through means of exploration via different theatrical mediums. As described, theatrical representations of the Holocaust are overwhelmingly constructed in the tragic mode through unwillingness on the part of both performers and spectators to violate the 'sacredness' of the Holocaust and its memory: "One symptom of this is what Gillian Rose called 'Holocaust Piety [sic],' a mystification 'of something we dare not understand.'" (Eaglestone and Langford, 2007: 2) Rose's term was originally coined to describe *Schindler's List* and is particularly relevant to the notion of Holocaust fatigue when one considers that the mass-market appeal of Spielberg's film transformed "a story about the Holocaust into *the* story of the Holocaust" (Boswell, 2012: 1), reflecting the idea of the singular Holocaust narrative inherent to empty empathy. According to Matthew Boswell (2011), the term 'Holocaust piety' is generally used to describe particularly sentimental or sanctimonious approaches to the Holocaust (1) and this is often the case with plays constructed in the Holocaust tragic mode. One exception to this rule, Peter Barnes' 1978 play *Auschwitz*, attempted to address the Holocaust through comedy. The play explores the theme of the Holocaust from the perspective of petty bureaucrats who without comprehension or concern enable the smooth running of the Nazi extermination machine. It is "filled with sight gags, one-liners, farcical business, witty reversals of identity, and a general refusal to take life or art too seriously for too long." (Skloot, 1988: 63) However, Barnes' intention of drawing attention to the ethical implications of the subjects of his play through poking fun at them failed; it was felt by audiences and critics alike that his intention

was to cause offence, and so the play was withdrawn after a short run. Thus it is the convention for a Holocaust play to be 'tragic' instead of 'comic'; any comic moments used are often a device to make the ensuing dramatic action more 'tragic' by contrast. The prevalence of Holocaust etiquette means that the dominant socio-cultural treatment of the Holocaust resides in terms of tragedy, and, inevitably, in Holocaust piety and empty empathy.

The function of empathy, as both a willing attempt to undergo the feelings of another person and the act of experiencing those feelings, creates awareness through engagement and/or emotion. I consequently define 'empty empathy' as being spectatorial awareness of the historical circumstances of the events being portrayed, but a lack of true emotional presence or connection with those events. In this context the spectator is aware that what they are witnessing relates to the Holocaust, and may be moved to feel a certain degree of associated emotion such as pity or sympathy, but these 'feelings' do not extend beyond what the spectator is seeing. While empathy – or a lack of it – can be determined to a certain extent by the personality of the individual audience member, Holocaust theatre itself is crucial to the response that it elicits. I posit that Anglophone Holocaust plays such as Miller's *Playing for Time* (1985), Kraus' *Angel in the Night* (1995), Larche's *Number the Stars* (1996), Brady's *Korczak's Children* (1983/2002) and so on appear to propagate empty empathy in that while they attempt to deal with the Holocaust in multiple ways – from encouragement of identification with the heroine to rescue, martyrdom, survival in the camps, and commemoration – they fall short of pushing the audience towards real empathy and a true consideration of the horror of the Holocaust.

Isser declares that so-called "ghetto and martyr drama" (which he defines as plays that take place in "recognizable [sic] and approachable settings [...] distanced spatially from the ineffable world of the death camps") enable audiences to "identify and empathize [sic]" with the onstage situation by means of a "cushioning" or "mediation" effect (1997: 22-23). However, I argue that this is not true empathy; it is the engagement of sentimentality. Some emotional *affect* may be achieved – as in the ending of *The Diary of Anne Frank* – but it does

not cause an overarching, uncomfortable questioning or deeper consideration; rather a sense of pity and fear in the Aristotelian sense (*katharsis*): “a means by which one comes to ‘feel the right degree of emotion in the right circumstances’” (Heath, 1996: xxxix cited in Duggan, 2012: 10). Therefore Holocaust etiquette, combined with contemporary audience etiquette, implies that as long as some form of emotional reaction to what is being portrayed onstage is experienced or expressed, then one has fulfilled one’s obligation in attending a Holocaust play. As stated, this constitutes an engagement of sentimentality, not empathy. Spectators may weep for Anne Frank as her father holds her diary at the play’s conclusion, but it is doubtful that many of them will consider that Anne survived for a further seven months after her final diary entry nor dwell much upon the conditions in which those months were spent. Anne’s figurehead status and the sentimental romanticism that this entails does little to permit the image of the teenaged girl as she died – starved, shaved, naked, ridden with typhus and scabies, and alone. In this Anne has become a Holocaust symbol. Empty empathy constitutes an allowance or awareness of this symbol but a failure to engage efficaciously with Anne on a personal level and begin developing a true comprehension of the Holocaust.

In a theatrical context, then, the precepts of Holocaust etiquette and Holocaust piety coupled with the conventions of the theatre mean that to attempt a radical re-presentation of the Holocaust, even in terms of developing a greater consideration of it, within a ‘straight’ play is to violate both theatre and Holocaust etiquette. However, I suggest that the conventions and audience pre-conceptions that arise from the very utterance of the word ‘cabaret’ allow for a new approach to staging the Holocaust. The medium of cabaret has its own associated set of pre-conceptions, none of which are moulded in the tragic form and all of which – at least from the perspective of ‘pure’ cabaret – are focused upon the interrogation of urgent and topical subjects.

Balagan defined: from Meyerhold to Holocaust cabaret

The Russian theatre practitioner Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) was an enthusiastic supporter of Bolshevik ideals, and was particularly attracted to Leon Trotsky's dictum that "one of the ultimate aims of revolution was to do away with any separation between physical labour and intellectual work (including art)." (Brown, 1995: 391-92) Meyerhold stated that the movements of a skilled worker were devoid of superfluity or unproductivity; rhythmic; correctly positioned in relation to the body's centre of gravity; and stable (Braun, 1998: 198). His resulting theory – that skilled work borders on art – became the foundation for Biomechanics (ibid, 198). In this acting system, which began as a system of actor training and became a highly theatricalised style of performance, the precision and economy of movement are achieved by extensive training in gymnastic exercises and the breaking-down of stage action "into 'acting cycles' [...] of intention, realization [sic], and reaction." (Brown, 1995: 392) Meyerhold combined this with the Pavlovian theory of emotional reflex, in which internal feeling and external posture mutually reinforce and heighten the other, and this correlated with Anatoly Lunacharsky's²³⁷ concept of Sociomechanics, where political consciousness or social position was used as a foundation for characterisation over individual psychology (ibid, 392).

The theatre that Meyerhold created tended towards the grotesque and drew heavily upon the traditions of *commedia dell'arte*. Moves, poses and gestures were the primary function of the actor, and the emphasis was always upon the group (ibid, 144; Brown, 1995: 392). Meyerhold wished to redeem theatre from the 'fourth wall' and numbing 'slice of life' constructs brought about by the "realism" and "literariness" implemented by Stanislavski, and urged a return to "the ancient and hallowed well-springs of theatre as an antidote to the decline of theatricality." (Clayton, 1993: 54) According to Clayton, one of these 'well-springs'

²³⁷ Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933) was a Russian author, publicist and politician, and Lenin's Commissar for Art/Education from 1917 (Brown, 1995: 391; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky.' <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/351345/Anatoly-Vasilyevich-Lunacharsky> [Accessed 15 August 2013]).

was balagan; in Clayton's definition, although he concurs with the general translation of the word as meaning 'fairground booth', the word did not just refer to the 'booth' itself but also to the "street farce that was enacted" within it, upon such occasions as *maslennitsa*, the Russian Shrovetide (ibid, 54). John E. Bowlt (1977) asserts that balagan was originally a form of Russian folk theatre that had existed for centuries prior to the late eighteenth century (when the "dramatic theatre" arrived in Russia through the cultural preferences of Catherine the Great), and resembled the English 'Punch and Judy' theatre (65), being a kind of low farce. Balagan was also used as a medium of political and social satire (ibid, 73). In 1908 Meyerhold declared his intention to establish an "Intimate Theatre Society" which would function as an "artistic 'balagan'"; he initially used the term to denote a space dedicated to the staging of experimental productions (Braun, 1998: 111-13). Such a space was opened in 1910 under the name of the Interlude House, and in October Meyerhold staged a production of *Columbine's Scarf*, adapted from Arthur Schnitzler's pantomime *The Veil of Pierrette*:

The aim was to banish the cloying sweetness so often associated with pantomime and create a chilling grotesque [...]. The three scenes were broken down into fourteen fleeting episodes, in order that the spectator should be shocked by the constant switches of mood into an unquestioning acceptance of the play's own ghastly logic. (Ibid, 113)

The notion of 'shocking' the spectator – as well as exhorting them towards an acceptance of the logic of the performance – is inherent in all three case studies within this chapter, especially in *Sammy's Follies*. As I will discuss, the three scenes examined in the latter become ever darker and push the spectator into accepting what they witness onstage as being normalised within the context of the performance. Most significantly in terms of the relationship between the balagan of Meyerhold and the balagan of Holocaust cabaret, the term 'balagan' is used in Russian both figuratively and pejoratively to mean vulgar theatre or "even a scandal of any kind in which conventional decorum is flouted." (Clayton, 1993: 54) When Meyerhold directed Alexander Blok's play of the same name (*Balaganchik*) in 1906, a balagan – or scandal – was just what he tried to provoke: "The ironical title, with its tinge of

endearment [-chik], was an affront to the bourgeois theatre-goer [sic] and ironically anticipated his/her reaction to the spectacle.” (Ibid, 54) Meyerhold’s balagan comprised only one element of his overall practice, and the same can be said for Holocaust cabaret: the case studies used here have not been written with the exclusive purpose of balagan in mind, but in the style of popular entertainment with the underlying objective of shocking audience members into a contemplation of the Holocaust and their attitudes towards it. The key similarities between the two forms of balagan are the notion of shocking the spectator; the outraging of ‘conventional decorum’ (in the case of Holocaust cabaret, Holocaust etiquette); the opposition to realism and the cathartic emotional response of the audience that the use of realism implies; the use of balagan within the milieu of popular entertainment (cabaret and farce); and the ironic anticipation of the spectator’s reaction upon the overturning of their theatrical expectations. Meyerhold’s balagan can be employed in virtually any theatrical context in order to bring about audience reactions relating to the highlighting of specific social or political concerns. Due to its very nature, Holocaust balagan is confined solely to Holocaust theatre (in this instance, Holocaust cabaret) through the specificity of Holocaust signs.

In his essay “The Holocaust experience through theatrical profanation”, Israeli scholar Gad Kaynar examines the notion of the breach, and thus the re-canonisation, of iconic codes in Holocaust representation to be found in Israeli theatre (1998: 56). This begins with the identification of acknowledged Holocaust symbols that function on an internationally-recognised semiotic level, including the guard tower, the gas chambers, the tattooed arm, and so on (ibid, 57). Kaynar argues that these symbols are so deeply engrained on the public consciousness that this causes them to “deteriorate to the level of ready-made and mechanically applicable semiotic vehicles [...] losing with each manipulation a little more of the authentic horror originally imbued in them.” (Ibid, 57) It is precisely because of the fact that these symbols have become so widely associated with and representative of the Holocaust that their original power and dreadfulness has diminished. In order to re-

implement their full horror, Kaynar argues, the “holiest taboos” of the Holocaust must be breached (ibid, 56), and this refers back to Des Pres’ prescription regarding the Holocaust as a sacred event. By toppling these semiotic signifiers before an audience in a way that violates Holocaust etiquette, the question can ultimately be raised in the minds of the spectators as to what it is that makes those symbols ‘holy’ in the first place, leading back directly to the Nazi genocide and its associated atrocities. As Kaynar observes, it is a way of “reactivating its memory by defaming it” (ibid, 59), and as the voices of the survivors are gradually lost, it is a way of re-introducing the horror of which, one day, no eyewitnesses will be left to tell.

The word ‘balagan’ is first used by Kaynar in relation to the five-hour-long Israeli theatre event *Arbeit Macht Frei vom Toitland Europa*²³⁸ [sic] (1991), in which the actions of the fictional character of a female Holocaust survivor include pulling a piece of bread from her vagina (an act which corresponds to earlier references to starvation) and trying to erase the number ‘tattooed’ on her arm (ibid, 57). The actress, Smadar Yaaron-Maayan, uses the word ‘balagan’ – a Hebrew word meaning ‘chaos’ or ‘mess’ – to refer to “the venture of [...] turning the Holocaust consciousness of the spectators into a ‘Balagan’, namely, into something that evokes the chaotic experience which it had originally exerted, yet is still entirely up to date.” (Kaynar, 1998: 57-58) Kaynar does not define the theoretical concept of ‘balagan’ any further in his essay, but the term is an appropriate one to use in referring to such theatrical events – namely, the subversion of Holocaust signs to posit a shift in meaning and/or perspective. In this context balagan is both a theatrical device specific to Holocaust theatre and an analytical framework through which to consider the use of this device.²³⁹ In spite of the fact that the principles underpinning balagan can be found in other art forms –

²³⁸ This translates into English as *Work Liberates from Deathland Europe* (Rokem, 2000: 56).

²³⁹ The use of the term ‘balagan’ is problematic in itself; its linguistic origins in Hebrew align it by implication to the genocide of the Jews (as opposed to that of all of the Nazis’ victims, including homosexuals, the disabled, Roma & Sinti, and so on). It is interesting that a term used to describe the inversion of Holocaust signs to ultimately bring about a shift in meaning/perspective is simultaneously laden with meaning itself.

namely, the desire to incite debate or deeper consideration of what is being portrayed²⁴⁰ – I contend that what makes balagan unique to Holocaust theatre in this instance is its status as an inversion of Holocaust signs in a live theatre event. It must be noted that the concept of balagan in a theatrical context is not generally used in relation to Holocaust theatre except for Kaynar's essay, and that even then its usage is confined to Israeli examples.

Kaynar's insistence on the 'mechanically applicable' Holocaust sign is supported by the following example. In *Trauma-tragedy: Symptoms of contemporary performance* (2012), Patrick Duggan describes the 2004 National Theatre production of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. In one scene the young heroine, Lyra, is taken to the 'Bolvangar' camp, and Duggan notes obvious scenographic elements, also included in Pullman's original novels, that are evocative of the Nazi concentration camps: "A large building [...] dominates the stage. It is an austere-looking structure, cold and institutional, penal even. [...] [There is] cage after cage of quivering and agitated animal-like figures." (2012: 133) A "huge 'scientific' laboratory" and the presence of a gigantic guillotine blade add to the Nazi implication through the invocation of 'medical' experiments and summary executions (ibid, 134). The underlying knowledge of the concentration camps on the part of the spectator adds a dual ominousness to Lyra's imprisonment. Duggan argues that while there are hints of Nazi Germany in the original books, these are repeated so often within the National Theatre production that they "take centre stage" (ibid, 178). As he notes, this is problematic: these 'hints' are meant to function as "allegorical signs for a generic sense of 'evil'", but through such usage they banalise the Holocaust, denying its specificity and placing it as a universal sign of suffering (ibid, 178-179). The Holocaust thus becomes a 'mechanically applicable' semiosis of suffering through 'hints' of the Nazi concentration camps in a production that has nothing to do with representing the Holocaust. It is this "manipulation" that Kaynar decries when he refers to the "transitory circumstances" upon which many Holocaust signs are projected

²⁴⁰ *The Game of Tag/Berek* (1999) by Polish artist Artur Żmijewski, a short film in which naked men and women play tag in a basement and a former gas chamber, is a primary example.

(1997: 57), and I argue that it is examples such as the National Theatre's production of *His Dark Materials* that help propagate the existence of a 'casual' Holocaust sign repertory. This 'casual' repertory – that is, the use of insouciant references to the Holocaust to denote universal suffering – underpins the 'deliberate' repertory, which as defined above encompasses those symbols that function on a direct referential and representative level to the Holocaust. Kaynar defines the need for balagan in relation to this deliberate repertory, and it is perhaps this 're-horrifying' of direct Holocaust signs that is key to resulting in a more careful and more measured use of the Holocaust in the casual repertory.

How We Danced While We Burned: Holocaust cabaret that does not quite achieve balagan

The first published English-language Holocaust cabaret was *How We Danced While We Burned* by American playwright Kenneth Bernard. It premiered at Antioch College in Ohio in 1973 and was subsequently meant to be staged in New York but, as Gerald Rabkin notes, Bernard "himself canceled [sic] the production because it failed to project his intended ironic outrage, without which, he realized, it could be grossly offensive." (Bernard, 1990: viii) As I will argue the play does not achieve balagan, but it is important to evaluate it alongside case studies that do so in order to develop an understanding of how Holocaust cabaret has evolved. What is of especial interest is the progression from Bernard's play, a production that was cancelled in the 1970s due to concerns of its being 'grossly offensive', to Lion's *Sammy's Follies* – a play that, in the early years of the twenty-first century, actively seeks to incite its audience to anger and offence.

How We Danced While We Burned is set in Hell, described in the stage directions as having the décor of a "small, overheated German beer hall" and in which 'waiters', 'waitresses' and 'patrons' mingle with the audience as customers (ibid, 23). The action is perpetuated by the Commandant, a master of ceremonies who plucks numbers from a bowl to summon patrons to the stage, where they must 'perform' in order to (temporarily) save

themselves from being sent through the 'Exit', a door in the back of the stage, to the gas chambers. The waiters and waitresses physically reinforce the authority of the Commandant through their treatment of the hapless patrons and their "blood-curdling" interaction with both the Commandant and those frantically performing for their lives (Skloot, 1988: 61; Bernard, 1990: 23). The action includes a macabre version of 'Musical Chairs' (34), the appearance of Hitler as a ballet dancer obsessed with flowers (38-39), a boxing match (52-53), and a dramatic parody of a medieval romance (Bernard, 1990: 44-46; Skloot, 1988: 62). At the end of the play, the Commandant reveals his excruciating past and connection with the onstage events as he tells of the deaths of his family. Previously a prisoner, the Commandant formerly worked in clearing away personal belongings from the transports to the (unnamed) concentration camp. After the Commandant's speech, the play concludes with a newly-arrived group of patrons receiving orders from the Commandant, accompanied by a Bach cantata (ibid, 55).

How We Danced While We Burned is pure cabaret in the sense that the audience is both "amused and abused, sometimes at the same time" (Skloot, 1988: 63). The Commandant's interaction with the audience is ongoing; he encourages their participation and 'plays' to them incessantly in a way that, according to Robert Skloot, "creates both intense audience involvement and, simultaneously, an emotional rejection." (Ibid, 62) The structure of the play is comic, but by using the parody of a talent show in which only a few are able to 'win' and briefly delay their own murders, Bernard "describes the horrible existence endured by inmates of concentration camps." (Ibid, 61) In this lies the play's greatest aspect of balagan, with the metaphorical talent show juxtaposed over the horrendous reality of the camps. However, I contend that other moments that could be construed as balagan are not as powerful or efficacious as those found within *Camp Comedy* and *Sammy's Follies*.

Virtually all of the action in *How We Danced While We Burned* stands as a metaphor for life in the camps. Alongside the parody of a talent show, the 'turns' are reminders of the

various facets of camp life and are calculated to provoke thought from the spectator. As such not all of the 'turns' are balagan in that many perpetuate or confirm Holocaust signs/stereotypes rather than challenging or outraging them, and these also utilise elements of symbolism to underscore their resonance. Two such moments are the actions of #124, an old man with a suitcase full of dolls, and the resigned acceptance of #29, a mother with her three children (Bernard, 1990: 31-32; *ibid*, 33). The old man and the Commandant struggle over the former's suitcase, which bursts open to reveal its cargo of dolls.²⁴¹ The Commandant's words are a chilling metaphor:

COMMANDANT: Ah, you got a family, I see.

(The old man tries to pick them up. The COMMANDANT [sic] kicks them out of reach, laughing)

They ain't gonna get away, old man. I got them, every one.
[*ibid*, 31]

After further abuse from the Commandant, including a forced tango, the old man is pushed into the gas chamber (32). Immediately after this #29 is called: "*A woman and three children come up. They walk straight to the EXIT [sic], heads down*" (*ibid*, 33). The silent acquiescence of the family is striking and calls to mind the fate of mothers and children upon arrival at the concentration camps. Children were usually murdered immediately for reasons ranging from their status as the offspring of "unwanted" or "dangerous" groups to being deemed unfit for work.²⁴² At Auschwitz in particular, mothers were sent to the gas chambers with their children in order to keep both child and parent "calm" (Adelsberger, 1995: xxiv). In *How We Danced While We Burned* the Commandant briefly stops the children and gives

²⁴¹ In addition the suitcase of dolls is a metaphor for the trains crammed full of humans being sent to the camps.

²⁴² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 'Children during the Holocaust.' Holocaust Encyclopedia.
<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005142#seealso> [Accessed 21 August 2013].

them “*Halloween masks, lollypops [sic], balloons, and noise-makers.*” (Bernard, 1990: 33)²⁴³

The family continue to the gas and a child eagerly asks if Daddy is here:

MOTHER: Yes. He’s over there. On the other side.

CHILD (*As door is shut*): Daddy! Daddy!...Daddy!

(*Sound of balloons popping*) [Ibid, 33]

The double meaning of the mother’s words, coupled with the balloons popping, is a strong metaphor for the lives cut short in the camps. Yet as unmistakable and powerful as the two examples above are, they do not function as balagan but rather as a means of representing the Holocaust in a way that is specifically engineered to induce a response without necessarily causing outrage and a (re-)consideration of Holocaust events.

The puppet show of #47, a man who endeavours to entertain his audience with ‘Roscoe’ and ‘Punchinella’ in a kind of Punch and Judy show (26-27), underscores the state of the Jews as hapless ‘puppets’ in the hands of the Nazis (see Appendix 1, Note 6). When #47 is sent to the gas his pregnant Punchinella puppet begs for her life and that of her unborn child. The waiters and waitresses “*hammer her head and push her in. She screams. The door is shut*” (Bernard, 1990: 28), evoking the fate of pregnant women arriving at Auschwitz. Yet although the sequence is chilling (especially Punchinella’s scream), the Holocaust signs used are implied or metaphorical. A puppet does not fall within the delineated Holocaust sign repertory – and it merely confirms the reality represented by those metaphors without challenging the spectator’s perception of them.

The next ‘turn’ is a young woman, #89, who performs a striptease in a bid to win the Commandant’s desire and gain a reprieve:

(*[...] #89 does a strip while marching and reciting. [...] Her stripping is awkward. She trips, she falls, she rips clothes, she becomes frenetic and desperate*)

²⁴³ The Commandant giving out sweets is symbolic of those given by the camp physician to patients in the children’s infirmary within the ‘gypsy camp’ at Auschwitz-Birkenau (see Appendix 1, Note 5).

#89 [...]: Commandant, Commandant
 I love the Commandant.
 Commandant, Commandant
 I love the Commandant.

[...]

I love him in the morning,
 I love him noon and night,
 My love to him is calling,
 I love him all my might [sic]. [Bernard, 1990: 29]²⁴⁴

The striptease is suggestive of the stripping of new prisoners upon arrival and constitutes balagan in that the Holocaust sign of the naked prisoner is subverted and used as part of a cabaret act (the striptease is also used in *Sammy's Follies*, as will be examined). In addition the attempts of #89 to save herself through promises of sexual favours are resonant of the 'sexual bartering' that women undertook in the ghettos and camps in order to obtain food, supplies, privileges and, ultimately, survival. According to Ravenel Richardson (2013) such bartering was a ubiquitous part of life in the camps.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, sexual bartering and the sexual abuse and rape of Jewish women have not "received attention in most of the conventional literature" as it is "an immensely delicate subject, and those who suffered at the hands of the SS might understandably wish to keep silent." (Rees, 2005: 238) This dearth of 'conventional literature' about the subject and the lack of research available in the public domain means that in terms of wider awareness, the public is generally less informed about this aspect of the camps. In this context the striptease in *How We Danced While We Burned* can be construed as informing the audience without overt signposting within the performance to denote that this is the case. The act is then more readily associated with the Holocaust sign of the naked prisoner.²⁴⁶ This is supported by the fact that the Commandant plays a "fag

²⁴⁴ It is interesting that the Nazis 'stripped' their victims of their humanity, and #89 is stripping to appeal to the Commandant's human/masculine urges.

²⁴⁵ It is significant that such bartering is known as a "choiceless choice", as those who engaged in such practices ultimately had no freedom to do as they wished (Richardson, 2013).

²⁴⁶ This is not to say, however, that none of the spectators would be aware of sexual bartering in the camps; for those spectators, the elements of sexual bartering and prisoner processing would most likely both be recognised.

act”, pretending to be gay, before “*Touching her vulgarly*” and finally having her thrown into the gas chamber (Bernard, 1990: 28-31). The sequence is short and takes place near the beginning of the play as one of a succession of ‘turns’. Each one is soon pushed aside and forgotten by the advent of the next. It is, quite simply, what it is: an ‘unsuccessful’ strip act, even while it gives the spectator cause for thought – as do the other acts, ‘successful’ or not.

Another scene that could be construed as balagan takes place around halfway through the play, when #27 is wheeled in on a serving table: “*He is nude and trussed like a pig with an apple in his mouth.*” (Bernard, 1990: 42) A doctor enters, flanked by soldiers, and conducts a ‘medical experiment’, ordering a soldier to insert a thermometer into #27’s rectum before injecting him with unspecified substances and taking his temperature. When the reading proves unsatisfactory, #27 is wheeled through the Exit (ibid, 42-43). The scene works on several levels. Firstly, it draws attention to the insulting of Jewish customs by the Nazis through the presentation of #27 as a pig (the Jewish dietary laws regarding kosher food prohibit the eating of pork). The ‘experimentation’ of the doctor invites comparison to the so-called ‘medical experiments’ carried out by Nazi doctors at concentration camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen,²⁴⁷ and I suggest that it is in this respect that the scene comes closest to balagan. #27 is visibly restrained, physically abused, and distressed, immediately fostering a parallel with images and testimonies of camp prisoners and recognisable as a Holocaust sign.²⁴⁸ Simultaneously, even allowing for the shock factor of the scene – a naked man has a thermometer pushed into his rectum in front of an audience – the Holocaust sign is not subverted, but confirmed: the Nazis experimented on prisoners, and this is what is represented. Even the Commandant is afraid of the doctor, preventing the outraging of the sanctity of the victim’s suffering through laughter (and thus the fulfilling of balagan through the violation of Holocaust etiquette).

²⁴⁷ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. ‘Nazi Medical Experiments.’ *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005168> [Accessed 21 August 2013].

²⁴⁸ As with the striptease, a ‘medical experiment’ appears in *Sammy’s Follies*.

Contemporaneously, the lack of dignity with which the victim is treated, with the invasive medical procedure carried out onstage, does form a feature of balagan in that Bernard does not permit sanctity and respect for the Holocaust dead, as personified by #27. Suffering is visually represented, rather than alluded to or described.

How We Danced While We Burned deliberately sets out to express the moral outrage of the author at “the silence of God and [...] the rest of the world” when faced by the atrocities depicted onstage (Bernard, 1990: ix). The play highlights the complicity of the audience in such atrocities as they, too, watch in silence (ibid, ix). However, when examining Bernard’s play in the context of balagan, the aspect of balagan is hardly present and certainly not as efficacious or powerful as that within the following case studies. The play uses shock to good effect and undoubtedly outrages Holocaust etiquette through the way that, for the most part, the Holocaust is certainly not treated as a solemn or sacred event. Moments which do represent the horror of the Holocaust – such as the Commandant’s revelatory speech and the final stage direction: “[...] *The new ‘patrons’ turn in their seats and watch the audience leave. If possible, steam sounds, perhaps a few wisps [sic] of smoke from floor, maybe windows in floor beneath which [are] nude writhing bodies*” (ibid, 55) – are rendered more disturbing through their contrast with other, comedic moments. The play is both shocking and thought-provoking, but there is a dearth of actual Holocaust signs. Those that are used simply confirm Holocaust stereotypes and sensibilities, rather than subverting or outraging them.

Camp Comedy: understated balagan that confirms Holocaust signs

Roy Kiff’s *Camp Comedy* (1999) is based upon the true story of the actor and cabaret star Kurt Gerron, who was imprisoned in Theresienstadt and coerced by the Nazis into making a propaganda film about life in the camp. The two prominent antagonists, Nazi commandant Rahm and the hell-inspired figure of the Imp, drive Gerron forward as he tries to extend filming in a desperate attempt to save lives. Using visual metaphor, grim humour, music – the

songs are from the original cabarets at Theresienstadt – fantasy/nightmare sequences and direct audience address, the play poses the ethical questions surrounding the making of such a film, before Geron and his comrades are finally sent to die in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

In real life Geron had appeared in every major cabaret and revue in Berlin throughout the Twenties; he had played Tiger Brown in the premiere of *The Threepenny Opera* and the vaudeville director in the film *The Blue Angel*, starring Marlene Dietrich (Jelavich, 1993: 275). Following the rise of Hitler, Geron moved to Amsterdam and, after the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands, Dietrich tried to bring him to America. Geron refused as he did not want to emigrate again, and he also believed that, as a German veteran of the First World War, he would be safe (ibid, 275). In September 1943 he was sent to the Dutch transit camp of Westerbork, and at the beginning of 1944 he was transported to Theresienstadt (ibid, 275). Theresienstadt had an active artistic culture and Geron established the most lavish of all the Theresienstadt cabarets, the *Carousel (Karussell)* (Jelavich, 1993: 275). He was ordered to make a propaganda film in order to impress a Red Cross commission, and the film was eventually completed in March 1945. By the time the commission saw it, however, Geron and nearly twenty thousand prisoners had been sent to Auschwitz in September and October 1944, where the majority were gassed (ibid, 281-82).

The world premiere of *Camp Comedy* was staged by Teatr Modrzejewskiej in Poland in September 2012 (translated into Polish as *Komedia obozowa*). It received excellent reviews and the company was subsequently invited to perform *Komedia obozowa* at the Warsaw Theatre Festival in April 2013 (Kift, 2013), but the play has yet to receive an English premiere. Kift's reasons for writing *Camp Comedy* are grounded in his belief that comedy, rather than tragedy, is the dramatic mode most suited for representing the Holocaust. This arises predominantly from his view that the adjectives which describe comedy – such as “irrational, inexplicable, surprising, [and] nonsensical” – may also be used to illustrate the complete “loss of rationality” that was the Holocaust (Kift, 2010: 6). Kift rejects tragedy as a

mode of portraying the Holocaust through the connotation of tragedy as inevitable and a state in which Man is “helpless in the hands of the gods, or Fate [...] fall[ing] to disaster through a combination of [his] own personal failings and circumstances over which [he has] no control”; as Kift expresses it, “the concentration camps were anything but inevitable.” (Ibid, 6) He asserts the importance of remembering the true horrors of the Holocaust and posits his concern at the use of ‘Holocaust tragedy’ within this framework. As such, it is worth quoting Kift’s argument in full:

[...] [I]t is vital that we remain clear [...] as to the horrific realities of being a prisoner in a concentration camp. And this is a huge problem for both scholars and artists. [...] Life in a concentration camp must have felt like being condemned to spend the rest of your days in torment and distress in a[n] inescapable nightmare, an infinite winter of the soul, a hopeless and helpless state of eternal hell. For no rational reason at all, other than racial hatred [...] and the lust to kill.

[...] Any description of the Holocaust is almost certain to provoke feelings of pity for the victims. No one disputes that we should show due respect for all those who experienced such horrors. Let us not forget, however, that unmediated by genuine empathy, pity leads to contempt. [...] No, the holocaust [sic] was not a pity, it was a nauseous and odious outrage, an irrational offense against all that is decent, respectful and tolerant in human relationships. And because it was irrational, this makes it not only a scandal, but absurd. And for this reason I would argue that it is not only wrong-headed but also absurd to treat it as a tragedy. (Ibid, 5-6)

Kift is concerned with the scale of the ‘tragic’ conventions that demand that spectators respond in a certain way, which is closely allied with Holocaust etiquette. His choice to write a play that deals with the Holocaust in comic terms resulted not just from the opinions outlined above, but from the fact that within Theresienstadt there existed an active culture of art, performance and music – including Geron’s *Karussell*. The *Karussell* is illustrated in *Camp Comedy* by elements including the revolving stage upon which the action takes place. The fact that Geron was a real person immediately posits the possibility of emotional connection with spectators. While the play is fictional, the people featured within it were either Holocaust victims (such as Geron and the cabaret performers) or perpetrators (Commandant Rahm). Some of the names, particularly those of the cabaret performers and

the head of the *Judenrat*, Eppstein, have been altered slightly to indicate that they have “half a foot in reality and half in [Kift’s] own fantasy.” (Skloot, 1999: 40) The use of music and songs from the Theresienstadt cabarets adds a further emotional dimension to the play, including Kift’s own translation of Leo Strauss’ “As If”, about life in Theresienstadt (ibid, 69-70). The spectator is aware that they are watching the performers singing a song that deliberately sets out to “highlight the contradictions between illusion and reality” in the ghetto (Kift, 2010: 9). In view of Roy Kift’s preference for comedy over tragedy, *Camp Comedy* has a continual line of temperate yet punchy humour that draws attention to the truth of the Holocaust. For example, in Act 1 Scene 4 Gerron is summoned to the commandant’s office, where Rahm and his second-in-command Haindl inform him that he is to make a propaganda film about Theresienstadt:

RAHM: [...] The Führer would like you to direct a film for him.
[...]
KURT: Me?
RAHM: Yes you, Gerron. Don’t look so amazed.
[...]
KURT: But I’m a Jew.
HAINDL: And if the Führer orders you to make a film, who are you to raise racist objections? [1999: 59-60]

While jokes such as this highlight the political and ideological origins of the Holocaust, the visceral realities of its victims are emphasised through instances such as that of Michel, a writer who has been approached by Gerron to write a script for the film. In response to a suggestion that the film needs a “leitmotif” to illustrate the essence of life in the ghetto, Michel furiously demands to know what he should use: “Tears? Hunger? Swollen bellies, sunken cheeks? Lice, coffins! [...] Or if you want a real running gag, how about dysentery?” (Skloot, 1999: 80-81)

Examples of balagan can be located in *Camp Comedy*; even though the emotionally-affecting or ‘theatrical’ moments within the play are balanced by the comedic or ‘cabaret’ aspects, predominantly the intervention of the Imp, it is a matter for debate as to whether these have as great an impact as those in *Sammy’s Follies*. There are two examples in particular: the corpse and ashes of Frau Schwarz, and the kicking of ashes around the stage by Commandant Rahm, his sidekick Haindl and the Imp (as the character of film producer Hanka) at the play’s conclusion.

Frau Schwarz is a Jewish woman who believes that as she is German she should not be kept prisoner alongside “Yids”: “You can’t imagine what a shock it was for me to be confronted with all this human degradation. Theresienstadt is no place for Germans.” (Ibid, 66)²⁴⁹ In Act 2 Scene 9, Gerron and Michel are planning a scene for the propaganda film, in which workers do the camp’s laundry. An “*enthusiastic newsreel*” commentary runs while the workers are “*sorting out the sheets*” (ibid, 108). Suddenly some of the workers “*come upon a large filthy bundle containing something heavy*”, and when they untangle it the corpse of Frau Schwarz rolls out:

KURT: What’s that?

(*He stares down at the corpse. After a moment she moves her head and looks up at him.*)

FRAU SCHWARZ: They murdered me. ([...] *She clutches his ankle.*) I’ve been incinerated, Herr Gerron. Look. (*She fumbles in her clothing and pulls out her urn. Takes off the lid and pours out a pile of ashes.*) That’s me. (*He reaches down and pries her hand away from his*

²⁴⁹ The attitude of this character epitomises the antagonism between ‘German’ Jews and ‘Polish’ Jews, or *Ostjuden* (Eastern Jews), within the ghettos and camps, harking from the days of the Weimar Republic. Weimar Germany was an “advanced urban-industrial capitalist society”, while Poland was “heavily and backwardly agrarian” (Hagen, 1996: 359). The majority of German Jews, which totalled around one percent of the entire German population, were highly assimilated and generally bourgeois; Polish Jews, numbering ten percent of the Polish population, were often Orthodox or Hasidic, had strong Zionist beliefs, and lived modestly or in poverty (ibid, 359). As a result, Jewish anti-Semitism was rife. In Theresienstadt there was a “hierarchy of anti-Semitism” – “Czech Jews hated their German counterparts because they associated them *en bloc* with the Nazis; the Germans looked down on the Austrians; and the Austrians looked down on the *Ostjuden*” (Rovit and Goldfarb, 1999: 204).

ankle. Then he turns and hurries away. She gets to her feet and stares down at the pile of ashes.) That's me.

(She exits, leaving the ashes to be ignored, stepped over, or scattered in the remaining action.) [Ibid, 108]

The ashes are the central feature of balagan in this scene in that their presence onstage, only to be disregarded or avoided, invites a desecration of the ashes as a Holocaust sign. By ignoring, stepping over or scattering them – it is to be assumed by walking through them – the characters do not attach any importance to them and thus violate the sanctity of the Holocaust dead.²⁵⁰ Additionally, the ashes function on a similar semiotic level to the mute gaze of the new patrons at the end of *How We Danced While We Burned*. The focus on the stage is reversed back to the audience through adroit inference – what is *their* attitude towards the Holocaust dead? Do they (metaphorically) ignore, step over or scatter? The presence of Frau Schwarz alongside her ashes sets the laundry scene firmly in a ‘safe’ metaphorical context; if the ashes were truly supposed to be Frau Schwarz then the character would not appear with them. I suggest that the potential impact that the ashes could have is therefore lessened; for example, if they were to be brought on by another character. As Primo Levi repeatedly asserts: “[W]e, the survivors, are not the true witnesses.” (1989: 63) The dead are the ‘true witnesses’, and the presence of Frau Schwarz alongside what are meant to be her cremated remains negates the horror of the true witness and provides something of a cushioning effect for the spectator. The ashes achieve their full effect once Frau Schwarz has left the stage, but emotional cushioning has already occurred through the presence of the character and I argue that this diminishes the effect of the balagan.

²⁵⁰ In his introduction to Levi’s *The Drowned and the Saved*, Paul Bailey includes a quote from Levi regarding the handling of ashes by the SS at Auschwitz: “The human ashes coming from the crematoria [...] were used instead of gravel to cover the paths of the SS village near the camp. I couldn’t say whether out of pure callousness or because, due to its origins, it was regarded as material to be trampled on.” (Levi, 1989: xi)

The second example of balagan in *Camp Comedy* – which I contend is the most powerful and simultaneously problematic use of it in the play – is the penultimate scene. Geron and his production team, having completed their purpose in making the film, are loaded on to the trains bound for Auschwitz. The stage revolves away and turns full circle to reveal urns full of ashes where the performers were: “*RAHM, HAINDL, and HANKA* [a film producer played by the Imp] *jump aboard and kick the ashes about the stage with relish.*” (Skloot, 1999: 112) This is an image of immense power and will certainly shock and/or offend spectators. As with the ashes of Frau Schwarz, it fulfils the dictates of balagan in that it outrages the sanctity of the Holocaust dead. However, I posit that the scene is awkward in that it does not challenge Holocaust signs: it confirms them. It is a stereotypical image of the Nazis as barbaric monsters who desecrate the ashes of their victims. The spectator does not need to consider or imagine the historical event because it is being represented in front of them. The depravity of the Nazis in kicking the ashes is certainly ‘balaganesque’, but the spectator does not need to rely upon their own knowledge or imagination in order to (re-) consider the horror. Furthermore, this consideration stops at the boundaries of the horror being shown onstage: if the playwright and performers dare go no further, why will the spectator? In this sense, while the scene may appall or disturb, it does not necessarily provoke. I argue that whatever balaganesque aspects this scene has are negated by the play’s ending, following immediately afterwards. The Imp is overwhelmed by the reappearance of the rest of the characters, whom the audience have seen loaded on to the trains and who are presumed to have been murdered, singing “with triumphant gusto” (ibid, 113). This somewhat comfortable conclusion manages to imply that even though the singers have been sent to their deaths, good eventually prevails over evil. Ironically, this ‘upbeat’ ending resembles the tragic mode of representation that Isser defines – the attempt to find transcendent meaning through the ‘redemptive’ death of the hero on behalf of the community (in this case, the deaths of the Theresienstadt Jews on behalf of international Jewry) – and which Kift deprecates as being ‘wrong-headed’ and ‘absurd’. Unfortunately, this is the

Holocaust cabaret equivalent of the ending to *The Diary of Anne Frank*, with the misquoted 'In spite of everything, I still believe that people are truly good at heart.' The spectator is not forced to reflect but is encouraged to undergo *katharsis* in feeling the 'appropriate' emotion only within that particular moment before leaving the performance space – as previously stated, an engagement of sentimentality rather than true empathy.

Camp Comedy has two underpinning contexts: emotional, in that the spectator is aware that the characters represent actual people who lived and died under the Nazis, as well as the individual Nazis themselves; and comic, due to Roy Kift's argument that comedy rather than tragedy is the more appropriate dramatic mode in representing the Holocaust. The play draws attention to the political, ideological and visceral horrors of the Holocaust through its comic vein, but I argue that the balagan in *Camp Comedy* is not as powerful as it could be. The leitmotif of the ashes is poignant and profound, providing a fundamental function of balagan through the desecration of the Holocaust dead. However, the image of the Nazis gleefully kicking the ashes of their victims around the stage is metaphorically powerful, yet simultaneously feels theatrically jaded. The action confirms stereotypes rather than challenging the spectator to scrutinise the events of the Holocaust, either through a true empathic connection with the characters (cognitive or affective) or by being genuinely shocked or offended, and thus highlighting the gap in empathy that, as I have stated in the Introduction to this chapter, constitutes empty empathy.

Sammy's Follies: A Criminal Comedy: the efficacious use of balagan in Holocaust cabaret

What differentiates *Sammy's Follies* from the other two case studies in this chapter is its classification as 'American burlesque' instead of cabaret. Whereas cabaret follows the form already outlined, American burlesque has similar aspects while at the same time differing in various ways. Traditional burlesque performance was typically a travesty or satire, and was present in American theatre from the eighteenth century (Bordman and Hirschak, 2004: 100).

The modern American burlesque began to develop in the latter half of the nineteenth century, inspired partly by the British burlesque performer Lydia Thompson and her company of 'British Blondes', and partly by blackface minstrel shows and 'leg shows' in the mid- to late 1860s (ibid, 100; Banham, 1998: 142). The resulting form was a raucous and bawdy style of variety performance which was generally written, produced and performed by women (ibid, 142; Allen, 1991: xii). Performances were structured in three parts: the first featured song and dance by a female company, comedy sketches (or 'bits'), and low comedy from male comedians; the second part was an "olio of specialities" such as "acrobats, instrumentalists, magicians, freak entertainers, and sentimental-song singers" (and in which women did not appear); and the third was a grand finale, with an occasional travesty on politics or current plays (Sobel, 1967: 141; Banham, 1998: 142-43). American burlesque "took wicked fun in reversing roles, shattering polite expectations, [and] brazenly challenging notions of the approved ways [in which] women might display their bodies and speak in public." (Allen, 1991: xii) However, due to "increasing professionalization and cultural stratification" men gradually began to take over, resulting in the introduction of aspects such as belly dancers (known as 'cootchers') and the illuminated runway, enabling interplay between "strippers and audience" (ibid, xii; Banham, 1998: 143). American burlesque thus devolved into an increasingly disreputable vehicle for displaying the voiceless and eroticised female body, "starting with the cooch dance in the 1890s and the shimmy and striptease dances of the early twentieth century." (Allen, 1991: xii) Women were denied a voice and contemporaneously placed upon the stage as objects of forbidden sexual desire, leading to the loss of burlesque in its original form and to female performers losing "their power to unsettle and subvert." (Ibid, xii)²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Lion's deliberate choice of American burlesque thus reflects his opinions of the subjugation of women. The dramatic function of Rosie's character, including her striptease and subsequent unsettling of the audience, highlights the oppression of women through the form of performance and simultaneously places the 'power to unsettle and subvert', however briefly, back in the hands of the female performer.

Aspects of American burlesque that are particularly visible in *Sammy's Follies* include a striptease (by the single female character in the play); the use of clown-like make-up, which in the original burlesques was usually worn by the primary male comedian but in *Sammy's Follies* is worn by all the characters; the main comedian (Sammy), who is assisted by other comedians (Jocko-Ali, Addy, et al); and the courtroom scenes (Sobel, 1967: 141-42). The concept of the courtroom scene was one of the most famous 'bits' in American burlesque shows:

It showed a judge, lawyers, witnesses, and jury all busy considering the case of a lady guilty of a misdemeanour. As the trial progressed the judge shot peas at the jury, hit himself on the head with the gavel while calling for order, and finally collapsed in the pandemonium which he had himself created. (Ibid, 142)

The courtroom scenes in Lion's play revolve around a concentration camp commandant rather than a 'lady'. However, as I will discuss, the scene in which a woman does take the stand in *Sammy's Follies* is the most disturbing and unsettling in the play.

Sammy's Follies is set in the metatheatrical and often lurid world of The Follies, a corner bar in an unnamed American city. Owner Sammy and his troupe – from gay waiter Addy to ex-burlesque queen Rosie – mount the trial of a concentration camp commandant for the crime of 'indifference'. With savage humour, grotesque re-enactments, testimony, physical comedy, a burlesque routine, song and audience participation (whether they want to join in or not), the final verdict must be delivered by the audience themselves.²⁵²

Sammy's Follies was originally written as a response to the Vietnam War, and according to Lion it was revised and updated every year (Lion, 2013).²⁵³ The play is deliberately constructed to jolt a 'numbed' audience. It exhorts them to examine their own 'indifference' to prejudice, violence and suffering, and simultaneously calls upon them to

²⁵² The only production of *Sammy's Follies* (which was as community theatre) was in British Columbia in May 1995 and ran for four performances. In a letter to the author in February 2013, Lion wrote: "Interestingly, each night produced a different verdict: Guilty, Innocent, then a Hung-Jury [sic], and on the last night, the actor playing Bertie shouted the wrong verdict at the end, invalidating everything."

²⁵³ The version used in this chapter was published in 2003.

literally act as members of the jury and pass a verdict upon the commandant. The notion of indifference surrounding the Holocaust – from that of the perpetrators towards their victims to that of the world looking on – is held up before the audience through the action of the trial, illustrating the historical consequences of extreme indifference. However, what challenges the audience further is the fact that “the holocaust [sic] in SAMMY’S [sic] is a metaphor for all our current holocausts – against blacks, women, Muslims, homosexuals, the poor and disempowered, etc.” (Lion, 2012b) This is supported by the characters in the play, including a lone woman, Rosie, who is sexually objectified by the other characters; a black Muslim, Jocko-Ali, who is racially abused and when ‘hanged’ in a farcical re-enactment of an execution at Auschwitz darkly declares, “It’s an old family tradition” (Watts, 2003: 387); and a gay waiter, Addy, who is ‘operated’ upon in a grotesque parody of a medical experiment (ibid, 408-414). The intention of the play, therefore, is to push the spectator into comparing their own attitudes towards current oppression and persecution to historical attitudes leading up to and surrounding the Holocaust. It is implied that both current and historical attitudes have not varied much.²⁵⁴ Up until his death in 2013, Eugene Lion spoke out for human rights and against present-day ‘holocausts’, especially regarding the passivity of society in allowing such abuses to continue. It therefore comes as no surprise that *Sammy’s Follies* contains various instances of balagan, following the mode given. There are three examples in particular: the hanging, the medical experiment, and the ‘processing’ of a new prisoner. I argue that all three perfectly fit Kaynar’s definition of Holocaust signs, and can be categorised within the ‘deliberate’ Holocaust sign repertory in their context as infamous and well-known abuses of prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Such a view is supported by Ruth Kluger in her memoir *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*: “In our hearts we all know that some aspects of the Shoah have been repeated elsewhere, today and yesterday, and will return in new guise tomorrow; and the camps, too, were only imitations (unique imitations, to be sure) of what had happened the day before yesterday.” (2001: 69)

²⁵⁵ There is a reconstruction of the public gallows on display at Auschwitz I, and accounts of the hangings carried out appear in works by Holocaust survivors such as Primo Levi, Eli Wiesel, Heinz Heger and Fania Fenelon. Dr. Joseph Mengele, whose epithet was the ‘Angel of Death’, was

The first example of balagan in the play is the 'execution' of Jocko-Ali in Act One. Playing the character of Chaim Schneider, a (fictional) murdered prisoner, Jocko-Ali testifies against the commandant and describes his own hanging. His frequent 'need' to read directly from the script prevents the short account from becoming emotionally powerful. Jocko-Ali climbs on to a stool, a noose is placed around his neck and just as the hanging seems imminent, Rosie accidentally breaks her necklace, showering pearls across the stage. After further interruptions Jocko-Ali is finally 'hanged': "[...] *Drum roll. SAMMY nods. JOCKO-ALI hands MAZO his script. Gripping the rope, FLIP leaps off his stool – percussion – lifting the BLACK MUSLIM [Jocko-Ali] into the air. FLIP, with help, secures the rope. JOCKO-ALI jerks about: the latest dance craze.*" (Watts, 2003: 382) When the Defender, played by Kerr, halts the proceedings, protesting that "Such an exhibition is morbid and in questionable taste", he is overruled: "*Music continues. The BLACK ACTOR completes his dance – abrupt, convulsive, climactic end.*" (Ibid, 382) The scene is comic and macabre; Kerr's objections, which arguably reflect those of the audience, demonstrably negate any probability of the author writing in ignorance of the scene's effect and so signifying that there is a reason, if not immediately apparent, for its inclusion. The proceedings are accompanied by literal gallows humour: when asked if he is "comfortable", Jocko-Ali replies, "It's an old family tradition," to which he is then told: "Then you can hang on a bit longer." (Ibid, 387) Moreover, at no point is it ever pretended that Jocko-Ali is actually dead, and the Prosecutor/Ab continues his cross-examination of him. Ultimately, Jocko-Ali is cut down and resumes his place with the rest of the performers to sing a savage song until the end of the scene (ibid, 383-394). The disallowance of emotional power and pathos, the continual interruptions in the action, the literal 'dance of death' and the scene's finale allows neither empathy nor empty empathy. The audience are not permitted to connect on an emotional or sentimental level, nor are they

renowned for selecting prisoners for gruesome and bizarre 'medical' experiments ostensibly based upon Nazi racial policies. The selecting, stripping and shaving of new prisoners is the most notorious and well-known aspect of the treatment of prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau, if not of all the Nazi concentration camps.

able to express any form of emotional reaction at Chaim/Jocko-Ali's 'death': he is singing and dancing on the stage in front of them. At the most basic level of balagan, it is to be hoped that the spectators would deem the scene offensive due to the parody of an Auschwitz execution: the spectator invocation of Holocaust etiquette. The greater hope still is for them to have to define, whether to themselves or others, why such a parody is offensive: in other words, the actual hangings at Auschwitz.

The second example of balagan is the 'medical' experiment. A Greek girl, played by the character of male Addy, is 'operated' upon to re-enact the testimony of a doctor who conducted experiments on the ovaries of a group of women. The audience are warned of what is to come by Addy's proclamation: "Lights! Action! Travesty!" (Watts, 2003: 408) Two audience members are instructed to hold Addy down while Rosie and Jocko-Ali 'operate' using a lipstick, an ice pick, a fork, a kitchen knife, an ice bucket and a pair of tongs. During the proceedings, Addy reads a newspaper whilst unable to contain his hysterical laughter. The doctor is 'anonymous', played by Maclan swathed in toilet paper. As the scene progresses "black blood" begins to "blossom" from behind the mask, culminating in a "geyser" that sprays everyone within reach (ibid, 411-413). The doctor's testimony is given on his behalf by Mazo, who succumbs to fits of laughter while attempting to speak. The testimony, like the account of the hanging, is denied emotional power by the action onstage. Following various quips, a string of knockwurst is produced from Addy and borne away to be put into soup,²⁵⁶ before a "gleaming, dripping apple" – an overt symbol of fertility – is held aloft by Jocko-Ali, proclaiming "Ain't love grand!!" (Ibid, 413) After this, the frenzied and hysterical tone of the scene ceases; a 'courtroom drama' cross-examination of the doctor ensues until he refuses to answer any further questions and leaves (ibid, 413-422). As with the hanging there is a lack of emotional impact due to the incongruity of the action onstage,

²⁵⁶ Later on, soup is served to the onstage audience members and the cast (Watts, 2003: 432). It is not noted in the stage directions as to whether the knockwurst is actually in the soup or not; it would be interesting to discover the reactions of the audience members in both cases.

although I posit that the cross-examination draws the spectator in through the conflict between the doctor and the two counsels. In this sense the audience is encouraged to engage, cognitively or spontaneously/emotionally, with the dialogue; it simultaneously holds them at a distance and secures their attention. The metatheatrical and metaphorical elements of the operation – referrals to the script; black humour (“Sutures. [...] Suit yourself.” [Watts, 2003: 414]); the use of everyday items as operating equipment; foodstuffs as human organs; and the laughter of those involved, including the audience members holding the ‘patient’ down – simultaneously reduce the horror of the doctor’s testimony and invert the Holocaust sign of the ‘medical’ experiment. What is more, it constitutes a double violation: that of the sacredness of the Holocaust sign, and that of the sanctity of the doctor’s office. Similarly to the hanging, the intention is that the audience will be offended and again look to the actual experiments at Auschwitz as a referent point for that offence, rather than relying solely upon the conventions of Holocaust etiquette for their reasoning. However, it is the final example of balagan within *Sammy’s Follies* that I argue provides the greatest impact, not just through the means of a violation of a Holocaust sign, but through emotional weight and the reversal of focus from the stage back to the audience.

A female prisoner, named as A-Eighty-four One-eleven and played by the character of Rosie, testifies about her arrival at Auschwitz, detailing her separation from her husband and her subsequent stripping and shaving. The first indication that this scene will be markedly different from the previous scenes comes when Rosie, seated in the witness box, lays aside her script – which by contrast the previous ‘victims’ have had to continuously consult – after a brief exchange with the prosecution (ibid, 422). Her subsequent testimony is comparatively detailed: she begins by speaking of the journey in the cattle trains and the selection of the new prisoners. The spectator is made aware that something ‘bad’ is going to happen when partway through her testimony Rosie turns to Ab, who is playing the Prosecutor:

ROSIE: [...] I don't think – This – This isn't the place for it.

AB (*no longer looks at ROSIE*): It's perfect.

ROSIE: But –

AB: Finish! [Ibid, 423]

What makes this significant is the fact that none of the previous 'victims' have had any qualms about what they are going to perform; indeed, they have been enthusiastic participants. The musicians begin to play as Rosie carries on testifying, and five of the male characters "*close ranks*" behind her, forming "*the CHORUS LINE for her production number.*" (Ibid, 424) It transpires that this is a striptease that she performs, with the backing of her repulsive chorus line, simultaneously to testifying: "*ROSIE begins to remove her clothes, her body moving to the music, her face like stone.*" (Watts, 2003: 425) She describes the smell of burning in the camp; the herding of the women into a large building, where drunk soldiers order them to strip; the attempts of the women to hide behind each other and keep hold of small personal items; and finally the shaving of their heads (Ibid, 424-429). Throughout these five pages, the 'chorus line' sings songs such as "[...] Ring around the gallows tree! [...] Ready for another atrocity? [...] Ashes, ashes – [...] All fall down!" and "[...] Ring around our Rosie! [...] Fourth floor! Lingerie!" [...] Oh, honey, let it all come down!" (Ibid, 424-425) While this follows a similar 'comic' pattern to what has already been seen, there is an undertone of menace and an awareness that, unlike the other two scenes, the troupe may just turn on their 'victim' for real. The singing, jeering men, swigging alcoholic drinks, brings to mind the image of sneering Nazis watching their victims strip for the gas chambers. One of the men ejaculates while watching her; Rosie again tries to plead with Sammy to let her stop, but he is "implacable":

ROSIE's head drops. Then slowly – regally – she bares her breasts.

MacIAN and JOCKO-ALI fall to their knees before ROSIE. ADDY, shot glass in one eye, appraises first one breast, then the other.

[...]

MacIAN and JOCKO-ALI sample ROSIE's breasts with their mouths. The music resumes. (Watts, 2003: 426-427)

By the end of the scene Rosie is completely naked. Her head, concealed by a wig until this is ripped off, has been shaved to the skull: "*She stands frozen: a naked, old display mannequin.*" (Ibid, 429) The rest of the characters exit drunkenly, leaving Rosie alone and exposed onstage:

The WOMAN weeps. SAMMY places a robe over her shoulders. ADDY puts a drink in her hand and follows SAMMY into the wings.

Alone, the ACTRESS examines her glass. Then, without drinking, she lifts her head and faces down her AUDIENCE – nakedly, soberly, dauntlessly.

The lights fail. (Ibid, 430-431)

The scene is both comic and horrifying: the popular entertainment value of the striptease is juxtaposed brutally with the forced removal of prisoners' belongings and clothes prior to either 'disinfection' or death. The concept of the idealised image of the perfect body of a stripper, as well as the sexual objectification of Rosie – culminating in the 'sampling' of her body – mirrors both the Nazi obsession with appearance and the savagery towards women within Auschwitz, including rape, physical and sexual abuse, and forced sexual slavery in the camp brothel (Rees, 2005).

Whereas the testimony of the other two 'victims' is constantly interrupted by the other characters, there is no such disruption in Rosie's case. The other characters may intrude or mock with coarsely comic songs and jokes, but it does not distract from what Rosie is saying and even supports her perception of the Nazis in her testimony, lending further credence – and thus emotional force – to her speech. What makes the striptease even more thought-provoking as balagan is that not only does it function in the same manner as the two examples already discussed, but it invokes Auschwitz before the audience's eyes through the behaviour of the characters and Rosie's testimony. It confirms what the audience already

know as well as challenging them to remember it. I suggest that depending on the individual audience member, it is entirely possible to be spurred into either laughter or horrified dismay – even both.

This example of balagan is all the more forceful because at the end of the scene, the focus is suddenly turned back upon the audience. The silent gaze of the actress becomes an unspoken accusation; a questioning of the attitude of the audience towards the Holocaust. It is now the spectators who are under scrutiny: those who may have laughed during the powerful and disturbing scene, and those who may have watched in mute or vocal horror.²⁵⁷ Not only is it the intention to horrify through such a flagrant breach of probably the most recognised symbol of the Holocaust, but it is a reminder and a warning of what happens when the world looks on but does nothing. The scene is both balagan and an admonition against inaction. Whether provoked into laughter or revulsion, tears or anger, it is impossible for the spectator to remain in a state of empty empathy.

Turning the processing of new prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau into a full striptease, supplemented by bawdy songs and jokes of questionable taste, is the ultimate implementation of balagan in *Sammy's Follies*. While the hanging and the 'medical' experiment fulfil the obligations of balagan in that they violate the sanctity of such events as Holocaust signs, the striptease simultaneously accomplishes a similar desecration and goes further by involving the spectator emotionally through Rosie's uninterrupted testimony and the visual, dual-layered implication of the other characters as being both performers and perpetrators. The hanging and the experiment establish an expectation that subsequent representations of Holocaust events within the play will be unemotional and/or parodic treatments, comprising largely metatheatrical, metaphorical and comic elements. Neither

²⁵⁷ It must be noted that although the play insists on audience participation, no mention is made in the stage directions of encouraging any of the audience members, onstage and off, to intervene on Rosie's behalf, or what the actors should do if such an intervention occurs. This goes some way in supporting Lion's view of the passivity of society, as represented by the audience, in the face of the mistreatment of others.

'victim' in the hanging or the experiment is particularly distressed by what is happening to them, and the 'real' aspects – from the actual hanging to the surgical incisions – are implied. The striptease shatters the spectator's newly-formed pre-conceptions by showing full nudity, visual sexual 'abuse', the distress of the 'victim', and so on. The savage comedy of the preceding scenes becomes ruthless, and the striptease of Rosie and the historical stripping of Nazi victims overlap in a way that synchronously implements balagan and compels the audience towards contemplation of the Holocaust. Through this, it is desired that an attempt on the part of the spectator to delineate what it is exactly that makes the action of the play so offensive will result in a renewed consideration of the Holocaust experience and its associated horror.

Conclusion

I argue that the dominance of Holocaust etiquette and Holocaust piety render it necessary for a radical reassessment of ways to represent the Holocaust in the theatre that do not lead to empty empathy or Holocaust fatigue. One approach with which to do this is through the avoidance of the Holocaust tragic model demonstrated by the majority of British and American Holocaust plays, and the implementation of Gad Kaynar's definition of 'balagan', inverting the 'Holocaust sign repertory' in order to re-imbue such signs with some of their original horror. The implementation of balagan causes the spectator to be offended according to their sensibilities of Holocaust etiquette. In its purest and most desired form, balagan will then trigger a (re-)consideration of the Holocaust's horror through the spectator's need or desire to define what it is precisely about balagan that is so offensive, negating the potential for Holocaust fatigue and empty empathy. Cabaret, as a form fundamentally opposite to tragedy, enables the institution of balagan. Its foundation in the addressing of urgent, contemporary socio-political issues, its structure of different performance mediums, and its pithily satirical commentary foster relevant audience pre-conceptions and so facilitate the requisite conditions for balagan. This is reflected in the three case studies in this chapter.

While the three plays are not cabarets per se, they feature aspects of cabaret, each one enabling the facilitation of balagan to varying degrees.

In Bernard's *How We Danced While We Burned*, the most overt use of balagan is the use of a parodic talent show as a metaphor for life in the concentration camps through its offensiveness at deliberately comparing Holocaust victims to game show contestants. The striptease of #89 is symbolic of sexual bartering, but without overt signs that this is the case, and given the subtlety of implication, it is an abstract 'turn' within a procession of similar acts. The dolls of #124 and the family comprising #29 function as recognisable Holocaust signs (although they do not form part of the actual Holocaust sign repertory) in that they point to the fates of prisoners, but these moments confirm those signs rather than subvert them. *How We Danced While We Burned* informs about the Holocaust through signs; as such, the play as a whole does not totally implement balagan but implies it through, as stated, the metaphorical talent show.

Kift's *Camp Comedy* features a stronger element of balagan than *How We Danced While We Burned*, yet in contrast to *Sammy's Follies* the balagan is more restrained and understated. Whereas *Sammy's Follies* utilises three separate Holocaust signs, *Camp Comedy* employs a leitmotif of ashes. Due to the boundaries imposed by the playwright surrounding what is represented, the balagan in *Camp Comedy* is not as powerful due to the simple fact that it is not as graphic or shocking. The balagan of the kicking of human ashes around the stage by Nazi officers is an appalling image. However, I contend that any spectatorial consideration of the horrors of the Holocaust is reduced by the reappearance of those of whom the ashes are supposed to be the remains, singing triumphantly in an ending that echoes the Holocaust tragic mode that Roy Kift otherwise protests against. Similarly, the appearance of Frau Schwarz alongside her own ashes reduces the impact of the balagan. The kicking of ashes by Nazis confirms Holocaust stereotypes without encouraging the audience to dwell more upon them, and in this sense it can be construed as placing a barrier in the way of deeper consideration. Additionally, *Camp Comedy* partly adheres to the notion

of Holocaust piety (exemplified through the sentimentality of the final appearance of the performers); combined, the confirmation of Holocaust signs and the inclination towards Holocaust piety enable the elicitation of empty empathy from the spectator.

In Lion's *Sammy's Follies*, the re-enactments of a hanging, a 'medical' experiment and the processing of a new prisoner in the context of the trial of a concentration camp commandant enable the levels of balagan to build. Beginning with a man dancing at the end of his own noose and culminating in a devastating striptease, *Sammy's Follies* fulfils balagan by violating the sanctity of the Holocaust signs represented in each example. The prevention of emotional involvement on the part of the spectator in the hanging and the experiment through nonsensical interruptions and unceasing, irreverent action leads to a more tremendous impact of balagan when an emotional link is established by the victim, Rosie, during the striptease. This occurs through an uninterrupted testimony taking place concurrently to the act of balagan (the striptease) and her visible distress at what is happening. In addition, the visceral actuality of the representation – two of the men onstage 'sample' Rosie's naked breasts with their mouths – does not allow the spectator to shelter behind a 'safe' boundary imposed by the playwright. While the first two examples may fulfil the objectives of balagan in offending the spectator, and so prompting them to define the events of the Holocaust, the third act of balagan in *Sammy's Follies* is a horror in itself. It is a 'double balagan': it leads to a contemplation of the contextual historical horror through violating the sanctity of that horror, and layers this with the immediate horror of what is being shown onstage to produce a vivid and disturbing juxtaposition. I suggest that in this manner the spectator is brought closer to the dreadfulness of the Holocaust and, simultaneously, prevented from engaging in either empty empathy or Holocaust fatigue.

The efficacy of balagan is ultimately determined by the individual audience member. The three case studies in this chapter are contrived to elicit reactions from their audiences that do not adhere to conventional responses, but the interpretation of the audience is vital. It is difficult to establish spectator reactions to the three case studies: neither *Sammy's Follies*

nor *Camp Comedy* have been given professional productions in English, although the former has been optioned for production at least twice²⁵⁸ and the latter has been staged in Polish; there are no available reviews of *How We Danced While We Burned*. While interesting contrasts and conclusions may be drawn simply from reading the three texts, such as the ‘in-yer-face’ elements of the American-derived balagan in *Sammy’s Follies* as opposed to the more understated British balagan elements of *Camp Comedy*, a professional English-language production of either play with an audience survey or extended discussion is the only way to truly ascertain balagan’s efficacy in this context. The varying aspects and types of balagan will appeal to and affect different audience members, depending on their willingness to remember and their sensibilities. The widespread and deeply-rooted nature of Holocaust etiquette reasonably portends that the shock of balagan would not be welcomed, or well-received, by the majority of audience members. Central issues surrounding balagan in Holocaust theatre include its use as being problematic if the audience know little or nothing about the Holocaust, as they will already be in a position to be (relatively) easily horrified or spurred into contemplating the Holocaust’s original horror. Equally, the question must be raised as to the reception of balagan by survivors and Holocaust ‘specialists’, such as artists and scholars. Is there such a thing as the ‘ideal’ spectator for balagan? As I have stated, only an English-language production and associated audience dialogues can truly determine both balagan’s efficacy and the types of spectator that it is best suited for.

Taken out of context, balagan might appear to be little more than cheap and offensive gags at the expense of mass suffering. Yet in terms of drawing attention to and teaching about the Holocaust, permitting the lessons of the past to break through Holocaust fatigue, and dynamically promoting the move from empty empathy into active, cognitive engagement,

²⁵⁸ Both of the intended productions of *Sammy’s Follies* were scheduled to take place in 2006 – one at the Persephone Theatre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (Canada) and the other at the Northern Stage Ensemble in Newcastle (UK): “The director who planned to do the show in Saskatoon dropped dead before he could stage it, and Klaus Maria Brandauer, the Viennese actor around whom the production in Newcastle was planned, dropped out before the production materialized.” (Lion, 3.6.2012)

the brutality and horror of Holocaust cabaret and balagan could justifiably be viewed as the most effective methodology of all.

CONCLUSION

The importance of Holocaust theatre should not be underestimated. It has social, political, historical and cultural implications, and helps to enable spectators to undergo comparisons between the world today and as it was when the events of the genocide occurred: how has the world changed (for example, in terms of the implementation of human rights), and where is there still a need for action and change – where are oppression and persecution still happening, and what can be done about it? Two particular examples within current events have strong relevance: a refugee crisis in South East Asia, and another such crisis in Europe. Persecuted Rohingya in Burma, denied citizenship and subjected to oppressive laws including exclusion from public schools and restrictions on movement within the country, are being forced to live in ghettos and camps; many are attempting to flee by boat but are forced to live adrift for up to several months due to the ‘push-back’ policy of neighbouring countries, where the boats are denied entry to ports (CBC News, 2015). Human trafficking camps have been discovered where refugees are kept under guard, abused and given inadequate shelter and food until their families provide money for their release (Stone, 2015). Immediate comparisons can be found between the contemporary plight of the Rohingya and the historical attempts of Jews in fleeing persecution; well-known examples of mass Jewish endeavours to escape by boat are the SS St Louis²⁵⁹ and the SS Quanza,²⁶⁰ with the latter commemorated in Holocaust theatre by Stephen J. Morewitz & Susan Lieberman’s 1991 play *Steamship Quanza*. Likewise, the accounts of abuses suffered by Rohingya being kept in the human trafficking camps mirrors the stories of Jews being hidden by so-called ‘rescuers’ in Nazi-occupied Poland (Hochberg-Mariańska, 1996). Furthermore, there is a current refugee

²⁵⁹ “On 13 May 1939, more than 900 Jews fled Germany aboard a luxury cruise liner, the SS St Louis. They hoped to reach Cuba and then travel to the US - but were turned away in Havana and forced to return to Europe, where more than 250 were killed by the Nazis.” (Lanchin, 2014)

²⁶⁰ The SS Quanza was chartered by 317 passengers in order to flee to America from Europe. Despite the initial refusal of government officials to grant visas to the Jewish refugees on board, all of the passengers subsequently found asylum in America following the intervention of Eleanor Roosevelt (Buckley, 2007).

crisis in Europe: hundreds of refugees from countries such as Syria and Libya (both of which are engaged in civil war) have been attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Italy via boat. Rather than the 'push-back' policy described above, the concerns of the Italian government are the high numbers of fatalities as the overcrowded boats frequently sink, drowning those on board; the Italian government has subsequently called upon the EU to assist with rescues and form an international resolution (BBC News, 2015). Again, comparisons can be drawn with the situation of Jewish refugees from the Holocaust, who were subject to rigidly-enforced quota numbers from potential host countries and were often unsuccessful in obtaining quota numbers, leading to 'illegal' migration and escape attempts.

The media coverage of these crises emphasises the human aspect of the refugees' plight, such as footage showing mothers aboard the refugee boats holding out their young children in pleas for help. Yet the inherent danger of 'moral habituation' and 'empathy fatigue' in a trauma-dominated and media-saturated world – as I have discussed in relation to child protagonists of Holocaust drama – means that such images of mass groups of people and the relation of relevant statistics throughout news reports can potentially contribute to a 'flattening' of their intended effect and, in fact, bring about distancing or dissociation by the spectator. Theatre enables the humanity within mass suffering to be brought through in the medium of personal stories, and I argue that this is particularly pertinent in the case of the Holocaust: it was not six million statistics that were murdered. As illustrated within this thesis, if spectators are actively encouraged and aided to empathise with the victims and survivors of the Holocaust, then I posit that they will subsequently be able to empathise with those fleeing from or enduring persecution today – both through drawing historical parallels (as was the case with *Bent*) and through finding common ground (as exemplified by several case studies examined here, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Number the Stars*). Through such empathy it becomes possible for spectators to become critical and critically-thinking citizens, and thus to take action against oppression and suffering. Therefore, and as I have demonstrated in this thesis, empathy is an intrinsic part of Holocaust theatre, from stimulating

playwrights to create Holocaust plays to encouraging emotional responses from spectators. As noted in the Introduction it is impossible for empathy not to be used within the theatre, particularly in view of Bruce McConachie's observation that it is automatically (and unconsciously) deployed by spectators. In the context of Holocaust theatre the need for empathy is heightened through the use of Holocaust plays as teaching resources and tools for raising awareness into the issues surrounding the genocide. Without empathy spectators are not able to place themselves in the position of those involved and thus cannot learn efficacious lessons. In this context there is a continued need for audience members to be able to empathise with characters in Holocaust plays in order for the inherent lessons of the Holocaust – predominantly the dangers of discrimination and prejudice – to be highlighted and absorbed. As well as the international refugee crises described above, recent global events underscore this need: civil unrest and protests in Ukraine in November 2013 against a hard-line government, which suppressed the free speech of its citizens and used violence to subdue protesters; the recent rise of far-right political parties in Hungary, including the assertion of one politician that lists should be created of "Jews who pose a 'national security risk'" (Dunai, 2012); and the comparison of bodies of dead detainees in the Syrian civil war to those of victims of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen (Thomson Reuters, 2014).

Amy Coplan calls for a "narrower conceptualization" of empathy in order to understand it better (2011b: 40). Yet while such a 'conceptualization' could prove beneficial in the context of improved comprehension of the term, the myriad ways in which 'empathy' has been used and understood to date reflects the ways in which it may be utilised within Holocaust theatre. Indeed, I argue that it is necessary to continue exploring the multiple meanings of empathy in order to build a further understanding of how and why empathy is intrinsic to Holocaust performance. For instance, as illustrated by the theory of balagan and Holocaust cabaret it is still possible for Holocaust theatre to be avant-garde while simultaneously 'going back to basics' in employing victim/survivor narratives; as I have argued, empathy is used and understood in the sense of 'empty empathy' prescribed by

Holocaust etiquette. However, I suggest that Holocaust etiquette is too deeply entrenched for its conventions to be radically challenged all at once, and the inherent risk with Holocaust cabarets is that they will alienate and offend spectators to the extent of distancing them from interest in the Holocaust altogether. It is therefore necessary to explore other ways in which audience empathy may be engaged without recourse to conventional modes of representation.

As described in my discussion of Holocaust cabaret, Edward R. Isser has outlined the existence of three waves in Holocaust theatre, and to his definition I would like to add that of a fourth: the approach of the post-survivor age. Hank Greenspan (1998) observes that we need Holocaust theatre due to the fact that we do not listen properly to survivors, and further to this I argue that theatre will soon be the only living, breathing form that enables an immediate connection with the subject of the Holocaust. As discussed in the chapter about child protagonists in Holocaust drama, theatre is used as a teaching resource in schools. In Britain, Voices of the Holocaust utilises empathic connections between schoolchildren and onstage characters through the creation of plays in which the latter are of similar ages to their audience. However, as of January 2015 Voices of the Holocaust is the only Holocaust theatre and education company in Europe, raising questions of how theatre can truly be effective if it is not maximised to its full advantage. The need to continue developing and understanding the use of empathy in Holocaust theatre, therefore, as well as the need for Holocaust theatre itself, is becoming even more pertinent as first-hand accounts are subsequently lost. As I have observed, the perpetrator narrative is gaining wider attention. This is shown by the publication of novels such as *The Kindly Ones* (2010) by Jonathan Littell and *Monsieur le Commandant* (2013) by Romain Slocombe, as well as within the field of Holocaust studies with publications such as Katharina von Kellenbach's *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-War Lives of Nazi Perpetrators* and Wendy Lower's *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*, both published in 2013. I disagree with an outright shift in focus to the perpetrator narrative, as previously stated, and instead I argue

for the need to propagate a balance between the victim and perpetrator perspectives. Furthermore, alongside the use of theatrical devices such as balagan, the utilisation of the avant-garde in terms of new or lesser-known narratives within the victim/perpetrator performative offers further scope in terms of fresh perceptions and innovative ways to engender empathy, under whichever definition the latter term may fall. For instance it is notable that scholars are moving away from the 'traditional' historiography of the Holocaust as a male-perpetrated genocide and increasingly examining the role of women as perpetrators, demonstrated by Lower's book as well as others such as *Women and Nazis: Perpetrators of Genocide and Other Crimes During Hitler's Regime, 1933-1945* (2012) by Wendy Adele-Marie Sarti. In the theatre this is reflected through the recent example of *Blonde Poison* (2013) by Gail Louw.

This notion of perpetrator narratives within the theatre potentially enables the spectator to examine their own capacity for perpetration through empathy – and, by implication, identification – with the perpetrator portrayed. In turn, questions are raised in relation to this surrounding the idea of whether this really helps one to understand 'why' and 'how' events like the Holocaust occur, and if the perpetrator perspective will become another aspect of Holocaust etiquette in that the 'monsters' become enshrined in myth and fantasy. As discussed in the chapter focusing on Holocaust cabaret, the stereotypical Nazi is already an inherent part of Holocaust etiquette, as British and American portrayals of Nazis create and disseminate the image of the 'Nazi as monster' which must be battled and overcome. Yet empathy is a way of making the spectator mirror the monster, and either gain an understanding in the simplest sense of the word (which some might deem as excusing or justifying the actions of the Nazis), or, on a deeper level, encouraging an exploration, however uncomfortable, of the spectator's own capacity for such actions. As Alfred Werner (1958) points out, in *Hitler in Uns Selbst (The Hitler in Ourselves)* psychologist Max Picard declares that "All of us [...] carry some sort of Hitler in ourselves, an inherent sickness of the soul which may grow into a dangerous cancer unless we cure it in time." (Enzer and

Solotaroff-Enzer, 2000: 163) The key question in relation to this revolves around the spectator glimpsing, even briefly, what it is like to be the oppressor, and if this *propagates* or *prevents* such views.

Whether theatre about the Holocaust seeks to present the perspective of either the victim or the perpetrator, and in whichever form that perspective is depicted, its fundamental objective should be to educate and inform. According to Alison Landsberg:

Representing the Holocaust is about making the Holocaust concrete and thinkable. It is about finding ways to 'burn in' memories so that they might become meaningful locally, so that they might become the grounds for political engagement in the present and the future. (1997: 85-86)

The popularity of plays such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* indicates that even with the emergence of Holocaust fatigue, many spectators are willing to listen and learn. The same can be said of Holocaust plays which feature child protagonists, especially in view of the fact that many such plays are staged in America by schools and amateur theatre groups. The extensive educative potential of Holocaust theatre is exemplified by *Bent*, both in terms of teaching about a 'new' aspect of Holocaust history and drawing parallels between historical and contemporary oppression. The ability of Holocaust theatre to engage spectators anew through the breaking of taboos and Holocaust etiquette, potentially connecting a new generation of spectators who have been over-exposed to contemporary traumas with the lessons of historical genocide, is epitomised with the use of balagan and Holocaust cabaret. Within each of these examples lie different meanings of empathy and different ways in which to utilise empathy to its full advantage, allowing for explorations and representations of the Holocaust that can reach out to as many audience members as possible. There is no singular mode of Holocaust theatre that can be said to effectively engage spectators to the same degree, and thus it is imperative that plays about the Holocaust are constructed across a range of narratives, forms and techniques. I have stated that empty empathy has arisen from the conventions of Holocaust etiquette. While Holocaust etiquette is necessary to a

certain degree in order to prevent a 'normalisation' of the Holocaust, it is to be hoped that Holocaust theatre in the twenty-first century moves spectators to learn from history and away from empty empathy towards engagement and action in the avoidance and prevention of oppression.

APPENDIX 1: FURTHER INFORMATION

- 1) Primary concerns centred on the ‘saleability’ and the lack of “typically American” – that is, multi-ethnic – aspects of the books. Readers complained about what they saw as Levin’s too-blunt candour in addressing Jewish problems. Ultimately his persistence was successful and he managed to establish a modest audience for stories about how Jews lived both at the time and in the recent past – although it must be noted that these stories were from the “discerning *American* point of view” (Graver, 1995: 4-5; italics added).
- 2) It is interesting to note the similarities between the activities of Levin and Goodrich & Hackett, as well as the fact that both parties had been witnesses to the Spanish Civil War, although Loyalist-supporting Goodrich & Hackett only saw the aftermath of starving refugees (Goodrich, 2001: 133). Graver implies that Levin, through his journalistic work and his presence in Spain with his then-wife to also support the Loyalists, had a greater involvement, although this is not specified (1995: 5-6).
- 3) Levin’s immediate emotional reactions manifested in proactive efforts to inform the world of what had happened and to help the survivors. He “took every opportunity to report on what the Germans had done to the Jews as more and more specific details about their [...] genocidal campaign were confirmed” (Graver, 1995: 7) He made it a personal mission to approach survivors, take their details, and attempt to contact family members on their behalf. At the time he did not feel that it was his right as someone who had not been caught up in the genocide to tell the story of what had been done to the European Jews; he firmly believed that the right belonged to those who had, leading to his assertion that “Some day, a teller would arise from amongst themselves.” (1950: 174) Anne Frank subsequently became that ‘teller’ from Levin’s point of view, and Tereska Torres questioned why this was the case: “Why Anne Frank [...]? Because she was a victim who was also a writer?” (*The haunted houses of Meyer Levin*, 63) But Anne was not the only ‘victim who was also a writer’ to affect Levin: at Buchenwald he met thirty-year-old Mordecai Stiegler, a Polish-Jewish writer who had survived torture, slave labour and a death march and had narrowly saved himself from execution. Stiegler’s actions in the midst of the horrors – such as secretly instructing children in Yiddish and Hebrew, and holding ‘literary evenings’ for fellow inmates – helped Levin to reach an understanding of the survival of the human spirit (Abzug, 1985: 58-59). It is curious that Levin did not take up Stiegler’s story, in view of Levin’s professed connection with Anne Frank as a Jew and a writer, but it is not noted as to whether Levin even considered this; it is unlikely, taking into account Stiegler’s own position as a survivor and a writer and thus someone who could speak for himself.
- 4) After its 2009 revival at the London Palladium, *Oliver!* ran for 1,366 performances and grossed £40 million at the Box Office (<http://oliverthemusical.com/the-show/history/> [Accessed 12 December 2013]); *Billy Elliott* opened in London in 2005 and has won awards such as the Olivier Award, Evening Standard Award, Theatregoers’ Choice Award and Critics’ Circle Award for Best Musical (<http://www.billyelliottlondon.org/> [Accessed 12 December 2013]); and since opening in the West End in October 2011, *Matilda The Musical* has won various awards, setting a new record for winning a total of seven awards at the 2012 Laurence Olivier Awards, and has extended its run to December 2014 (<http://uk.matildathemusical.com/about/history/> [Accessed 12 December 2013]).

- 5) According to Lucie Adelsberger, who worked as a doctor while imprisoned in the camp,

They knew nothing of his business with the gas chambers [...] [or] that we trembled with every visit [...]. All they knew was the candy he brought in his bulging pockets. He handed it out one piece at a time, sometimes tossing it to them playfully and now and again pressing a piece into the hand of one too sick to move. [...] The camp physician had only to appear for the little ones to beam with joy. (1995: 59)

- 6) The idea of camp inmates as puppets is vividly shown in Hotel Modern's 2010 production *Kamp*. The piece combined music, theatre, sculpture, video and three thousand tiny puppets in a scale model of Auschwitz-Birkenau to show day-to-day life, and death, in the camp: “[...] [T]he point of *Kamp* [sic] ultimately has to be that it makes us see Auschwitz through Nazi eyes – pretty, innocuous and full of puppets” (Needham, 2013).

APPENDIX 2: BENT AUDIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions were sent via email to audience members of the 1979 London production of *Bent*.

- 1) How old were you when you saw the production?
- 2) How did you find out about the play?
- 3) What made you decide to see the play?
- 4) Were there any particular aspects or scenes within the play that had particular resonance with you, either positive or negative?
- 5) What was your overall view of the play?
- 6) Has your initial response to the play changed over time or remained broadly the same?
- 7) Did any of your friends and family attend the play?

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