ABSTRACT

Beth Greich-Polelle, Advisor

This dissertation critically evaluates the concepts of tolerance and toleration and how these two ideas are often deployed as the appropriate response to any perceived difference in American culture. Using young adult literature about the Holocaust as a case study, this project illustrates how idealizing tolerance merely serves to maintain existing systems of power and privilege. Instead of using adolescent Holocaust literature to promote tolerance in educational institutions, I argue that a more effective goal is to encourage readers’ engagement and acceptance of difference. The dissertation examines approximately forty young adult novels and memoirs on the subject of the Holocaust. Through close readings of the texts, I illustrate how they succeed or fail at presenting characters that young adults can recognize as different from themselves in ways that will help to destabilize existing systems of power and privilege.

I argue this sort of destabilization takes place through imaginative investment with a literary “Other” in order to develop a more cosmopolitan worldview. Using the theories of Judith Butler, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Gerard Delanty I contended that engagement with and appreciation of difference is possible when reading young adult Holocaust literature. By looking at how Jewish, Roma-Sinti, disabled, and homosexual victims are portrayed I illustrate how victimized populations are represented as vulnerable and grievable in ways that will help readers understand how particular populations were viewed as less than human and targeted for cultural annihilation as well as physical death. I also look at how Germans and neo-Nazis are portrayed in young adult literature, arguing for nuanced portrayals of the Germans themselves and how unethical choices are represented. I also remind readers not all books are created in
ways that enable cosmopolitan engagement; many fail on the grounds of historical inaccuracies, vague characterizations, and the presentation ongoing stereotypes. The ultimate goal of the project was to challenge rigid binary systems of identity categorization and to encourage readings of the literature that contest ongoing unequal distributions of power and privilege. Young adult Holocaust literature has the potential to do this, but it must be reconceptualized as a tool that can do other work besides teaching tolerance.
For Matt, the best husband ever.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Beth Griech-Polelle, for her enthusiasm for this project and her ongoing support and encouragement. I hope she chairs many more ACS dissertations in the future. Also essential to the success of the dissertation was Kim Coates, who often made me stressed (but not mad!) and demanded the best of me. Thanks as well to Vicki Patraka, whose course inspired this project, and her tireless assistants Isaac Vayo, Arundhati Ghosh, and Tiffany Knoell. Finally, thanks to Don McQuarrie for his ongoing advice and support while I have been at Bowling Green State University.

The ACS community and my friends in Bowling Green deserve a huge shout out as well. ACS has been an incredibly welcoming place since my first visit here in the spring of 2007, and without the community here I would have been a sad, sad PhD student. Special thanks to the people who helped me keep my sanity that first summer in Bowling Green: Ned and Evin Faulhaber, Courtney Olcott, and James Paasche. I look forward to enduring friendships and intellectual collaborations with a variety of people I have met here in BG: Kelly Watson and Jason Zeh, Vanessa Cozza and Nick Napoli, Jamie Stuart and Marnie Pratt, Phillip and Aliza Cunningham, Colin Helb and Carolyn Reinhardt, Angie Fitzpatrick, Andy Famiglietti, and Charlotte Quinney. I am terribly sorry we lost Matthew Karasek this year and therefore I cannot look forward to rolling dice with him in the future. I’ll never forget his stroke of genius that granted me that merkin.

Thanks go out to my family as well, Vicky and Richard Nunamaker for all their support and advice on pretty much any topic imaginable. Stanley Czepiel for being one of the most amazing people in the world in general, and a wonderful grandfather specifically. Thanks for
Eric Dean’s support and good wishes. Thanks to Matt’s family as well, for always making me feel welcome and at home: Tom and Linda Ruzicka; Marybeth and Javier Magallanes; Mike, Cindy, Liz, and Martha Ruzicka; David Magallanes; and all the Chicago Ruzicka clan. Thanks also to James Dean for encouraging my love of books; I am so sorry that you are not here to see it come to fruition.

Finally, thanks again to Matt Ruzicka for being the best husband imaginable. Without your patience, support, sense of humor, and love I would definitely not be Dr. D-R.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: TOLERANCE, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND LITERATURE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicating Tolerance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Cosmopolitan Theory</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Fiction and Cosmopolitan Worldviews</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOGNIZING THE OTHER IN THE CHARACTER OF ANNE FRANK</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition, Grief, and the Problems with Tolerance</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Frank as Teaching Tool</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Frank the Icon</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Frank the Beloved</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Frank the Eternal Optimist</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEWISH LIVES, VULNERABLE LIVES</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginary Constructs of the Other</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolithic Misunderstandings</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Are the Victims?</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Might it Mean to be Jewish?</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are Jews Specifically Targeted?</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER III.

RECOGNIZING ALL THE “LIVES UNWORTHY OF LIVING” ................................................................. 97

Roma-Sinti Stereotypes and Persecution ...................................................................................... 101

“Gypsies” in Young Adult Holocaust Literature ........................................................................ 106

Disability is a Human Rights Issue ............................................................................................ 119

The Disabled in Young Adult Holocaust Literature ................................................................... 124

Contemporary Intolerance of GLBT Communities .................................................................... 132

Damned Strong Love and Nothing More? ................................................................................ 137

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 142

CHAPTER IV.

GOOD NAZIS AND GERMANS AS VICTIMS ................................................................................... 144

Willing Executioners: the Average Bogeyman .......................................................................... 149

Ordinary Men: the Average Man .............................................................................................. 153

Social Death and Ordinary Germans ......................................................................................... 156

Mass Murder and Ordinary Germans .......................................................................................... 163

Historical Accuracy and the “Good Nazi” ................................................................................... 168

Germans as Victims ..................................................................................................................... 179

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 185

CHAPTER V.

NEO-NAZI REPRESENTATIONS AND VALUES WORTH LIVING BY ........................................... 189

Why It May Not All Be Relative .................................................................................................. 192

Representations of the Experiences of Neo-Nazi Characters ................................................... 200
### LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Vladek’s arrival home...........................................................................</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Vladek explains what happened after the war .......................................</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Art’s fears of creating a caricature of Vladek ..................................</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Vladek’s racism ..................................................................................</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Françoise’s response to Vladek’s outburst .......................................</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  An injured Theo explains his experiences to his sister Helena and his mother</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Readers see a flashback to Theo’s first experience with the <em>Einsatzgruppen</em></td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  The <em>Einsatzgruppen</em> in action ................................................................</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION: TOLERANCE, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND LITERATURE

Misfortune mayhem
You blame it all on "them"
They're dirty and mean
You want your country clean
What does it mean "clean"?
If they're not like you
Then they don't belong
Everyone's a foreigner
Almost any place he's in
Tolerance is the better way
In friendship all win
—Tankard, “Always Them”

Holocaust history in children’s books is supposed to teach a message. What that lesson is depends upon the particular way adult writers perceive the ethnic, religious, and national identity of their child readers; however, the need to construct a lesson, some lesson, remains constant.
—Adrienne Kertzer

In her well known pedagogical work *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks takes a very critical look at multicultural education. Her initial hopes for diversity initiatives were for “the possibility of a learning community, a place where differences could be acknowledged, where we would finally all understand, accept, and affirm that our ways of knowing are forged in history and relations of power” (30). However, much to her disappointment, the potential of acknowledging and openly discussing those power relations eventually was watered down until diversity education became “the stuff of colonizing fantasy” (31). The problem that hooks identifies, and the one that I address in this project, is the way in which much multicultural education fails to take into account existing systems of power and privilege. This particular weakness is illustrated clearly in the ways that the discourse of tolerance and toleration are deployed in contemporary American culture.

This project seeks to do two things: first, I argue that tolerance itself is not the admirable goal that it is often held up to be. Tolerance is always connected to existing structures of power
and privilege. To promote tolerance as the morally appropriate response to difference ultimately encourages those in the position of power to tolerate those with less power, creating that “colonizing fantasy” that bell hooks refers to (31). Second, this project uses the cosmopolitan theories of Kwame Anthony Appiah and Judith Butler to argue that literature can help readers engage with difference in ways that may help them develop a sense of appreciation or acceptance for others that goes beyond merely tolerating them. In Judith Butler’s terms this is the challenge of “consider[ing] how existing norms allocate recognition differently” and finding ways to extend recognizability to a host of marginalized identities (Frames of War 6). I apply these two arguments to a body of texts uniquely suited to evaluations of tolerance and the Other: young adult Holocaust literature.

The books on the Holocaust fundamentally must deal with concepts of difference and power structures as they represent the persecution of various individuals under the Nazi regime. These texts are also very often used explicitly to “teach tolerance” in various educational settings. I have chosen this particular set of texts for their incredible proliferation and continued publication and critical interest. Sullivan’s 1999 bibliography The Holocaust in Literature for Youth lists 137 autobiographies and biographies, as well as 295 fictional narratives targeted toward younger readers, and in the ten years since his bibliography was published the body of texts has only grown larger. Sullivan’s bibliography covers a broader range of ages than this study considers, however. For the purposes of this project I have limited the texts to those written for an adolescent audience. Adolescent literature is commonly defined as texts designed for an audience approximately the ages of twelve to twenty, generally books that students would read between early high school and the first few years of college. In the sections that follow I will briefly unpack the basic ideas of tolerance and cosmopolitanism, as well as explain further
the functions of adolescent literature and Holocaust themes in relation to engagement with identities other than the reader's own.

Complicating Tolerance

Tolerance, according to political scientist Wendy Brown “produces and positions subjects” in ways that create meanings, identities, and political possibilities “through the dissemination of tolerance discourse across state institutions” (4). The real issue at stake in this project is how tolerance discourse positions subjects within already existing power structures. Historically, the notion of tolerance and toleration had primarily been applied to religious difference particularly during the Middle Ages when Christian, Jewish, and Muslim populations were attempting to coexist as their communities increasingly interacted with each other (Forst). During and after the Protestant Reformation humanists such as Sebastian Castellio and Jean Bodin began arguing for the connections between individual reason and faith in order to allow for a separation between religious and secular authorities (Forst). Their arguments for the connections between reason and tolerance anticipate the pragmatists of the seventeenth century, including Locke and Spinoza. Their pragmatic arguments created a view of toleration as compromise, a state where “we are willing to put aside our commitment to our moral beliefs, not because we think there are other legitimate options, but because we know there is no other way to maintain social stability” (Heyd 198). However, it is the work of John Stuart Mill where the concept of tolerance breaks away from strict religious moorings. Mill’s work argues “in modern society toleration is also required to cope with other forms of irreconcilable cultural, social and political plurality” (Forst). From this broader perspective tolerance and toleration develop into a sort of moral imperative, where toleration becomes “the appropriate response to people who differ from us, and whom we dislike or of who we disapprove” (McKinnon and Castiglione 55).
It is this notion of dislike or disapproval that I see as essentially connected to systems of power and privilege.

In this system where tolerance is the appropriate response to those who differ from ourselves the central unspoken element is that disapproval itself. It speaks to normative behavior codes that are all too often organized around what Audre Lorde calls the “mythical norm” (704). For Lorde, the mythical norm is “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” (704). Lorde’s norm is the universal gauge by which standards for the “human” are all too often measured. This way of calculating human value then sets up binary structures where those considered normal must tolerate those labeled as abnormal, inferior, or disgusting. For those existing outside this mythical norm, any deviations from the qualities it presumes must be tolerated in a society that offers more power and privilege to those within the norm than those outside it. This hierarchy, according to Wendy Brown, functions as a binary system. She sees how, “through the alignment of the object of tolerance with difference, its inferiority to that which is aligned with sameness or universality is secured. Its association with difference places the object of tolerance outside the universal, positioning it as needing tolerance and hence as a lower form of life” (187). In this way hierarchies of power and privilege are reinforced by the concept of toleration itself.

These power structures are societally defined and are tied much more to differences between groups of people than individuals alone. In fact, the creation of monolithic groups is often one of the precursors to genocide, as I explain in chapter two. Therefore, as political philosopher Anna Galeotti points out, “the issue of public toleration must be addressed not simply in terms of the compatibility between liberal institutions and various cultures or practices, but in terms of contests over the inclusion of distinct identities and their bearers in the polity via
the public recognition of their differences” (6). There are two key points from Galeotti that deserve further comment. First, the notion of the “inclusion of distinct identities” is at stake. Judith Butler discusses the way restrictive norms refuse to acknowledge or include particular identities in various discursive structures. These individuals and their distinct identity categories are elided by norms which “produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognized,” giving certain identity categories immediate recognition and making marginalized identities often nearly invisible (Frames of War 3). Second, Galeotti comments on the importance of the “public recognition of differences” by individuals within a culture (6). Similar to hooks critique of the failings of diversity education, the inability to have a public recognition of difference can lead to what hooks calls “the rainbow coalition where we would all be grouped together in our difference” (31). If acknowledgement of difference and discourses of tolerance and toleration do in fact function in this way, “difference” becomes a quality ascribed to all humans, meaning the systems of power and privilege that constitute these differences are never interrogated. For theorists like Butler, it is central to consider how public recognition of difference is limited by historically constituted discourses that do not acknowledge many individuals or groups.

Tolerance discourse itself ignores the ways in which conversations regarding recognition are historically constituted. Wendy Brown points to the way various oversimplifications lead to the notion of tolerance as the appropriate response when faced with difference:

An interlocked series of generalizations—difference as the cause of prejudice, prejudice as the cause of injustice, and tolerance as attenuating the dangers of prejudice—permits the gathering of an extraordinary range of phenomena into the same explanatory rubric and the same justice project, as well as the exile of serious political and historical analysis. (143)
As Brown notes, the moral imperative of using tolerance to fight injustice ultimately allows tolerance discourse to take the place of serious evaluations of how the terms which allocate personhood and recognizability differently are always historically constituted, just as much today as they were in Nazi Germany. This critique of tolerance discourse and diversity education then begs the question: what might be a better solution? My larger argument is that the appreciation or acceptance of difference, beginning with open recognition and acknowledgement of distinct identities, is to be preferred over a facile tolerance of others. As political theorist Catriona McKinnon points out in her collection *The Culture of Toleration in Diverse Societies*, “Appreciation does not demand that a person deny her differences with others” (58). I refer to this public recognition of distinct identities as cosmopolitan engagement. I draw on various contemporary cosmopolitan theorists including philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, cultural critic Judith Butler, and sociologist Gerard Delanty to support this argument. Like the concepts of tolerance and toleration, cosmopolitanism is crucial to the larger project and deserves to be unpacked a bit further.

**Modern Cosmopolitan Theory**

Cosmopolitanism as a way of conceiving the world is not a new theory, although it is one that is gaining renewed intellectual interest. One primary reason for the revitalized use of cosmopolitan views in contemporary political, economic, and cultural theory is the ever-increasing phenomenon of globalization. As the world becomes what seems to be a smaller and smaller place, theorists are striving to come to grips with what that means in terms of personal responsibility and potential renegotiations of long-standing power structures. While the spectrum of cosmopolitanism is relatively broad, I focus on the social and cultural theoretical deployments of the idea, rather than those employed in contemporary political or economic
theory. Etymologically, the term comes from the Greek word *kosmopolites*, meaning “citizen of the world” (Delanty 20). Appiah, in his 2006 book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, calls for a return to the original sense of the term, rather than relying on the associations of urban elitism the word has accrued. He argues for a return to the roots of *kosmopolites* because he sees it as a way to combat the “thoroughgoing ignorance about the ways of others” that he defines as “largely a privilege of the powerful” (xvii). Viewed in this manner, cosmopolitanism can then become a tool to challenge the hierarchical and often self-serving value of tolerance and toleration, as long as it maintains an air of achievability, rather than one of

---

1 For an example of the political theorists discussing cosmopolitanism today, see Cheah, Pheng and Bruce Robbins. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
elitism. Appiah sees it as a quite straightforward prospect that “shouldn’t be seen as some exalted attainment: it begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association” (xix). A cosmopolitan worldview is a technique for cross-cultural conversations that can avoid the colonizing tendencies of liberal multiculturalism that bell hooks identifies. In addition to Appiah’s work, I find the theories of sociologist Gerard Delanty to be useful in exploring cosmopolitanism. Like Appiah, in his text The Cosmopolitan Imagination Delanty heavily focuses on the importance of the imagination as a way to create larger public communities, which is why the use of fiction and memoirs as a way to open up and encounter new perspectives that aid in a cross-cultural understanding is so significant.

Contemporary theorists, in particular those like hooks and Butler, have multiple problems with the humanism put forth by the Western philosophical tradition. They criticize the simplistic notion of an end goal to history based on the idea of the “human,” when that individual is defined by the incredibly limited parameters that the European Enlightenment ultimately offered. However, recent projects of Butler’s like Precarious Life and Frames of War can be defined as cosmopolitan undertakings, as she calls for recognition of a wider variety of subjects through an acknowledgement of our shared vulnerability and the ways this impacts our personal responsibility. In this project, the worldview that purports an extensive multicultural understanding yet leaves unacknowledged powers and privileges untouched is termed a “liberal multiculturalism.” I cover the problems with liberal multiculturalism in chapter one as I discuss the idea of a tolerant multicultural society that leaves populations unacknowledged and problematic power structures unquestioned.
Delanty criticizes the ultimate usefulness of liberal multiculturalism. Toleration was increasingly deployed as various cultures felt the increasing pressure to accommodate immigrant, indigenous, and exiled populations. The problem with the idealization of tolerance as a way to integrate unstable populations was that multiculturalism “was constructed on the assumption that there was a dominant cultural identity to which the incoming groups had to adjust but to whom certain concessions could be made. It was never intended to be a model for pursuing social justice” (Delanty 141). The issue with the notion of multiculturalism through toleration is, again, that it leaves existing and troubling power structures in place, and does not offer a set of guidelines for behavior in the face of injustice. All too often it is employed by multicultural initiatives as a solution to a wide variety of conflicting values. Cosmopolitanism, in contrast to liberal multiculturalism which is based around idealizing tolerance, recognizes that tolerance itself is just one of the many values present in contemporary society. Delanty argues that a cosmopolitan worldview allows for the possibility of “an international normative order based on human rights and multicultural forms of political community in which cultural difference gains positive recognition” (14). Cosmopolitanism has the potential to lead to a transformative ethics, one where individuals are asked to consider not only difference, but how “existing norms allocate recognition differently” (Butler, *Frames of War* 6). One of the ways to encourage this sort of reflection on power, privilege, and difference is through engagement with literature.

**Historical Fiction and Cosmopolitan Worldviews**

Historical fiction for young adults is capable of playing a significant role in their ethical development and may promote their ability to create recognizable and grievable lives from previously unacknowledged populations. While a large amount of the concentration of Holocaust fiction and films for any audience is “to remember,” for young adults “memory is not
being invoked; it is being created” (Baer 280). One of the most interesting aspects of historical fiction is the idea that it can create memories for young readers and these memories encompass experiences that may be far removed from their own. Memories created by historical fiction are central to larger considerations of the functions of representation and literature. Young adult novelist Joan Aiken writes about how fiction was able to make history seem real to her as a child, and how “fiction—the fact implanted in a story—does have a way of becoming knit into the mental processes much more easily, much more permanently, than facts on their own, unrelated, ever can” (qtd. Kokkola 53). The question then becomes what kinds of memories Holocaust fiction is creating, and what sort of understanding of the distinct identities are available to readers who consume these texts.

Currently, we are roughly seventy years past the events of the rise of the Third Reich and the genocide that the Nazis perpetrated. Soon, all knowledge of these events will be passed down solely from children of survivors or those who study history. The importance of learning this history places Holocaust literature written for young adults in an interesting position. Often, children’s first exposure to the events of the Holocaust comes via historical narratives, whether fictional or memoir-based. These texts, as Elizabeth Baer points out, are a way of creating memory for readers as the deaths of millions of Jews and those others declared Lebensunwürdig, or unworthy of life, are held together and transmitted to young adults through a single narrative structure. These narratives carry a significant responsibility. The stories that are told define who

---

2 Personal anecdotal evidence supports this idea. There have been many times when I have mentioned my project to other people and they claim their favorite book from adolescence was one that dealt with Holocaust themes. These stories really have become part of their memory in important ways and often spark a life-long interest in studying the Holocaust or persecution in general.
the victims were, what their treatment was like, and who the enemy was. In the Holocaust this is often a much more complex set of facts than many texts successfully acknowledge. I include all of these elements here in chapters covering the distinct identities of Jewish victims, the “other” victims, and representations the perpetrators and neo-Nazi characters in young adult literature. My examination of the constellation of identities targeted for elimination that make up what is commonly known as the Holocaust offers a critical look at the representational practices that often define and delimit recognizable and grievable lives themselves.

In terms of an overview this project’s themes, I want to offer a brief note on terminology. The term ‘Holocaust’ comes from Greek roots, and was made popular in contemporary culture by the Nobel Prize winning author Elie Wiesel (Hirsch and Kacandes 9). Etymologically, the term comes to us from two distinct roots: the Greek roots holos or whole and caustos or burnt. Holokaustoma then translates roughly to “totally consumed by fire” and the Hebrew word olah which denotes a burned sacrifice (Kokkola 4). Critics and authors, including Wiesel himself, are troubled by both the etymological implications of the term as well as the prevalence of its use in modern society. They feel with over-use comes a weakening of the power of the word itself (Kokkola 4). Another common term used to denote the destruction of European Jews during the era of the Third Reich is the Hebrew term shoah, meaning catastrophe. While commonly used in Israel and popular in many European countries, the term is also complicated by the lack of agency in the generalized “catastrophe” (Hirsch and Kacandes 9). The term catastrophe in English is often applied to natural disasters, destructive fires, or large-scale accidents. All of these uses of catastrophe lack human control of the destruction, and therefore do not have the implications of perpetrator and victim that are necessary when discussing mass murder. I have chosen to use the term Holocaust in my study because I feel it is the more familiar term used in
American culture, and particularly in fictional and critical material written for young adult readers. Finally, the term *genocide* denotes the “agency of the crime” but is generally deployed to indicate a variety of “systemic exterminations” and is therefore something of a concern to this study, but not to be used interchangeably for the specificity that the term *Holocaust* denotes (Hirsch and Kacandes 9).

Questions of representational strategy and whether the Holocaust is something that “should” be written about for young adults has been debated by various scholars. What I do here is a cultural-studies based approach which uses texts on the Holocaust as a case study to illustrate how tolerance and cosmopolitanism function. As background, I find it necessary to note some of the main debates that have been covered in young adult literature research up to this point. One of the earliest texts on Holocaust literature for children is Eric Kimmel’s 1977 article “Confronting the Ovens: The Holocaust and Juvenile Fiction” where he comes to the conclusion “mass murder is not a suitable topic for children” (qtd. Martin 315). However, as we have seen, suitable or not, there are literally hundreds of texts that have been created for a young adult audience. The Holocaust, so often referenced as something unimaginable or unspeakable, is actually one of the most written about, commented upon, and widely represented historical events in human history—and that proliferation extends to adolescent literature. While Theodor Adorno wrote after the war had ended that “to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric” (34)

---

3 This is actually a shortened version of the full quote, “The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today” (34). The entire quotation gives another layer of meaning to the expression as it calls into question not only poetry, but also cultural criticism.
that certainly has not stopped poets, survivors, and novelists from heavily covering the subject matter and directing those texts to a wide variety of audiences.

Lydia Kokkola, in her book *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature* asks readers to consider that “[o]ne of the main issues we should pose when considering Holocaust literature for young children is how the text takes responsibility for presenting the factuality of its content” (53). She is fiercely determined that there should be factual accuracy in texts for young adults, so that they have some sort of access to the truth of the Holocaust. She critiques texts such as *I Am David* (Holm, 1963) for not adhering to any sort of factual representation of David’s journey throughout war-torn Europe. Historically inaccurate narratives are, of course, problematic in terms of Baer’s position on how historical fiction functions to create memories for young readers. I concur that factual accuracy is an important element in texts for young adult readers, although I wish to avoid any sort of strict adherence to the “most truthful” or “authentic” experience of the events, as those terms are both loaded and impossible to ultimately define. In terms of this study, historical inaccuracy potentially could lead young readers to believe that the situation was not, in fact, as dire as it actually was. Problems of this sort may open the doors to Holocaust denial. Inaccurate representations may also become overly generalized portraits of how readers become “grouped together in our difference,” and therefore fail to recognize the Other in any significant manner (hooks 31).

In addition to Kokkola’s recent book on the Holocaust in children’s literature there are two more critical texts entirely devoted to the topic. Adrienne Kertzer’s *My Mother’s Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust* and Hamida Bosmajian’s *Sparing the Child: Grief and the Unspeakable in Youth Literature about Nazism and the Holocaust* are both excellent investigations of Holocaust literature for youth. Kertzer and Bosmajian’s texts differ from my
study partially due to the fact they are both texts that deal with the authors’ personal relationship to the events of the Holocaust. Kertzer’s title alone indicates her position: a scholar of children’s literature and the Holocaust who struggles to reconcile representational practices with her mother’s stories from her own persecution. Bosmajian’s book comes from the perspective of a non-Jewish German who lived in Germany from her birth in 1936 until her family immigrated to America in 1952 (Seven). Bosmajian’s family remained independent, never joining the Nazi party. As she came of age in America one of the issues that she, like so many Germans, struggled with was the sense of guilt over what her nation had done. Her sense was that of “belong[ing] to a nation of perpetrators” (qtd. Seven). Bosmajian also felt as though Germans “just can't escape that because now we're democratic” (qtd. Seven). Her work on Holocaust literature for youth is a way of working through the intellectual legacy of being a German in post-Nazi era society. All three of the full-length studies on children’s Holocaust literature are interesting and valuable contributions to the larger body of Holocaust representation scholarship.

Like Kokkola, I lack the personal connection that Kertzer and Bosmajian have. Unlike Kokkola, I come from an American background, bringing to the table some of the ways the Holocaust itself has been “Americanized” and incorporated into our public discourse and social institutions. Also unlike Kokkola, I do not do the sort of examination of “moral obligation” and the “general problems of combining historical faction with fictional devices” that characterize her rhetorical examination of the texts (Kokkola 3). The chapters of this project each seek to expand and describe the ways in which individual lives are represented, recognized, and often grieved. Throughout the five chapters I rely on the language of the criticisms of tolerance and toleration that I have briefly illustrated here, as well as an examination of how literature can help readers develop what I call cosmopolitan ethics—one that acknowledges difference in a
sophisticated manner. I encourage the use of literature to move beyond tolerance and instead promote the idea that writing can help readers engage with and appreciate difference. Holocaust literature then has the potential to challenge the problems with multicultural education that bell hooks points out in *Teaching to Transgress*.

**Chapter Overview**

Anna Galeotti’s point from *Toleration as Recognition*, regarding the inclusion of distinct identities and the need to publicly acknowledge difference is central to a cosmopolitan ethics. Her points inform my overall organizational structure, as I have chosen to align my chapters with various distinct identities. My first chapter, “Recognizing the Other in the Character of Anne Frank,” expands on the problems inherent in the notion of tolerance with a close look at the character of Anne Frank. I examine *Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl* and its uses in tolerance-based pedagogy. I also look at several additional texts for young adults that create fictional representations of Anne Frank to see how her legacy informs contemporary Holocaust fiction. One of the problems I identify in this chapter is how readers are often encouraged to see Frank as similar to themselves rather than different, which therefore limits any attempts to refigure existing systems of power and privilege. Frank is generally viewed as the Holocaust’s most famous victim, and by extension, the most famous example of European Jewish culture for young readers. In chapter two, “Jewish Lives, Vulnerable Lives,” I look towards a variety of representations of Jewish characters, many who often illustrate the specificities of being Jewish in a much clearer manner than Anne Frank. I also turn to children’s literature scholar Elizabeth Baer and her suggestion that young adult Holocaust literature creates a “new algorithm for evil” in the post-Holocaust world. For this to be the case, I argue, the texts must be explicit about how the Nazis exploited difference and used it to create lives that were not considered human at all.
Jewish lives were not the only lives considered unworthy of living by the Nazi regime and therefore targeted for elimination. Chapter three, “Recognizing all the Lives Unworthy of Living,” looks towards three distinct identities that are often still persecuted and viewed as decidedly abnormal. There are a limited sub-set of young adult texts on the Roma-Sinti (commonly known as Gypsies), the disabled, and the homosexual victims. The texts that highlight their persecution can ask readers to recognize the Other, but there are severe limitations in what is currently available, creating a forgotten set of lost lives. Without historically accurate and sophisticated narratives regarding the Roma-Sinti, the disabled, and the gay victims of the Nazi era the complete story of the Holocaust remains untold and important voices are potentially silenced. My analysis of the fiction is coupled with examples of the troubling ongoing poor treatment of members of these groups both in America and Europe.

Beyond looking at the victims of the Nazis, it is important to also look at those that hold the power and privilege. In chapter four, “Good Nazis and Germans as Victims,” I discuss the importance of creating a set of German characters that are not merely a monolithically evil group. This chapter engages with one of the most central aspects of Holocaust scholarship as it discusses the debates regarding the overall attitudes of the “average German” towards the genocidal policies of Nazi leadership. I take into account Daniel Goldhagen’s version of the Germans as universally “willing executioners” as well as Christopher Browning’s argument that the population was really merely a set of what he calls “ordinary men.” Texts for young adults that choose to view Germans, even Nazis, as ordinary men must do so with an intense regard for historical accuracy, otherwise it is too easy to create fundamental misunderstandings and even plant the seeds of Holocaust denial. The final chapter, “Neo-Nazi Representation and Values Worth Living By,” discusses how neo-Nazi characters fail to see the Other as human, generally
with violent results. Ultimately, neo-Nazis are the perfect example of how the mantra of tolerance, "live and let live," fails. If we ascribe to "live and let live" as a moral philosophy, then one must also tolerate neo-Nazism and hatred in ways that only reinscribe troubling systems of power and privilege. I argue instead that as a society we must be able to argue for a shared cosmopolitan ethics that is not afraid to label some values as not worth living by, such as those held by contemporary white supremacists and neo-Nazis.

I complete this project with a close examination of a wide variety of texts on young adult Holocaust literature. I use more than thirty books that cover the last sixty years of publications for adolescent readers, striving to represent the most relevant examples from each text in terms of discrete identities and how readers may engage with the Other. Due to the scope of the project, I have included brief plot details and explanations but largely hope that the individual passages I analyze from the featured texts will illustrate my points better than an extensive explanation of each separate novel. Finally, it is central to recognize that what Bosmajian points out in *Sparing the Child* is no doubt true:

Most narratives about the Holocaust and Nazism are indeed read in school, ostensibly to raise consciousness, conscience, and empathy the young reader. It is clear, however, that no one book is likely to have made a young reader a life-long witness to the Shoah perpetrated by Nazi Germany. (241-242).

There is no one singular book that can explain the Holocaust to a young adult. In fact, according to many Holocaust scholars, there is no explanation to be had at all as the events of the Nazi era defy reason itself. And yet, even if there is no possible explanation or facile lesson to be learned, there must be a way to evaluate and interpret the hundreds of texts for young adults on the topic. I hope this project successfully opens some new possibilities for viewing the functions of young
adult Holocaust literature and larger cultural notions of difference and diversity that go beyond
the “colonizing fantasy” of which bell hooks was so rightly critical (31).
CHAPTER I: RECOGNIZING THE OTHER IN THE CHARACTER OF ANNE FRANK

And I know they buried her body with others
   Her sister and mother and 500 families
And will she remember me 50 years later
I wished I could save her in some sort of time machine
   --Neutral Milk Hotel, “Oh, Comely”

The very fact that we want to tell children stories about the Holocaust suggests that we think there is a lesson to be taught. But what is the lesson we think they will learn?—Adrienne Kertzer

Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl has had a pervasive and lasting influence on American culture and one that is significant to understanding the Holocaust and the teaching of tolerance and compassion. Scholars including Adrienne Kertzer and Pascale Bos discuss the messages that educators hope texts like the Diary impart to students about complex topics such as prejudice, personal choice, responsibility, and toleration. These ideals are integrally tied to lessons about compassion which is a concept, like tolerance and toleration, that requires further unpacking. Lauren Berlant’s idea that compassion “implies a social relation between spectators and sufferers” also points to how the social relation often fails to illustrate “what responses should be desired and when private responses are not only insufficient but a part of the practice of injustice” (1, 9). Anne Frank’s Diary is an excellent text to examine in order to see how private responses are problematic in a variety of ways that often reinforce systems of power and privilege that allocate recognition differently. The Diary’s purported messages are also appropriated and translated into other popular culture artifacts, and these texts influenced by Frank’s work are worth a close assessment. Through a close evaluation it is possible to gain insight into the pitfalls of relying so heavily on a single young girl as the universal representative of persecution. In various curricula, Frank is often applied as an example of “all the injustices in the world” (Bos 349). Using her as a universal example tends to elide the specifics of her life
(and death) as well as allay the horrific elements of the Holocaust. In this chapter, my critical reading of the *Diary, Postcards from No Man’s Land*, and *Anne Frank and Me* evaluates and highlights the limitations of liberal multiculturalism and the notions of tolerance itself by examining the dangers inherent in creating one figure to stand in for Holocaust victims in their entirety.

Since its publication in 1947, and appearance in the United States in 1952, there have been multiple dramatic adaptations of the story to television, stage, and film (Prose 20-21). The *Diary* has been the obsession of multiple artists including author Myer Levin’s fanatical attempts to publicize the diary which culminated in his rejected Broadway adaptation.¹ Musicians such as Jeff Magnum’s band Neutral Milk Hotel and their 1998 album *Aeroplane Over the Sea* feature lyrics that remind listeners of some of the more poignant aspects of Frank’s story, particularly her untimely death as he expresses his desire to save her “in some sort of time machine.”² Artists like Levin and Magnum are two examples among many who use Frank to inspire their work. In terms of adolescent literature, there are additional authors who have been inspired by Frank and have used that inspiration to incorporate Frank herself as a character in their novels. Aidan Chamber’s *Postcards from No Man’s Land* and Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottesfeld’s *Anne Frank and Me* are two examples of such texts. Here, I look at the *Diary* itself as well as *Postcards from No Man’s Land* and *Anne Frank and Me* in order to illustrate the downside of a

¹ Levin’s subsequent lawsuit over who had rights to Anne’s diary for stage adaptation purposes is one of the primary tactics that Holocaust deniers use in order to discredit Anne’s diary as a fraud (Prose 211).

² For a recent complete history of the work’s publication and reception, see Prose, Francine. *Anne Frank: the Book, the Life, the Afterlife*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009.
facile promotion of tolerance and compassion that never asks readers to engage with the notion of difference.

For a critic, the evaluation of *Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl* includes a variety of challenges. Harold Bloom sums up the question of looking at the work as one open to literary criticism by claiming “*this* diary is emblematic of hundreds of thousands of murdered children” and therefore “criticism is irrelevant” (qtd. Prose 8). Bloom finds that the circumstances of the Holocaust and Frank’s death impact his ability to criticize the work itself. However, Frank’s diary is such a fundamental text, and so influential on many readers’ understanding of the Holocaust at large, it deserves a close critical evaluation. The *Diary* “is used in almost all courses (and course sections) dealing with the Holocaust on the elementary and secondary school levels” (Bos 348). It is the most widely anthologized piece of literature, of any sort, for young adult readers in the United States which makes Frank “Hitler’s most famous victim” (Culbertson 63). Despite Bloom’s hesitation to critically evaluate Frank the murdered child, the very fact of the prevalence of her diary in popular culture calls for critical analysis.

**Recognition, Grief, and the Problems with Tolerance**

There are two ideas that are central to my analysis in this project. The first is tied to the hope that there is a potential transformative power in narratives about the Holocaust. As I highlighted in the introduction, this is a very cosmopolitan argument revolving around the idea that “evaluating stories together is one of the central human ways of learning to align our responses to the world” (Appiah 29). However, the texts that are successful in aligning our responses and responsibilities in the face of persecution are those that ask students to recognize and engage with difference. This notion of the joint importance of recognizability and difference

---

3 There were possibly 1.5 million children killed in the Holocaust, a number that dwarfs Bloom’s statement.
is vital to understanding my criticisms of the *Diary* in this chapter. Judith Butler has been theorizing how one can see and recognize the “Other” in texts including *Undoing Gender*, *Precarious Life*, and *Frames of War*, all projects that seek to motivate new understandings of what it means to be human.⁴ I find her language particularly compelling for explaining the basic vocabulary this project often relies on. Butler tries to expand the idea of human life and humanity to ensure that populations who are traditionally unseen receive the recognition that they too deserve. Because her theory of recognizability is also often connected to the idea of what qualifies as a human and therefore grievable life, it is well suited to a set of texts that relies heavily on the pathos of character’s deaths to draw in readers.

What, then, do the terms recognizable and grievable mean? For Butler they are inseparable because “when we undergo [loss], something about who we are is revealed” (*PL* 22). In fact, what is often revealed is how much one’s relationship with others constitutes the self. In this way grief “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility” (*PL* 22). Once one experiences loss, the ties between self and “Other” are highlighted through the process of grief. Instead of viewing grieving as a private process, Butler reminds readers that recognizing the relationship between self and “Other” has the power to spur ideas of ethical responsibility for others. As individuals are “undone” by each other, the interconnected nature of the human experience is highlighted (*PL* 23). Unrecognized lives create unknown and perhaps unknowable “Others” in ways that lead to discrimination, oppression, and the potential for violence. For Butler, we can work to create a

---

⁴ Hereafter abbreviated in parenthetical citations as *Undoing Gender: UG*, *Precarious Life: PL*, and *Frames of War: FoW*. 
more visible “Other” through the process of recognizing the shared sense of loss that all humans experience. This step, ideally, will help expand conceptions of what it means to be human, and what one’s responsibility is as a member of a dependent global community. However, a young adult audience may not have experienced the kind of loss that Butler relies on for her theories. This is why the recognizability and grievability of characters in adolescent fiction is so important.

Young adult Holocaust texts have the potential to expose readers to a narrative-based loss. However, I argue if that loss is tied too closely to self-identification, the grieving process between self and other is never attained. This is one problem with the Diary itself as it ends with a loss that is no loss as of yet, an unfinished book rather than a life that has ended. While the editors inform readers of the chain of events after Frank’s capture, the informative language fails to evoke the same kind of emotion that Frank’s prose itself does. Readers learn that Anne Frank “must have died in late February or early March” and “the bodies of both [Margot Frank and Anne Frank] were probably dumped in Bergen-Belsen’s mass graves,” but they never learn these facts through the words of Frank herself, the character who readers of the Diary have so strongly identified with (340). Frank’s prose and its personal, confessional style are truncated and readers are left to interpret her loss without ever having to identify with the experiences of deportation and the camps themselves. Frank’s loss is then positioned as an afterward to her experience in hiding, making the text itself more a book about coping with the difficulties of being in hiding than a book about the events that characterize the Holocaust itself.

As I illustrate shortly, texts like the Diary that put forth characters who are “just like me” never illustrate how we are undone by each other. Recognition is a process that is “engaged when subject and “Other” understand themselves to be reflected in one another, but where this reflection does not result in a collapse of one into the Other” (Butler, UG, 131-132). Butler
claims here that recognition of the “Other” must not be synonymous with consumption and exploitation of the “Other.” She asks that readers see how there are aspects of shared humanity, often recognized through our shared experience of loss, but reminds us that “collaps[ing] one into the Other” limits understanding of the broader scope of the many and varied categories of human (UG, 132). Narratives that elide difference in favor of personal identification collapse subject/”Other” distinctions, creating an inability to recognize those subject positions that expand one’s knowledge of the human itself. This notion is also deeply tied to what I have defined as a “cosmopolitan imagination,” an expansion of the work of sociologist Gerard Delanty and philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah. One central tenet of a cosmopolitan imagination is that it asks us to consider how artistic or literary texts can “reveal to us values we had not previously recognized or undermine our commitment to values that we had settled into” (Appiah 30). However, if engagement with the “Other” is limited to narratives that only ask readers to identify their similarities with the “Other,” the possibility of engaging with values not previously recognized is seriously hampered. Texts that fail to represent a tangible loss also considerably limit the notion of a cosmopolitan imagination, one that can help readers expand, rather than foreclose the understandings of who counts as human. When a cosmopolitan imagination is limited, the “ongoing process of self-constitution through the continuous opening up of new perspectives in light of the encounter with the Other” is restricted as well (Delanty 13). Both recognizability and grievability are terms central to understanding some of the failings in creating an iconic Holocaust victim like Frank. These two concepts are the theoretical foundations which support my larger criticism of the idealization of tolerance and toleration.

The second idea underpinning my analysis has to do with restrictive norms and the concept of tolerance. Norms themselves regulate recognizability and limit one’s ability to
recognize the “Other.” Norms by their very nature are restrictive, as they “create unity only through a strategy of exclusion” (Butler, *UG*, 206). Without a binary structure, the meaning of norms and “normal” itself is called into question. The problem in terms of the human is that when one is labeled abnormal, it is easy to get relegated to a category of less than human. This, in turn, calls into question the grievability of a life—is a life that is not quite human worthy at all? This is one of the primary ways that large scale persecution happens in general, and the Nazis were experts at creating categories of life that were either not-quite human or, in the case of the Jews, not considered human at all. So, if we are defining human recognition as essentially connected to recognition of mutual loss, then one can see the problem with creating an exclusionary system of norms. Systems of this sort also limit the cosmopolitan imagination considerably as boundaries are drawn around who is and is not able to be understood as human. Butler realizes the difficulties these limits place on ethics:

> The sphere of the humanly intelligible is circumscribed, and this circumscription is consequential for any ethics and any conception of social transformation. […] If we take the field of the human for granted, then we fail to think critically—and ethically—about the consequential ways that the human is being produced, reproduced, deproduced. (*UG*, 222)

It is incredibly important not to take the “field of the human for granted” when looking at young adult literature. The differences that have allowed populations to be labeled abnormal should be made clear to readers in order to trouble the very categories of normal and abnormal themselves.

Part of challenging the normal/abnormal binary must happen through confronting the idealization of tolerance and toleration. Tolerance is often described as an attitude of “live and let live,” but the ways in which this equation supports a normal/abnormal binary is rarely
questioned (McKinnon 3, Brown 184). Societally, we rarely discuss that the precondition for tolerance is dislike or mistrust. There is no real need to promote an attitude of live and let live unless one, for whatever reason, is compelled to not to let someone live. The idea of tolerance presumes that the first impulse on the part of the “normal” is to destroy the “abnormal.” In this way tolerance is linked to holding a social position defined by the power and privilege of seeming “normal.” Liberal conceptions of justice rely on the idea that individuals will refrain from exercising their power over those they dislike, to turn the other cheek and maintain a status quo. However, one is never asked to expand notions of the human when turning the other cheek, in fact, turning away from the “Other” is a practice that excludes looking, that denies recognition. Being tolerant, then, becomes a strange liminal area that never emphasizes the interconnected nature of populations. Without that recognition of mutual humanity there is no real position for a transformative ethics that offers direct guidance when facing power structures that persecute the “Other” based on a variety of prejudices. So while educational and cultural institutions are clearly drawn to a character like Frank, shown by how often her diary is taught in middle and high schools, her Diary has significant limitations to improving ethical responses in times of crisis.

Anne Frank as Teaching Tool

Kertzer, Bos, and Culbertson all illustrate how educational and cultural institutions often hope that having young adults read texts like Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl will pass along messages regarding the dangers of prejudice and the benefits of tolerance. These two goals have, in part, been tied so closely to the Diary because of Franks father, Otto. His purpose for the Diary, its translations, the Broadway play, and the Hollywood films were all part of his project to “ensur[e] people not be judged and excluded on the basis of their color or race or
religion” (Prose 189). Otto Frank tirelessly promoted the *Diary* as a document that would bridge ideological gaps. As he did this, he pushed for the creation of a universally likeable character, editing out passages where Frank felt particularly vehement dislike towards her mother and toning down her criticisms of her fellow annex-mates. Keeping in mind that Otto was Frank’s much beloved father, the editing decisions are understandable. He edited “guided by the instincts of a bereaved father” and wanted to put the best version of Frank possible into the hands of readers (Prose 75). However, his desires to create a character that bridged all ideological gaps and was universally liked had negative aspects as well. He writes that Frank’s diary is neither a “warbook” nor a “Jewish book” although the war and their religion must be considered essential background information (Prose 189). Otto Frank’s goals for the *Diary* and Frank’s words live on in the many museums and exhibits devoted to her, as well as the continued connection between her text and tolerance initiatives.

Frank’s diary is promoted in American educational systems in part by the “Teaching Tolerance” initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center.\(^5\) They sell a set of materials that promises to “offer a compelling lesson of the Holocaust and one girl's indomitable spirit” (“Anne Frank House”). In 2009, the Anne Frank Center in SoHo set its goals to focus “more generally on the theme of tolerance” and hopes to plant saplings from outside of Frank’s Amsterdam hiding place “as a symbol of the growth of tolerance” (Dunlap). The United Nations uses Frank’s *Diary*

\(^5\) The Southern Poverty Law Center was founded in 1971 by civil rights lawyers Morris Dees and Joseph Levin Jr. Their mission is “dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society” (“Who We Are”). While I am critical of the “Teaching Tolerance” initiative, the larger SPLC organization consistently does valuable and interesting work on hate groups, constitutional attacks, bullying, and other serious issues. I admire their larger mission, but want to complicate the goal of tolerance and Anne Frank’s place within that structure.
as the central text in its unit on “tolerance and respect for dignity and identity” where one of the stated goals is to “Demonstrate tolerance for differences” (“Peace Education”). The United Nations also declared 1995 “International Year of Tolerance” to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Frank’s death (Covil and Suijk). In a press release from the Anne Frank Center USA, directors Covil and Suijk speak of the need to “redefine tolerance” and that the problem with tolerance is that, “Only those in a weaker position enjoy the ‘pleasure’ of being tolerated. The notion is quite offensive to those who want to be considered ‘equal’” (“Anne Frank’s Legacy”). While this goal was publicly stated fifteen years ago, the recent criticism on tolerance and toleration points towards how the redefinition project has failed, and that tolerance remains rooted in dominant/subordinate roles.\(^6\) While Covil and Suijk were illustrating the problems with simplistic understandings of tolerance, that message has been slow to catch on with other institutions that use the *Diary* and other Holocaust texts at tolerance tools.

The *Diary*, as well as the texts that include Frank as a fictional character, highlight the problem central to the notion of tolerance itself—none of the books ask readers to engage with difference in a sustained manner. As I illustrate in this chapter, the *Diary, Postcards from No Man’s Land* and *Anne Frank and Me* all define and delimit the experiences of the Holocaust in a manner that rarely explains to readers the specificities of the victims or the reasons they were targeted for elimination by the Nazis. This, in turn, limits one’s understanding of the

vulnerability of Jewish lives as grievable lives. Because Frank is so often universalized the
*Diary* leaves behind considerations of “level[s] at which the normative operates, namely, through
norms that produce the idea of the human who is worthy of recognition and representation at all.
… we fail to understand the differential of power at work that distinguishes between those
subjects who will be eligible for recognition and those who will not” (Butler 138). All too often
power structures still embrace what Audre Lorde called “the mythical norm,” that she defines as
“white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” (704). As I argue
here, tolerance is always linked to being in a privileged social position. This position is also one
that is deeply connected to normative power structures illustrated by the fact that it is often an
exercise in the restraint of power which characterizes toleration. It is all too easy for an average
American reader to recognize a largely secular, young, well educated, middle-class girl as
“human” in ways that never investigate why the Nazis labeled the Jews as unworthy of both
recognition as human and life itself.

Toleration also often revolves around discourses of normativity that hide various
inequalities, and it is for this reason texts that attempt to emphasize a global responsibility should
ask readers to engage with and appreciate difference, not to reinforce “universal” norms. There
is much more to be accomplished when creating guidelines for ethical behavior in the face of
prejudice and injustice. Covil and Sujik of the Anne Frank Center are able to effectively tie the
problems with tolerance back to a historical discussion of the circumstances that led to Frank’s
death itself:

The Jewish people were once tolerated in Germany throughout the early 1900s.
Tolerance, as a social ideal, did not save the lives or civil liberties of over six million
Jews in Europe. Tolerance did not spare the lives of over half the European Roma
(Gypsy) population or over 70,000 people with mental or physical handicaps. Tolerance was a hollow promise to the 5,000 Jehovah's Witnesses or the 10,000 homosexual men imprisoned by the Nazi regime. Tens of thousands of other political or religious prisoners who were executed by the Nazis were not saved by the tolerance extended to them by cosmopolitan Europe in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Covil and Sujik’s dismal list of lost lives is a reminder for the potential dangers when tolerance breaks down. As the Nazis created a power structure that discouraged a “live and let live” attitude, those viewed as abnormal and not-quite human were targeted for elimination. Nazi ideology also connected the “abnormal” lives to science, creating a system of logic where difference was innate and biological, and therefore never possible to overcome by any means other than elimination. The idea that tolerance is an effective deterrent to prejudice and persecution is refuted by the twisted logic of genocide itself, particularly when coupled with science in ways that excuse hatred. An effective and transformative ethics would go beyond this encouragement of a “live and let live” attitude to something that offers much more practical guidance for how to act in times of crisis. This would include ways to acknowledge the interconnected nature of all subjects in ways that do more than reinforce existing norms. Even a very cursory examination shows how texts like the *Diary* are undeniably connected to teaching tolerance initiatives. However, my analysis of her book and the fictional texts that use Frank as a character stress the importance of moving beyond Frank the iconic victim.
Anne Frank the Icon

*Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl* is known as the nearly quintessential Holocaust text. Pascale Bos notes the diary is used in most courses in both elementary and secondary schools for units on Holocaust education (348). In fact, there is speculation that after the Bible, the *Diary* is the most widely read book in the world—making it one of the primary access points for the understanding of the Holocaust, European Jewish culture, and by extension the lessons of toleration and personal responsibility that are so often associated with reading stories dealing with this particular historical event (Bos 348). Frank’s skill as a writer and expressions of individuality are what draw readers to her again and again. Francine Prose supports the idea of using Frank as a symbol for all the millions of deaths, because “her individuality is the reason—in some cases the only reason—students everywhere are taught about the Holocaust” (Prose 171). Frank brings the events of the Holocaust back to an accessible level where the horrors that characterized the Holocaust are always at arm’s length.

Her skill as a writer and introspective nature allow readers access to feelings of being “just like” Frank. This makes it incredibly easy for readers to identify with Frank the individual. One of the most striking examples of this is the case of twelve-year-old Cara Weiss, who read the *Diary* in the late 1950s, and was so attached to Anne Frank that she began a more than twenty year correspondence with Otto Frank. Weiss’s letters illustrate the strength of her imaginary bond with Frank, “[the *Diary*] spoke to me and my dilemmas, my anxieties, my secret passions. I identified so strongly with this eloquent girl of my own age, that I now think I sort of

---

7 The version of the *Diary* I use here is the “definitive edition” that includes pages of the *Diary* initially left out by Otto Frank, as well as recently discovered and verified pages.

8 Their documented correspondence is published in the 1995 book *Love, Otto.*
became her in my own mind” (qtd. Ozick 79). Weiss’ personal identification is a perfect example of the problem of recognition and difference that I discussed earlier in the chapter. Because Weiss’ reading is a process of becoming Frank, the eventual loss of Frank is tied too closely to self-identification. Jewish American writer Cynthia Ozick takes this identification to task in her 1997 article “Who Owns Anne Frank?” The affinity that Weiss feels “can be duplicated by the thousand” and this is problematic for Ozick because “the young who are encouraged to read the diary cannot always be expected to feel the difference between the mimicry and the threat” (80). While Weiss “became” Frank in her mind, one assumes that she became the philosophical and empathetic girl, not the Holocaust victim. Embracing Frank’s death would do very little to “help me through my teens with a sense of inner focus” (Weiss, qtd. Prose 172).

Elaine Cuthbertson critiques the Diary as “perfectly acceptable adolescent fare” as it covers “Anne’s teen troubles” with “a smattering of philosophy about the world” (64). Throughout the book one sees common elements of teen life in terms of anxiety about growing up, restlessness and frustration with family, and discovery of early sexual desires. Passages such as, “I fall asleep with the strange feeling of wanting to be different from what I am or being different from what I want to be, or perhaps of behaving differently from what I am or want to be” and “I’m in a state of utter confusion, I don’t know what to read, what to write, what to do. I only know I am longing for something” illustrate the smatterings of philosophy and adolescent longings that pepper the book (72, 187). With all of these commonalities to identify with, it is easy for readers to forget their specific differences from Frank. To cleave too closely to the notion that Frank is just like any adolescent, and therefore a universalized figure, leaves out the notion that while in many ways she is “just like us,” she’s also inseparable from a particular set
of circumstances that are intricately connected to a historical moment and therefore should not be
taken as the universal example of all suffering and prejudice.

Frank’s experiences and popularity have brought out a variety concerns from scholars
who study Holocaust representation. While Frank’s *Diary* is central to so much Holocaust
education, a genuine concern of mine is that one can fail to recognize the “Other” after reading
the text. If recognition of the “Other” and a corresponding ethical response are the goals of
literary identification with Holocaust characters, to have a central text that only asks for self-
identification is deeply problematic. Cara Weiss, in her letters to Otto Frank, fondly
remembered Anne Frank’s skill and ability to express her adolescent desires and concerns in
ways that clearly helped Weiss through her difficult teen years. However, the concerns
regarding Holocaust education can be summed up, in part by Kertzer’s point: “scholars are
disturbed by the way that [Anne Frank’s] voice has come to speak some essential truth about the
Holocaust, a truth that appears not only misleadingly hopeful but for that very reason is
acceptable classroom material” (112). This notion of Frank’s diary as being misleadingly
hopeful is reinforced by a 2007 study on critical literacy and Anne Frank from the *Journal of
Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. The authors found that students liked to think of Frank as
“hopeful, in love, frolicking, and—perhaps most surprising—still alive” (Spector and Jones 36).
In fact, after being confronted with imagery of deportations and concentration camps, the
students felt in some way cheated, commenting that it was “ruined” because they could no longer
believe “any human could go through that and still remain optimistic” (44). Seeing how the
*Diary’s* message can be ruined by actual Holocaust imagery again highlights the ways in which
Frank creates a document that promotes self-identification. The way the students in the Spector
and Jones study responded to the *Diary* illustrates how they identify with Frank the living teenager, and are unable to see or recognize Frank the murdered victim.

The *Diary*’s misleadingly hopeful message comes packaged in the most famous line from the *Diary*, “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart” (332). Yet this often quoted and optimistic passage that is used to sum up the philosophies of Anne Frank has several problems: one, the “everything” that the text is so far “in spite of” has nothing to do with her capture; deportation to Westerbork, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Bergen-Belsen; the death of her family and fellow annex members; and her own eventual death from illness and starvation just prior to the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. As critics like Culbertson have pointed out, her forgiveness “before the fact” of her experience of the events that in fact typify the Holocaust itself (detainment, deportation on crowded trains, the camps, and the overall terror of the Nazi regime) “tends to diminish the true suffering of and consequences for those who were victims” (Culbertson 68). While Frank’s diary is an excellent text for discussing the dynamics of being in hiding, life writing and the development of a writer, critical literacy practices, and even gender, the facile attention by popular reception to forgiveness diminishes the actual events and experiences that characterize the Holocaust itself. This in turn can reinforce a message of “turning the other cheek” rather than acting as a guide for action in times of crisis or outbursts of hatred.

The second problem with the hyper-focus on Frank’s belief of the essential goodness of humanity ignores the very next line in the *Diary*: “It’s utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering, and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a

---

9 This phrase is largely so famous because of the Goodrich and Hackett Broadway adaptation and the following film, which heavily emphasize this particular line.
wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions” (332). The deep ethical dilemma that Frank highlights is one that all too often is overlooked when placing the emphasis on her optimism. Frank feels the suffering of millions from her attic hideaway as she recognizes the loss of friends and neighbors and listens intently to any broadcasts she can get from the BBC. For readers, however, the compassionate response may not be towards the suffering of these millions of individuals but only for Frank herself. This creates a series of problems involving the functions of compassion. As Berlant asks, “When we want to rescue X, are we thinking of rescuing everyone like X, or is it a singular case that we see? When a multitude is symbolized by an individual case, how can we keep from being overwhelmed by the necessary scale that an ethical response would take?” (6). The hyper-focus on Frank as Holocaust victim allows for a very limited response, as readers may want to rescue Frank, but are somehow assured that human nature itself will be the savior in this situation.

While Frank feels the suffering of millions, her return to optimism about humanity encourages the interpretation that if you merely feel compassionate any sort of ethical responsibility is taken care of. Frank immediately turns her thoughts back to the optimistic:

> And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquility will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I’ll be able to realize them!” (332)

To read only the “people are truly good at heart” is to ignore the fact that Frank’s life was destroyed by that approaching thunder and while she may have had a few more months to hold onto her ideals, it really is chaos, suffering, and death that will characterize nearly the rest of her life after this passage was written in July of 1944.
One of the primary issues with using Frank’s book as a text that teaches tolerance is the tendency to universalize rather than particularize the events and the character herself. As Bos points out,

In middle and high school curricula, the Frank text is often used precisely for its potential to serve as a universal example of victimization as the result of racism. While the goal may be to teach about the Holocaust specifically, the larger goal is to have young students understand racial (and other forms of) discrimination, its roots, and its ultimate consequences (mass murder) and to educate them to be vigilant and be aware of personal choice and responsibility. (349-350)

Frank becomes the symbol for all child Holocaust victims in this scenario, an empathetic stand-in for one and a half million diverse lives. In generalizing Frank as the quintessential victim however, the danger lies in the potential to reinforce privilege and existing norms as we look at the optimistic Frank as a universal victim instead of a Jewish victim of a particular and deadly series of events. When Frank is read as “just like me” the normal/abnormal binary is never troubled, and the question of whose lives are liveable and grievable is elided.

The analytical framework of this chapter considers how engagement with literary individuals can promote a move beyond the universalizing tendencies of the concept of tolerance into a much more nuanced examination of how the recognition of vulnerable subjects is so often limited to existing norms. This is useful to consider in relation to Anne Frank as the primary example of a universalized Holocaust victim. In Butler’s meditations on the importance of creating lives that are recognized as grievable and based upon the precarious and interconnected nature of global citizenship, she notes that, “Part of the very problem of contemporary political life is that not everyone counts as a subject. Multiculturalism tends to presuppose already
constituted communities, already established subjects, when what is at stake are communities not quite recognized as such, subjects who are living, but not yet regarded as ‘lives’” (32). Frank’s middle-class, rather spoiled childhood and her loving heteronormative family are perfect examples of already constituted communities that Americans are trained to recognize from hundreds, if not thousands, of media artifacts we consume throughout our childhoods. While the Nazis themselves certainly did not recognize Jewish citizens as “lives,” the normative aspects of Frank’s life make it easy for subsequent readers to do so, and therefore universalizes her experiences.

While the Frank family celebrates some Jewish holidays and Frank speaks about her relationship with God in the Diary, the Frank family lives a largely secular life. There is no extensive mention of particulars of the Jewish community or customs, or how being in hiding potentially compromises one’s religious doctrine. The family celebrates both Hanukkah and St. Nicholas’ Day, and while Frank refers to lighting the candles and “sing[ing] the song,” she also writes that “St. Nicholas’ Day on Saturday was much more fun” as gifts from the outside appear and poems are exchanged (73). This is not to say that we should criticize Frank for being who she was: a largely secular, middle-class, young Jewish woman. However, one can see the problematic nature of creating an iconic Jewish victim out of someone who gives very few glimpses into the actual difference of Jewish culture. There are a variety of texts that are able to do this in a more direct manner, which I turn to in chapter two. While there are benefits to the identification that tells readers “Anne was just like me,” there are also considerable detriments in

---

10 One can contrast the Diary to other books about being in hiding in the Netherlands in World War II, such as those by Ida Vos and Johanna Reiss. In these books kids deal with issues like the first time they are expected to break kosher tradition, or consume food explicitly forbidden by their religion like pork.
that it flattens difference and can create a falsely homogenized picture of cultural diversity, one that serves to uphold privileged norms.

Anne Frank the Beloved

Some of the detriments with the “just like me” identification are illustrated in other texts that use Frank as a character. The final two texts I cover in this chapter, Postcards from No Man’s Land and Anne Frank and Me, are useful in examining several problems with using Frank as the platonic Holocaust victim. The heavy use of Frank, both in terms of her diary and as a character, only serves to continue creating an individual who represents one particular normative ideal of victimhood. As this happens, it excludes various other categories from consideration including more devout Jews, the disabled, the Roma-Sinti, and the homosexuals. This, in turn, allows for the creation of a set of norms that continue to allocate recognition differently. Here, I will illustrate how these problems come to light in Aiden Chamber’s 1999 novel, Postcards from No Man’s Land.\footnote{British writer Aidan Chambers’ novel was well received in the United States, receiving the Michael Printz award for young adult literature from the American Library Association, as well as being voted an ALA best book for young adults.} This novel is the perfect example of how identification with Frank is so often really identification with the self in ways that fail to expand readers’ notion of the broader scope of what it means to be human. The basic plot revolves around the main character Jacob’s trip to Amsterdam to visit a family that had cared for his grandfather (a British soldier) during WWII. He meets new family members that he was formerly unaware of, makes friends with an older Dutch woman, gets to know members of the gay community in Amsterdam, and meets his eventual girlfriend and plans a new life in the city with her.
Early in the book, readers learn that Jacob is close to obsessed with Frank, underlining and memorizing passages from her diary, using the book to pry himself out of fits of depression, and confessing, “I think I’m in love with Anne herself” (42). Jacob idealizes Frank as a courageous optimist and his experience of being “in love” highlights Frank as an individual, not as a member of a vulnerable community. Jacob comes to believe that Frank is “his” in some special way, giving him ownership over Frank through his close identification with her.\(^\text{12}\)

Jacob’s ownership of Frank’s experience leads him to some conclusions about what prejudice means; however, his conclusions are often problematic. His identification and ownership of Frank and her experiences have also led him to have a near breakdown after visiting “the house behind,”\(^\text{13}\) now a part of the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam. Chambers illustrates how Jacob’s ownership of Frank is disrupted as he explains his visit to a friend. After Jacob sees the empty rooms with only the pictures of film stars Frank had stuck next to her bed remaining he explains:

“I started to go to pieces. All those times I had read the diary. Everything it meant to me. Especially those parts I’d marked because they were so important. Anne talking to me. Saying what was in my head. Speaking my own thoughts and feelings. And then, these bare rooms, and all these people coming between me and Anne. And they thinking about her just like I was thinking about her [sic].” (298)

\(^{12}\) For more on this concept of owning Anne Frank, see Ozick, Cynthia. ""Who Owns Anne Frank?"" *The New Yorker* 6 Oct. 1997: 75-87.

\(^{13}\) Anne referred to the book she hoped to publish on their experiences of being in hiding as *Het Achterhuis* or “the house behind,” in acknowledgement of the nature of their hiding place behind the spice shop owned by her father.
Confronted with the truth of the plethora of readers who identified with Frank, Jacob was unable to share her, and fled abruptly from the Museum. He had so strongly identified with Frank he was unable to acknowledge others’ similar experiences and perhaps see a larger community that comes together through Frank’s work. He was also blind to the other aspects of the museum that deal with the specifics of the Holocaust and completely ignores the need to face Frank’s death in addition to loving her life.  

Jacob has considerable trouble in the museum as he realizes that he does not have a monopoly on Frank herself. However, because Jacob’s character seems so unwilling to engage with Frank in a historical context, he may lead readers to problematic conclusions about the Nazis themselves. Frank’s experience and understanding of Nazi behavior and actions is largely mediated through her parents and the BBC broadcasts they can access while in hiding. While Frank writes multiple times in her diary about her understanding of the larger persecution of European Jews, these experiences are all second and third hand. One example of her mediated understanding comes early in the *Diary*,

Today I have nothing but dismal and depressing news to report. Our many Jewish friends and acquaintances are being taken away in droves. The Gestapo is treating them very roughly and transporting them in cattle-trucks to Westerbork, the big camp in Drenthe to which they’re sending all the Jews. … We assume most of them are being murdered.

---

14 The Anne Frank House runs various temporary exhibits on human rights that seek to draw connections between Anne’s experiences and contemporary society and highlight global responsibility in many ways.

15 Historical accuracy in terms of Dutch behavior during WWII is also compromised by focusing so intently on the *Diary*. While it creates a picture of the Dutch as the quintessential Holocaust rescuers, 82% of the Dutch Jewish population was deported, and 75% of the population died. This is the highest death rate of any Western European nation (Bos 353).
The English radio says they’re being gassed. Perhaps that’s the quickest way to die. (53-54)

While other books for adolescents directly engage with Nazi behavior and characters, Frank’s diary creates a vague picture of the overall scope of the Nazi terror apparatus. Even her most chilling passages, like the one above, show a limited understanding of the experience of those Jews who have been taken away. The aside “perhaps that’s the quickest way to die” leaves out the most terrifying aspect of the Nazi death camps: this was the quickest and most efficient way to kill, not the quickest way to die. Certainly, Frank is only a young girl, and there is no real expectation that she could have or should have known about the full picture of Nazi atrocities. However, Jacob could and should know better. Instead of looking at a wider history of WWII and the Nazi persecution of the Jews, Jacob sticks to reading and re-reading the diary obsessively. He fails to expand his understanding of the specifics of WWII in favor of his personal identification with Frank. Jacob’s understanding of Nazism, culled from Frank’s diary, revolves around a generalized notion of racism, one that speaks to the universalizing impulse that so often joins the consumption of Frank’s diary without supplemental materials.

In a conversation at a café with an older woman, Alma, who has rescued Jacob after he has been robbed, the subject turns to Frank’s words. He recites a passage from memory to Alma about youth and idealism:

Older people have formed their opinions about everything, and don’t waver before they act. It’s twice as hard for us young ones to hold our ground, and maintain our opinions, in a time when all ideals are being shattered and destroyed, when people are showing

---

16 Examples of books that engage more directly with Nazi atrocities that will be covered later in this project are Eric Heuvel’s A Family Secret and The Search, Art Spiegelman’s Maus, and Elie Wiesel’s Night.
their worst side, and do not know whether to believe in truth and right and God. (qtd. Chambers 41)

When Alma attempts to contextualize and particularize Frank’s experience by noting “she was writing during the war when everything was terrible,” Jacob responds by saying, “There are still plenty of Nazis about, it seems to me. People showing their worst side” (41). The specificity of Nazi crimes is clouded by Jacob’s focus on Frank’s words. While Alma tries to particularize her experience, Jacob comes back to the universal. Wanting badly to keep his identification with Frank ongoing, he looks to “the worst side” of any human behavior: places like Bosnia and Cambodia, but also pollution, drugs, and the homeless (41). However, as many theorists of the Holocaust ask us to remember (and in many ways Jacob does not) the Holocaust was an incredibly specific event that revolved around strict notions of who deserved life and who did not.17

17 Whether to look at the Holocaust as a unique historical event is not without debate, the primary issue surrounding the discussion is whether one should consider the Holocaust as a singularly unique experience, or whether it should be historicized. I find myself agreeing with Milchman and Rosenberg, who argue there is a way to look at the Holocaust as a unique event without having to choose one side of the unique/contextual binary (445). Their goal is to illustrate how there are “similarities as well as distinctions between different manifestations of human-made mass-death” (445). One of the ways which they define the Holocaust as unique is due to “the technical efficiency and organization” of the mass-murder, and that efficiency was “made possible by the ruthless application of the prodigious creations of twentieth-century science and technology” (447-448). The arresting facts of the Holocaust are integrally tied to a historical moment where anti-Semitism, modernity, and technology created those elements that are so emblematic of the Holocaust: the transportation networks, the gas chambers, and the crematoria.
In order to have an understanding of the interconnected communities and power structures that construct normal/abnormal binaries, it is necessary to historically contextualize how these policies directed toward the “abnormal” during the Holocaust led to the loss of specific lives. Butler calls for contextualization as well when she writes: “If we ask how recognizability is constituted, we have through the very question taken up a perspective suggesting that these fields are variably and historically constituted” (FoW, 5). For Butler, it is impossible to consider questions of recognizability without thinking through the power structures that allocate recognition itself. Systems of power and privilege are naturally variable and differ based on individual historical moments, and therefore must be contextualized in order to examine how recognition is distributed differently. This claim is central to the overall examination of Holocaust fiction. If readers are to come away with some form of memory or experience of the “Other” from these texts, it is important that the memory acknowledges how the power structures of Nazi era Europe constituted recognizability specifically. Jacob, in looking exclusively at Frank’s diary, does not see how the structures that surrounded her life and death are the products of a specific time and place. This creates simplistic understandings of the reasons and strategies of the Nazi death machine. As Jacob’s comprehension of the Nazis is fully mediated through Frank, he fails to recognize how she was so quickly turned from an individual into a number under Nazi policy. His failure to recognize the “abnormality” in Frank, in turn, points to the problem that Frank’s diary creates. As characters like Jacob identify with Frank as “just like me,” they erase the notion of difference that they are purportedly learning to protect by the act of reading the Diary in the first place. It is far too easy to simplify the real fears that the Nazi terror apparatus was capable of promoting. An idea like tolerance with a stated
goal of “live and let live” does little to offer guidance to those who are in situations where death is imminent.

This simplification only serves to create hierarchical relationships that reify particular power structures. All too often, “It is too easy to say ‘yes’ and thereby set up self-righteous categories of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ meaning ‘we’ would have helped, but ‘they,’ the ‘racists,’ the ‘intolerant,’ the ‘prejudiced,’ the ‘nationalists,’ would not have done so” (Cole 43). In this particular formation, the tolerator is the superior subject position to hold, while, oddly, the intolerant person is not to be tolerated at all. There is a decided attitude of moral superiority in this language of tolerance, one that I examine in more detail in chapter five. This, again, fails to question how existing power structures are still creating lives that are considered worthwhile and those that are not, and emotional attachments like Jacob’s to Frank maintain these binaries.

In order to further illustrate the importance of recognition and loss in terms of *Postcards*. Butler writes, in *Frames of War*, “[Recognizability] is not a quality or potential of individual humans. This may seem absurd asserted in this way, but it is important to question the idea of personhood as individualism” (*FoW* 5). Because the idea of the individual is so tied to our notion of the human, considerations of elided communities are never addressed when only thinking in terms of individuals themselves. Indeed, “If we claim that recognizability is a universal potential and that it belongs to all persons as persons, then, in a way the problem before us is already solved. We have decided that some particular notion of “personhood” will determine the scope and meaning of recognizability” (*FoW* 5). If we focus so heavily on Frank the idealized and universal individual, as Jacob does in *Postcards*, her particular personhood becomes the standard for a recognizable, and grievable life. The problem here lies in how, as Butler says, we have a “normative ideal” that already tells us everything we need to know about
recognizing others. However, that doesn’t allow for questions about how certain subjects are so easily recognized while others are not (FoW 6).

Frank the optimist becomes the universal Holocaust victim here, reinforcing a norm of middle-class, educated lives that are so easily and often viewed as recognizable subjects in Butler’s terms. This, of course, leaves out groups such as the very devout, the disabled, the homosexual, and the “gypsy”—all categories that are less easily recognized as grievable lives and more often left out of Holocaust literature for young adults. What Butler asks us to do, and what challenging literature for young adults has the potential to do, is to consider how “The problem is not merely how to include more people within existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate recognition differently” (FoW 6). Postcards itself has the potential to challenge the normal/abnormal binary. It does so when the book moves away from Jacob’s relationship with Frank, and the novel has genuine potential to “consider how existing norms allocate recognition differently” (Butler, FoW 6). However, by the end of the book, some of that subversive potential is undermined by the reassertion of heterosexual norms.

Postcards engages homosexual and bisexual characters in interesting ways, and it is these moments where the book has the power to trouble the normal/abnormal binary. In the first scenes featuring Jacob, he is joined in a café by a good looking Dutch person, Ton. Jacob initially takes Ton to be a pretty woman. As he finds himself flirting with Ton, thinking how he was “very much wanting to kiss her wide mouth” (8), Ton seems to realize Jacob’s mistaken assumption. As Ton hurriedly gets up to leave the café, Jacob asks to see “her” again. Ton’s response: “Are you sure?” is the first moment when Ton challenges Jacob’s assumptions about their short relationship. Ton’s more forward step of lightly kissing Jacob and insistently pressing Jacob’s hand to his crotch, “where [Jacob] felt the swell of a compact set of penis and balls”
clarifies what his mistake was (8-9). While Jacob is surprised to find Ton is a man, he does not react angrily. In fact, he remains interested in Ton, and readily talks to him at their subsequent meetings. Jacob expresses an ongoing engagement and curiosity about Ton’s identity, rather than any sort of disgust mediated by the discourse of tolerance or toleration.

In terms of Butler’s notion of recognizability of subject position, Jacob has in fact completely failed to recognize Ton as a gay subject at first; instead, his normative categories for recognition revolve around a strictly heterosexual paradigm, one which puts his desire for flirtation firmly at the center. Jacob fails to recognize Ton as a gay man, an identity category that, historically, has been labeled abnormal and less than human.18 Ton himself comments how his identity is viewed when he and Jacob meet for a second time. He mentions the ways in which his life is still viewed as less than human when one is “an open gay.” For Ton, the idea of live and let live is an impossibility. The fact is that “if being what you are is being like me, you soon get your head beaten in. Or worse.” Ton draws attention to the hypocrisy of tolerance, commenting, “we are all so tolerant of each other, aren’t we” (119). Ton directly points readers towards the dangers of a non-recognized subject position—living a life that is seen as abnormal and less than human. The concept of a tolerant society still does not extend to Ton, not when he has to worry about having his “head beaten in” (119).

---

18 While Jacob initially mistakes Ton for a girl, the text is clear that Ton is not trying to represent himself as female. Ton is an effeminate gay man, not a transgender character as Chambers later illustrates: “[Jacob] could see why he had mistaken Ton for a girl: small, delicately slim, neatly built, and his face had the light fine features of a girl with a smooth skin that showed no sign of a razor” but Chambers never mentions an intentional presentation of femininity on Ton’s part (114). When Jacob asks “Are you gay?” Ton replies affirmatively, not identifying as transgender in any way (117).
When Jacob tries to sympathize with Ton’s claims about the violence directed at gay subjects saying, “I know, I know,” Ton gently scolds him. “No, dear Jacques, I don’t think you do. You’ve heard about it. You’ve read about it, I guess. But you don’t know about it. If you knew, you wouldn’t ask about it” (119-120). Again, this is a moment that challenges simplistic notions of difference. As Jacob tries to identify as the same as Ton (perhaps as he sees himself as the same as the universalized Frank, whom he identifies so strongly with), Ton draws his attention back to difference. While Jacob desires to gloss over their differences, Ton demands that Jacob consider the norms that privilege his existence. Jacob will never be the same as Ton, and their differences are what threaten Ton’s life and assure Jacob’s safety in terms of homophobic hate crimes. Interestingly, it is this moment that Jacob feels anger towards Ton, his desire for Ton to be “just like me” challenged in a way that Frank could never do.

The anger is ultimately short-lived, and Jacob and Ton go on to have a friendship that is characterized by an ongoing flirtation and sexual tension. It is this relationship that challenges Jacob to engage with difference in a way that troubles normal/abnormal binaries. Chambers does an excellent job of creating a multi-dimensional gay character in Ton, and illustrates Jacob’s attraction to him in sophisticated ways. Jacob’s interaction with Ton consistently is an example of how a character can engage with and learn to appreciate difference, rather than tolerating the abstract “Other.” However, the text ultimately reinforces heteronormative behavior for Jacob, and it is disappointing to see their relationship fizzle in favor of a female love interest. Instead of pursuing Ton, at a memorial service for those who died in the Battle of Arnhem, he meets a young woman whose favorite book is also the Diary or, for Hille, Het Achterhuis (181). Hille becomes Jacob’s primary love interest, with several deep conversations and confessional letters marking the rapid development of their relationship. In this way, the
course of the narrative re-enters the comfortable world of heterosexuality. Instead of engaging in a queer relationship with Ton, or even a non-normative fling or open and long distance relationship with Hille, she decides that in order to continue seeing each other, Jacob must move to Amsterdam.

The novel ends with Hille and Jacob’s first sexual encounter, borne on the promise that Jacob will return to Amsterdam for school and therefore a traditional relationship will be pursued (320). In her book, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Trites reminds readers, “Although the primary purpose of the adolescent novel may appear to be a depiction of growth, growth in this genre is inevitable represented as being linked to what the adolescent has learned about power” (x). Here, Jacob’s coming of age story shows growth that intrinsically recognizes the standard of heteronormative relationship dynamics. Jacob has learned, via Ton that to exist outside of that structure is a threat to power and privilege, and he chooses a relationship with Hille, rather than Ton, that realigns him with normative power structures in ways that leave behind some of the initial challenging moments of the text. There are moments where the text recognizes the “Other” in ways that are extremely positive. However, that recognition is limited by Jacob’s choice of partner—one who is directly tied to Frank and self-identification.

Jacob’s identification with Frank is where his understanding of prejudice comes from, and is directly tied to Frank’s personality and his loving relationship with her. He only mentions her death once, again in context of his personal relationship to her as, “he always had trouble with his emotions when he thought of Frank being dragged away and of her tortured life and her ugly death in the hell of the camps” (42). Jacob’s understanding of the specificities of Frank’s death is unclear. He has some tertiary knowledge, but he has chosen not to expand on exploring
Frank’s death by fleeing the Anne Frank House. In making these choices, he does not have to face any version of Frank beyond the one he has created from the obsessive rereading of her diary. He, too, quotes Frank’s optimistic lines “I still believe that people are good at heart” and admires her courage and wit, much like the protagonist of Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottesfeld’s 2002 book *Anne Frank and Me*, who uses Frank to help her out of different kinds of difficult circumstances (Chambers 42). In particular, *Anne Frank and Me* is a text that illustrates the convergence of tolerance discourse and the ways in which scenes of suffering are employed to evoke compassionate responses.

Anne Frank the Eternal Optimist

*Anne Frank and Me* is another text that uses Anne Frank in order to ostensibly teach about tolerance in ways that are problematic. Bennett and Gottesfeld rely on two tactics commonly deployed in young adult Holocaust literature in order to garner sympathy for their main character Nicole Burns, and by extension, persecuted Jews during the Holocaust—the time travel narrative and the emphasis on scenes of suffering. In *Anne Frank and Me*, these tropes appear in the main character’s deportation from Paris in 1944 and subsequent meeting with Anne Frank herself on a train to Auschwitz-Birkenau.19 The version of Frank that Nicole meets while in transit is definitely the optimistic Frank of “people are truly good at heart” despite the terror and suffering of the deportation process. This emphasis on the suffering of the main characters certainly does answer some of the criticisms to which the *Diary* itself has been subjected. In particular, *Anne Frank and Me* illustrates the events of what happens after the end of the *Diary*. It is a fictionalized account of Frank in the camps, and plays its scenes of suffering for all they

19 Other books that use the time travel structure are Jane Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic* and Han Nolan’s *If I Die Before I Wake*. 
are worth. However, before a carte-blanche assumption that scenes of suffering equal useful compassionate responses to said suffering, it is important to consider what we mean by compassion, and how that might fit into creating an a transformative ethics that recognizes and appreciates difference instead of tolerating it.

Ethics scholar Martha Nussbaum has in fact called for the explicit use of narratives of suffering to evoke an emotional response in students, in order to promote multicultural education. She argues that scenes of suffering can encourage “the original meaning of pity in the Aristotelian sense: pity entailed the spectator’s sense that he or she could suffer similar misfortune,” which is crucial to the idea of social justice (Woodward 67). However, the problem with the pity evoked from scenes of suffering is that the modern notion of pity (in the non-Aristotelian sense) is that it emphasizes the “superiority of the spectator” (67). This notion of the superiority of the spectator is doubly evident in a book like *Anne Frank and Me*, as both time-traveling protagonist Nicole Burns and the reader are essentially spectators to the events of the Holocaust.

Because Nicole is a time traveler from the late twentieth century, she has the benefit of knowing there is a normal life waiting for her once she can figure out how to get back home. Her reactions are colored by this knowledge, and her responses are privileged by the knowledge that her suffering will most likely not end in death. As Lauren Berlant points out, “Compassion is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is over there” (4). As the reader is experiencing scenes of suffering and a presumed compassionate response, it is also assumed that one has “a resource

---

20 Other texts that rely on scenes of suffering to promote multicultural education are texts such as African author Chinua Achbe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s work on slavery in America, and Choi’s *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* regarding Japan’s invasion of Korea in WWII.
that would alleviate someone else’s suffering” (4). In the case of adolescent Holocaust literature that resource is generally taken to be an understanding of prejudice and the tolerance that comes from consuming narratives of suffering, which can then alleviate future suffering at the hands of prejudicial power structures. There is some suggestion among scholars that this type of identification will lead to the development of toleration through the engagement of a “moral imagination,” or “the ability to see the other from her point of view” (Heyd 203). However, one important question to ask regarding this spectacle of suffering and idea of a moral imagination is whether or not this helps produce a framework for recognizable subjects and grievable lives. Sadly, *Anne Frank and Me* distinctly fails on many of these counts, despite its rather heavy-handed attempts.

Bennett and Gottesfeld structure the beginning of the novel as Nicole Burns’ blog, suggesting one of the “possible reasons you are reading this” is because “you’re just like me” (1-2). They immediately call for a self-identification between Nicole and the reader. The three internet posts that serve to introduce readers to Nicole’s character attempt to create that identification between Nicole and reader that will assure readers see how they are “just like” her. She promises us that she is “such a cliché. I am in love with J, a boy who does not know I exist” (3) and “sometimes I am numb. Nothing matters. Other times, when I let myself feel, I feel too much” and that loving J is “a sickness. A fever” (5). Nicole appears in these initial chapters, purposefully, as a rather selfish and one-dimensional character. She has an unrequited crush, she slacks on her homework in favor of practicing to be a “fly girl,” and she mostly puts up with her younger sister. This all changes, however, after a visit from a Holocaust survivor while her English class reads the *Diary*, and their subsequent visit to an Anne Frank exhibit at a local museum.
Prior to this field trip, Nicole’s relationship to the lessons of Holocaust education is decidedly tenuous. Her class has been reading the *Diary*, and has been told to watch an adaptation of Jane Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic* on television and has read *Number the Stars* in an earlier grade (10). Still, when a Holocaust survivor visits their classroom the first question that she is asked by one of Nicole’s classmates is, “We already know about the Holocaust. I’m very sorry you had to go through it, but I don’t understand why we have to talk about it again. I mean, we don’t have Irish Famine Awareness Week, or How We Stole from the Native Americans Awareness Week, do we?” (10). Nicole’s English professor father echoes this sentiment the night before the field trip asking, “Do you have any idea how terrible it was in America during the depression? Honestly, Jews do not have a monopoly on suffering” (29). In fact, the only adolescent who seems truly concerned about Holocaust education is Nicole’s Jewish friend, David Berg. Nicole’s English teacher, Ms. Zooms, expresses frustration with the general malaise that the students convey and tries to reinforce the pedagogical goals of Holocaust narratives when she assigns a paper designed to “overcome … adolescent self-absorption long enough to recognize the importance of speaking out in the face of tyranny” (13). Her intentions echo those stated by Holocaust theorist Pascale Bos, where she calls attention to the need to be “vigilant and be aware of personal choice and responsibility” (350). While Ms. Zooms’ intentions may be worthy, the authors make it clear through the near-universal resistant responses to Holocaust education’s effectiveness that students are in some way missing the point.

These first few chapters, where the validity of Holocaust Awareness Week and the veracity of the *Diary* itself are called into question, set the stage for the lessons of the rest of the book. Nicole herself, in an effort to avoid doing any real work, logs on to a website run by “The Center for the Scientific Study of Genocide” that promises understanding of “the revisionist view
on history” (21). Nicole chats with a “Dr. Bridgeman” from the Center who promotes the idea that the Diary is a fake, using a copyright lawsuit actually related to the Broadway adaptation as his proof, and suggesting there are many “open questions” as to what actually happened in World War II.  He ends on the suggestion that she should “get all the facts, then make up your own mind” (24). The reference to Holocaust denial sets up the need for the book to prove to readers that Anne Frank was real. The book then becomes “unabashedly didactic” as it has an “overt moral purpose” to prove both Frank’s life and suffering actually happened (Russell 278). In terms of Anne Frank and Me the narrative seems to tell readers, almost counter-intuitively, that merely reading about the Holocaust will never generate the kind of understanding and tolerance that educators hope will follow from studying a variety of Holocaust narratives. Instead, Nicole can only gain this understanding through experiencing the spectacle of suffering herself as she is transported back in time to live as a young Jewish girl in Paris, France in 1942.  

When Nicole awakes after an attack at the Anne Frank exhibit her high school was touring, she finds herself as a member of a middle-class Jewish family in Paris, during the Nazi occupation. Nicole gradually adjusts to the fact she is no longer in twenty-first century America,
realizing she speaks French, plays the piano, and must wear a yellow star on her frumpy sweater at all times. Like Anne Frank herself, Nicole and her family are middle-class and are largely secular Jews. They survive based on Nicole’s father’s position as a doctor in a prestigious hospital and therefore they seem reasonably comfortable, even as Jews in occupied France. In fact, much of Nicole’s life seems reasonably similar to her American life as she finds herself in a relationship with Jacques—the 1942 version of her crush J. Her best friend from her former American life is now Jacques’ twin sister, and both are gentiles. Certainly she experiences the inconveniences and embarrassments of no longer being able to have a public life, but at first things do not seem so terrible for Nicole. However, since this is a narrative that relies on the notion of suffering and compassion in order to make its points about the validity of the Holocaust and the importance of tolerance, her middle-class lifestyle cannot remain intact throughout the entire book.

Much like Anne Frank, however, Nicole’s experiences of living with her family and within the Jewish community have the same lack of specificity for differences of Jewish culture. Except for the fact that they discuss their limited options as Jews in occupied France and their requisite yellow stars, very little about Jewish culture is covered. Nicole vastly prefers to spend time with her gentile boyfriend and best friend, and only spends time with her Jewish neighbor out of obligation and guilt. In these ways, much like the life of Anne Frank, Nicole is figured as an always already grievable life, her grievability is a condition that, “precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living” (Butler, FoW 15). Her particular grievable subject position, as young, middle-class, and largely secular is compounded by our knowledge as readers that none of her family members are “really” Jewish, particularly Nicole herself. Nicole’s experiences never challenge readers to consider the nature of difference. Her character,
presented as “just like me,” offers another place for self-identification. Nicole asks only that one looks into one’s self, rather than looking out at complex representations of the “Other.”

In fact, it is only when Nicole strays from her relationships with non-Jewish characters that she finds herself in trouble. At one point, she is spending the night at her Jewish neighbor’s house when the French police come through to gather Jewish citizens for detention in the “Operation Spring Breeze” raids of July 1942. Without the protection of her father’s Ausweis, she is gathered up along with the Einhorn family. The scenes where they are held at Vélodrome d’Hiver are the first of the novel’s attempts to gain compassion for the Parisian Jews’ suffering. At Vél d’Hiv they are held without food or water or sanitary facilities, and Nicole is horrified by what she witnesses there: “old people rocking themselves like babies, babies listless from dehydration with the dull stare of the old” (115). As uncomfortable as the dehydration is, the most agonizing part of the stay for Nicole is the lack of sanitation. When she sees “women who were squatting to relieve themselves along the walls,” she vows, “she would never, ever do that” (118). Nicole has been subjected to the discomfort and embarrassment of Vél d’Hiv because she was unfortunate enough to be caught without her Ausweis, a document protecting certain individuals from arrest and deportation. However, she and Claire Einhorn are both able to escape after Claire’s mother creates a distraction, under the pretense that the French police will not shoot to kill their own fleeing citizens (121). After her escape, Nicole becomes more involved with Jewish resistance activities, which lead directly to her capture and deportation to Auschwitz.

In contrast to the Vél d’Hiv incarceration, which takes very little time to cover in the narrative, Nicole’s arrest and deportation after her father has been caught participating in resistance activities comprise the main spectacles of suffering that the novel has to offer. From
Paris, they are deported by train to Westerbork, in Holland. They stay at Westerbork for a few
days before being put on another train, this one bound for Auschwitz-Birkenau. Nicole’s transfer
from Paris to Westerbork is a convenient plot device for Nicole to meet Anne Frank, but is a
stretch as far as historical accuracy goes. The authors of *Anne Frank and Me* note in their “Time
Line of Actual Events” at the back of the book that there was one railway car attached to a
German troop transport that left Paris for Buchenwald in August, 1944 (286). However, they
never explain the presence of the prisoners from that final train in Westerbork, nearly 350 miles
away from Buchenwald, not to mention Auschwitz-Birkenau. Lydia Kokkola rightly insists that
accuracy is an essential element of Holocaust fiction for children’s literature. Even “When
placed in a fictional setting,” authors have only so much literary license (55). Indeed, “no matter
how well-motivated the creators of such fiction may be, historical facts must not be disregarded”
(Kokkola 55). While the authors, like the fictional Ms. Zooms, have the admirable motive of
“recognize[ing] the importance of speaking out in the face of tyranny” (13), the incredible
unlikeliness of these events in favor of a convenient plot device is disconcerting.

Nicole meets the character Anne Frank aboard a train to Auschwitz-Birkenau, departing
from Westerbork. Frank, in this fictionalized account, is unfailingly optimistic despite the
horrible circumstances. Nicole recognizes Frank from the picture on the front of the *Diary*, much
to Frank’s shock. Their conversation includes this exchange, “Someone told me God must be on
vacation. Maybe there is no God. Maybe we just made Him up so we wouldn’t go crazy,” to
which Frank responds, “I don’t believe that” (227). Her evidence for this belief is that, despite
the fact they are in a cattle car, “we can still see the stars” (227). This version of Frank is not so
different than the interpretation of her many of the eighth-grade English students had in the
*Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* study where one student interpreted Frank as “happy in
the concentration camps” because “she could be in nature. She loved nature” (40). This troubling perspective is only underscored by the continual optimism that Frank expresses in the novel. Bennett and Gottesfeld attempt to create spectacles of suffering that will clarify events after Frank’s deportation, while trying to maintain a happy version of Frank. The fictional Nicole and her sister witness how, “Directly in front of them, an SS man tore an infant from a woman’s arms and flung him toward a group of men. Then, he slammed the woman in the stomach with his truncheon; she collapsed” (231), while being enclosed by the “cloying, nauseating” odor that surrounds the entire area (230). Curiously, Nicole suggests that her sister “act as if it is something you are reading in a book, not real” (231) as a coping mechanism. This serves to reinforce the fact that readers are in fact reading a book, as well as the idea that Nicole remains an outsider in the situation—both readers and Nicole are witnesses to the spectacle of suffering that the authors have presented.

Before her “death” in the gas chambers of the camp, Nicole sees a fearful Frank one last time. Nicole casts about for something “she could offer Anne” that would give “the same strength that Anne had offered her on the train” and finally settles on telling her that she “become[s] a famous writer. And you break a million hearts” (235). Frank’s optimism can remain intact with Nicole’s offering. However, the information that she breaks a million hearts because she is the representative of millions of murdered children is clearly not what Nicole chooses to share. This is Frank’s last scene in the book. Immediately following Nicole’s reassurance, she and her sister enter the gas chamber and are murdered. However, because of the nature of the time-travel narrative, Nicole promptly wakes up in her contemporary American

---

23 This section seems to presume some prior knowledge on the part of readers, particularly as to the source of the smoke and smell, since the book never clearly explains these details.
hospital bed. She is reconstituted as a subject whose “emphasis [is] on the spectator’s experience of feeling compassion and its subsequent relation to material practice” (Berlant 1). It is in the application of material practice, however, that the novel fails.

*Anne Frank and Me* illustrates that “the needs of contemporary liberalism tend to latch onto a powerful tale in the past and universalize it so as to produce a set of universal lessons” (Cole 42). In particular, this text highlights the need to acknowledge the existence of Frank herself as an actual person, which will in some way get past the resistance expressed towards Holocaust education by Nicole’s peers and parents. The importance of fighting prejudice is a lesson that Nicole learns to some degree, but it seems unevenly applied. Certainly, she comes back with the knowledge that Frank was real after meeting her aboard the train to Auschwitz-Birkenau. When her little sister attempts to hand in an essay on how the *Diary* is a fraud, Nicole gently corrects her and informs her “We could have been in the Holocaust. You and me. Anne Frank could have been a friend of ours” (282). This statement, of course, ignores the fact that while Nicole and Elizabeth could have been friends of Anne Frank’s, it is highly unlikely they would have been “in the Holocaust” as non-Jewish children. Additionally, while Nicole’s sympathetic agency extends to her newfound understanding of Jewish suffering, the prejudice placed upon non-normative members of her high school community are largely ignored. While Baer suggests that narratives on the Holocaust for young adults “should give the reader ‘a framework for response,’” in order “to create in the child reader a consciousness, a ‘memory,’ and a sense of personal responsibility regarding prejudice, hatred, and racial discrimination,” the prejudice Nicole is able to respond to remains limited (385).

Her response is particularly limited in terms of the social outcasts at her high school. The attack at the Anne Frank exhibit that initially caused Nicole’s concussion and subsequent trip
back in time was originally presumed to be a shooting, motivated by anti-Semitism or racism in some way. Everyone assumes that the perpetrator is “Doom,” an anti-social trench-coat mafia sort of boy. He is branded as a threat because of his poor attitude and his refusal to answer questions posed to him by Ms. Zooms such as “Would you agree some things are worth speaking up for?” and “Are we to assume your silence means you agree with Adolf Hitler?” (12). The correlation between a kid who has refused to speak in class for weeks and agreeing with Hitler is troubling, but it does not seem to faze any of the other students (11). It comes as no particular surprise then, when “shots” ring out at the Anne Frank exhibit the immediate culprit is assumed to be Doom. When Nicole awakens in the hospital she learns from the local television news that it was not in fact a shooting at all. Instead, it was a prank involving firecrackers and rival high schools, and her only response is a dazed “we were all so sure” of Doom’s guilt, and a vague suggestion that “we should apologize to him” (247, 250). However, her new knowledge about the dangers of prejudicial behavior does not extend to any interaction with Doom, nor a reconsideration of the problems inherent with judging based on appearances or antisocial behaviors in class. Nicole, ultimately, remains in the position of spectator and maintain that privileged site as the book ends.

Conclusion

*Postcards from No Man’s Land* and *Anne Frank and Me* are only two of the examples of texts that have been influenced by *Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl*. Frank’s *Diary* is a beautifully written document, and a valuable artifact regarding life in hiding during World War II. Because Frank’s *Diary* shows a limited view of the actual events that characterized the Holocaust, it is not the ideal text for introducing students to the Nazi regime and World War II. Additionally, the tendency for self-identification with a version of Frank that is “just like me”
fails to account for the ways in which Frank was perhaps not the same as the reader. Therefore, instead of gaining an understanding and appreciation of the “Other,” difference is elided for the sake of personal identification. The downfalls of the lessons regarding the “Other” and personal responsibility that adolescents do learn are evident in the characters of Jacob and Nicole: both have superficial understandings of what prejudice is, yet they act on that knowledge in ways that reinforce their own normality and privilege. Jacob views the Nazis merely as “people showing their worst side” and comfortably retains Frank as an icon without understanding many of the circumstances that created her iconic status. Nicole learns lessons about anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial, but she fails to see how these lessons apply to other categories of persecuted individuals when she ignores Doom. The real Anne Frank has been fictionalized in the minds of actual readers of her *Diary* as “hopeful, in love, frolicking” and “happy in the concentration camps” and in the subsequent fictional interpretation as a lovable optimist who offers salvation in all kinds of varied circumstances (Spector and Jones 36, 40). However, this small sample of books should not imply that texts about the Holocaust for young adults are universally incapable of engaging with difference. In the next chapter I undertake a close look at the ways in which a variety of Jewish characters are depicted in order to gain a more complete picture of how Jewish culture is represented and engaged in young adult Holocaust texts. Keeping in mind the importance of power and privilege discussed in this chapter, I turn to children’s literature scholar Elizabeth Baer’s work on evil in young adult literature as one possible site for a development of a more transformative ethics. Baer’s work provides a framework to question how young adult novels on the Holocaust that feature Jewish characters can aid in the development of an attitude of global responsibility and expanded notion of what it means to be human.
CHAPTER II: JEWISH LIVES, VULNERABLE LIVES

I hear the sound of gunfire at the prison gate
   Are the liberators here?
   Do I hope or do I fear?
For my father and my brother, it's too late
But I must help my mother stand up straight.
   —Rush, “Red Sector A”

I am urging that we should learn about people in other places, take an interest in their civilizations, their arguments, their errors, their achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement, but because it will help us get used to one another. —Kwame Anthony Appiah

The contemporary theorization of cosmopolitanism makes compelling arguments for cross-cultural dialogues that promote varying levels of engagement with numerous cultures, rather than embracing notions of tolerance alone. In this chapter, I argue that one of the most powerful ways to create a cross-cultural or cosmopolitan interest in others is through literature. Fiction and memoirs that acknowledge and describe difference help “us get used to one another,” and to approach differing values without fear or hatred (Appiah 78). As one uses imaginative powers to experience the “Other,” there is the possibility for a more in-depth multicultural understanding that is not merely based around the idea of tolerance. Engaged experiences of the “Other” are of particular importance in literature for young adults, where formative knowledge is being created and a variety of other cultures are being experienced for the first time.

In this chapter, I focus on Jewish characters in Holocaust fiction for young adults. There are a range ways we can look at how literature connects with Jewish characters from the near non-acknowledgement of cultural difference in a text like Escape from Warsaw, to an assortment of texts that do a much better job at creating multi-dimensional Jewish characters and cultural representations. There are also large numbers of Holocaust narratives that discuss various facets of World War II, but rarely include events that will help shape an understanding of what the
Holocaust or Shoah mean to European Jewish victims. I pay particular attention to how texts can create both effective Holocaust narratives as well as how that is integrally tied to their ability to make sophisticated portrayals of Jewish characters. In the preceding chapter, I argued that the creation of Anne Frank as fundamental Holocaust victim is problematic because of the focus on her similarity to readers rather than the differences that caused her persecution. This is one reason why creating an iconic Holocaust victim is a not ideal way to study persecution based on prejudices like those of the Nazis. Instead, readers need to be exposed to a broad spectrum of characters, both those who ask adolescents to closely identify as similar in some ways and those that encourage readers to recognize difference as well.

Children’s literature scholars have consistently pointed out how “it is not possible for any one book to give children a comprehensive understanding” of the complexities of the Holocaust (Russell 278). Reading only one book also cannot offer insight into the specificities of the targeted population, a fact that is exacerbated by some texts’ complete effacement of Jewish identity altogether. In addition to looking at the complexities of the Holocaust itself, however, reading multiple texts on the topic can promote engagement with difference in a way that can encourage what theorists like Appiah and Delanty refer to as a cosmopolitan worldview. The idea of cultural cosmopolitanism is, in many ways, an idea that encourages the opening of possibilities through the powers of imagination. These possibilities allow for cross-cultural conversations and engagement with a variety of worldviews and identity categories in ways that recognize the inherent validity for a variety of values. Cosmopolitanism is connected to ideas of what Delanty calls “liberal multiculturalism,” but goes beyond this tolerance-based value system to something that is much more capable of pursuing social justice.
Imaginary Constructs of the Other

As I have discussed in chapter one, the notion of human rights is complicated and often compromised by whom we recognize as human. In order to consider the possibility of creating a normative order based on human rights, Butler’s theories of human vulnerability must be taken into consideration. Gerard Delanty, in *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, in fact identifies Butler’s recent work as cosmopolitan, but only very briefly discusses her theories in his book (104). Butler does argue “there ought to be a more inclusive and egalitarian way of recognizing precariousness, and that this should take form as concrete social policy” which seems to very closely echo Delanty’s position (*FoW* 13). However, she also reminds us how “Forms of racism instituted and active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable” (Butler, *FoW* 24). Exploring and interacting with various populations in literature is one way to combat racism at the level of perception. There are a wide variety of texts dealing with Jewish characters in the Holocaust that attempt to engage with cultural differences that led to Nazi persecution. However, if young adult exposure to this population is through texts that ignore Jewish identity altogether to create a generalist view of the tribulations of war, the vulnerability of a specific population is effaced. This, in turn, has the potential to lead to a complete misunderstanding of the populations who were targeted and persecuted by the Nazi government during the Holocaust.

Butler also demands that readers consider pluralism and multiculturalism as potentially problematic constructs, because they do not do enough radical refiguring of dispossessed populations into our cultural vocabulary of vulnerable lives. As she reminds readers, “Multiculturalism tends to presuppose already constituted communities, already established
subjects,” particularly when one is considering what Delanty refers to as liberal multiculturalism. However, she reminds us that what “is at stake are communities not quite recognized as such, subjects who are living, but not yet regarded as “lives” (Butler, FoW 32). In this chapter I discuss a population that, in contemporary society, is largely regarded as a set of subjects who have lives worth living and grieving. I believe it is important to see how authors deal with these already established subjects in order to move towards an understanding of how their lives were, in a specific time and place, not considered as lives worth living. This theoretical framework lays the ground for the considerations of the following chapter, which will turn to the characters that are only now on the cusp of being recognized by Holocaust literature for young adults: the disabled, the homosexuals, and the Roma-Sinti.

One of the fundamental concerns behind any consideration of the Holocaust is the ways in which the Jewish population was essentialized and alienated in order to create a group viewed as not quite human. Without the creation of a set of subjects who were, like Butler notes, living but not quite regarded as “lives” the widespread murder of Europe’s Jewish populace would not have been possible (32). Comparative genocide scholar Jacques Semelin writes about this process in his book Purify and Destroy: the Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide. He argues that societies that participate in genocides must create an “imaginary construct” of a specific population, such as the Jews in Nazi era Germany (17). One of the crucial elements of genocide is not just the murder of a particular population, but a “mental process, a way of seeing some Other being, stigmatizing him, debasing him, and obliterating him before actually killing him” (Semelin 17). Genocides are not merely mass murder. They are first and foremost an attack on culture and beliefs, a desire to obliterate a particular set of cultural mores, before the actual physical death of the individuals targeted for elimination. Some of the best books for
young adults on the Holocaust are able to illustrate not only the terror of living as a Jew in Nazi-era Germany, but also the ways in which the attacks were specifically motivated to destroy traditions and customs before imprisonment and death. This is an important demonstration for what happens when tolerance breaks down and fear of the “Other” begins to take over. I address the ways in which texts successfully navigate the ideological nature of genocide shortly. First, however, I want to clarify and expand on the idea of an “imaginary construct” and how Semelin theorizes the creation of these constructs.

The imaginary construct is directly connected to various cultural anxieties about populations that are in some way defined as “different” from the dominant population. Semelin is careful to explain, however, that difference itself does not equate genocidal policies. Various groups and nations survive with a multitude of different populations within their borders and never adopt genocidal policies, even when they have a high population density or difficult economic situations. While individual acts of violence may occur in any society, the large-scale mass murder of a group is not a direct result of one factor, but rather the accumulation of a variety of events (Semelin 13).¹ Semelin identifies first a cultural anxiety about the “Other” in societies as varied as Germany, Rwanda, and Bosnia. His examples all point to a catastrophic breakdown in tolerance. Promoting acceptance, appreciation, or engagement with those different than the dominant group may have disrupted the cycle of anxiety-fear-persecution-violence that

---
¹ The mass-murder of Jews in Nazi Germany cannot be attributed to population or economics alone, Semelin argues, because “it is hard to see how the very small Jewish minority in [Germany] (520,000 people, or .76 per cent of the total population) could pose a demographic threat to the majority of non-Jewish Germans. In this case statistics are no help in understanding the rise of anti-Semitism (Semelin 11).
Semelin explains. Importantly, anxiety about the “Other” is not enough to promote genocide. Instead, there must be an active promotion on the part of leadership to encourage a sense of fear of a “highly dangerous” “Other” (16). Part of what leaders in times of genocide are able to do is destroy tenuous relationships where the dominant group tolerates the minority group. They encourage the underlying fears of difference and create discourses of hatred where before there may have been merely distrust or unease mediated by toleration. This level of hatred is itself a cultural construct:

This ‘transmutation’ of insidious anxiety into fear concentrated on a hostile ‘figure’ serves as the foundation for hatred to develop against the evil-minded ‘Other.’ Hatred here is not a fundamental given defining groups from the outset how ‘natural’ relationships will be between groups. It is instead a constructed passion. (Semelin 16)

The construction of an imaginary “Other” creates a “desire to destroy” which is coupled with the promise of “omnipotence and glory” that will restore the greatness of the normal population at the expense of the abnormal “Other” (17).

The desire to destroy the “Other” and political encouragement to do so is not enough to promote genocide on its own either. There must be a rationale behind the persecution, a twisted form of logic that convinces the majority population that the mass murder of the “Other” is the logical solution that will restore a former positive national identity. Elizabeth Baer, writing about children’s literature in a post-Holocaust world, refers to this rationalism as “new algorithm in horror, in evil, in the foulness of human nature,” a concept that I will apply to the young adult literature in this chapter (379). In the case of Nazi Germany, the logic was based in scientific reasoning, drawn from perversions of Darwinian theories and the science of eugenics. The Nazi’s use of the logical discourse of science, what Semelin calls “delusional rationality” then
“enables this discourse to precipitate destructive action” (46). Discursive practices that rely on the language of us/them, the need to return to a nostalgic version of an idealized society, and cultural anxiety all combine with leadership and logic to promote “rational means of eradicating this threat” (47). The ease of instituting this discourse in Nazi Germany was perhaps aided by the small percentage of the population that was Jewish, as Germans would be less willing to defend individuals they knew little about. Looking at the development of genocidal practices as a particular discursive formation highlights the need to combat racism at the level of perception. This is where literature comes into play. While not every young adult may interact with populations defined by their “difference,” the use of literature can help adolescents engage with the “Other” in ways that combat the initial cultural anxiety that Semelin identifies as the precursor to fear and the logic of elimination.

**Monolithic Misunderstandings**

One of the most complex aspects of considering representations of difference that create memories of both an event and a population is how that can be done without in some way essentializing a particular group. Clearly, the Nazi focus on the Jewish population as a monolithic group deserving complete extermination is one of the most extreme examples of what essentialism can do. To combat essentialism, historical fiction about the Holocaust has the potential to “undermine our commitment to values that we had settled into” when those values are overly simplistic, essentialized views of a group of people (Appiah 30). In a British study designed to evaluate the potential reasons for an increased rate of anti-Semitism in Europe, Short and Carrington found a variety of inaccurate stereotypes were prevalent among their pre-teen interviewees. Younger students viewed all Jews as “sort of foreign” and were uncertain whether they could ever be both English and Jewish at all (78). When students volunteered information
about the Holocaust they knew Jews had been “captured and tortured” but the only reason the student had received to explain their persecution was “because they are very rich” (79). Older students, who had some exposure to Holocaust education, continued to maintain the anti-Semitic focus on “alleged Jewish economic domination” as well as a tendency to confuse Judaism and Islam (81, 83). Responsible literature for adolescent readers needs to not only be historically accurate, as theorists like Kokkola demand, but also help dispel common anti-Semitic assumptions.

An effective way to challenge anti-Semitism in literature is through an engagement with aspects of Jewish culture that may be different from one’s own in a multi-faceted way. Rothberg refers to this process as “self-aware engagement,” in order to encourage not only an experience of Jewish characters in the Holocaust, but also in order to think about “the stakes of self-production” (468, 475). In these texts it happens via historical references, inclusion of folklore and mythology, use of language, and references to religious rituals and practices. If we can encourage readers to engage with specific differences in culture, to think about how those distinctions have been simplified and stereotyped in order to make persecution palatable, and to examine the ways in which subjects are constructed differently through representational practices, there is a definite potential for a cosmopolitan understanding of cultural variations. Readers can learn from engagement with difference, as Appiah recognizes when he encourages us to “take seriously the value of not just human life, but particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences” (xv). When readers

---
2 Their teacher that year was the daughter of a Jewish woman who had fled Nazi Germany; however the study does not indicate a particular curriculum the students were studying.
are confronted with a particular character in a narrative, the best possible outcome is this interest in practices and beliefs that may be divergent from one’s own. Ideally, these confrontations in conjunction with a self-aware engagement can ideally lead to something beyond what Short calls “information without understanding” or superficial knowledge (164).

Unfortunately, some of the texts that deal with the Holocaust and Jewish characters are all too often guilty of creating superficial knowledge that in turn can “drive a wedge between cultures, rendering Judaism potentially alien” (Short 164). In order to avoid alienating various cultural groups, ideas of cosmopolitanism and a non-imperialistic multiculturalism must heavily emphasize the fluid nature of culture in general. This notion of creating information that goes beyond the superficial is another reason why it is so important to expose readers to multiple Holocaust texts. Because of the extent of the Nazi takeover in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s a whole variety of Jewish populations were targeted for elimination, and the experience of a rural Hungarian or Polish character is considerably different than a northern European character like Anne Frank or Ellen Rosen from Number the Stars. Judaism as a practice is then connected to other cultural traditions, some shared and some not, which will help avoid essentializing Jewish characters to assume they are all like Anne Frank or all like Elie Wiesel. This is in part because of Nazi racist ideology itself: countries like Holland and Denmark were largely populated by what were deemed “Aryans,” whereas the people of Eastern Europe were considered Untermenschen, subhuman specimens, largely acceptable only as a slave population to be displaced and used by the Aryan German citizens. The lives of the non-Jewish population

---

3 Not to mention the other persecuted groups discussed in chapter three.

4 Two commonly taught Holocaust texts, and the two books the fictional students in Anne Frank and Me read for their English course.
in northern Europe were less restricted due to their Aryan nature. This distinction allowed for the escape of Danish Jews featured in *Hitler’s Canary* and *Number the Stars* as well as the attic narratives in Ida Vos’ books and Anne Frank’s *Diary*.

A range of Holocaust texts can create non-essentialized notions of difference by engaging both the variety and the interconnections of Jewish experiences throughout Europe, in order to establish complex historical memories and understandings of the period. These texts do this by engaging Jewish culture not only as a different religion, but a complex culture involving linguistic differences, unique folklore, and cultural practices. An exposure to the similarities and differences between one’s own culture and Nazi-era European culture can highlight the hybrid nature of culture that cosmopolitanism theory appreciates. This can also challenge simplistic notions of the value of tolerance as readers learn the category of the “Other” is not a monolithic group deserving one facile response. Giroux makes a similar cosmopolitan argument about multicultural education: “Rather than recovering differences that sustain the self-representation through exclusions, educators need to demonstrate how differences collide, cross over, mutate, and transgress in their negotiations and struggles” (208). It is this multi-faceted look at culture that can promote a cosmopolitan worldview, using historical fiction to be aware of how there are a variety of ways of understanding what it is to be Jewish and using that knowledge to consider how subjects are formed within power structures and representational practices in productive ways.

Who Are the Victims?

The historical accuracy and character detail that theorists rightly demand of texts on the Holocaust are both conspicuously missing in Ian Serraillier’s *Escape from Warsaw* (originally titled *The Silver Sword*), perhaps one of the most baffling portrayals of the Holocaust for young
readers available. I might even hesitate to call it a book on the Holocaust if other readers did not seem to define it in those terms, as most of the events that take place are generalized to such an extent that it could be nearly any war in any time that the children of the book experience. However, the new title evokes Warsaw and its ghettos, referencing Jewish persecution to a reader with some background in the events of World War II. Readers’ reviews of the book on Amazon.com show that it is often mentioned in terms their understanding of World War II and the Holocaust, by both students and instructors. One particularly glowing review reads, “I have taught school for 25+ years. And every year I read this wonderful book, and every year I laugh and cry in the same places with my students. For most of my students this poignant book is their first introduction to WWII and the Holocaust” (A Customer). It may be poignant, but the one allusion to religious persecution refers only to how the father, Joseph Balicki, was arrested because “during a scripture lesson, Joseph had turned the picture of Hitler’s face toward the wall.” (4). In fact, despite the fact that the family’s last name is Balicki, they are clearly Christian and often shown reading the Bible. Therefore, readers’ only understanding of religious persecution during the Holocaust in terms of Serraillier’s text is that you could be sent away to camps for being Christian while simultaneously disliking Hitler.

The basic plot involves the Balicki children who are all alone in Warsaw after their parents’ arrest. They survive as a ragged band, never in the ghetto, and eventually leave Poland on an expedition to find their parents, taking the orphaned Jan with them. The text makes clear that the Balicki family is Christian. Less clear is the identity of Jan, an orphan boy who travels

---

5 Balicki is a name that Ancestry.com lists more than one thousand Jewish records for (or Americanized versions of the Eastern-European name), an exponentially larger concentration than those listed as Catholic, Mormon, Presbyterian, or Huguenot.
with the Balicki children across Europe. Readers never learn much about Jan, although his character seems like the perfect opportunity to create a Jewish individual to balance out the generalizations of the poor treatment of the Polish by the Nazis in the occupation of Poland. However, without considerable changes to Jan’s character it is perhaps best that his background remains a mystery. Jan’s is uncooperative, unpredictable, disobedient and most troublingly, is portrayed as a thief and hoarder. With these less than stellar characteristics, and particularly the secret acquisition of “wealth” by Jan, it is perhaps a bit of a relief that he remains a missed opportunity, rather than a character that reinforces unflattering stereotypes.

One of the primary concerns regarding Holocaust fiction for youth is “how the text takes responsibility for presenting the factuality of its content” (Kokkola 53). The majority of fictional texts for young adults include some sort of paratext, a brief explanation for how the events of the story align with the actual, historical events of World War II and the Holocaust, designed to help authors take that responsibility for the factuality of their texts (Kokkola 57). *Escape from Warsaw* is no exception from this norm, including this blurb at the beginning of the story:

The characters in this story are fictitious, but the story is based upon fact. Imaginary names have been given to a few of the places mentioned—they are the villages of Boding and Kolina, the River Falken, the town of Falkenburg, and the prison camp of Zakyna. All other place names are real and can be found on the map of Europe. The description of the Red Army on the march is based on eye-witness accounts in J. Stransky’s *East Wind Over Prague.* –I.S.

Why Serraillier felt the need to change the names of towns and camps is uncertain, but that is not the only problematic aspect in which the facts of this story are presented. The entire family’s journey from Warsaw to Switzerland is wildly unrealistic, as they are helped at every turn by
kindly strangers and even sympathetic Germans. They are given food, lodging, Bibles, a boat, and cover from German forces as they make their way, alone, across a starving and war-torn Europe. They are even reunited with their long-lost brother who has escaped from a German farm where he has been working as a slave laborer. While another reviewer recommends it as a fine book to introduce children to “the nightmare of the holocaust and World War II” it seems more like an inconvenient dream than actual nightmare (Burkhamerk).

The places where Serraillier has a chance to engage with actual events involving Jews in Poland are also totally omitted. There is no mention of the ghettos in Warsaw, and when Joseph Balicki speculates on the rail traffic in Poland and the busy trains he sees the only information readers get is how they traveled “Eastward with carriages of troops and trucks of ammunition, they carried war to Russia. Westward they brought back the wounded to Germany, and sometimes rich plunder from the Ukraine” (23). Nowhere is the mention of the hundreds of thousands of Jews imprisoned and starving within the city, or the cattle cars packed with deportees on their way to various camps. The combination of all of these issues has the definite potential to lead to false conclusions about the situation in Europe during World War II regarding religious persecution and the kindness of strangers that was not nearly so prevalent. Readers do take this book as factual, even recent child readers like this reviewer who says, “The information in this book gave me a great picture of what it looked like back then” (A Kid’s Review). The nature of Serraillier’s text wholly disregards Kokkola’s reminder that “when placed in a fictional setting, no matter how well-motivated the creators of such fiction may be, historical facts must not be disregarded” (55). Escape from Warsaw is, fortunately, one of the most factually negligent of the texts available, but even those that are much more historically accurate still have problems in how they represent Jewish characters.
What Might it Mean to be Jewish?

There are a wide variety of texts that mention characters as Jewish, but give very few specifics as to what that means. For adolescent readers, this creates a one-dimensional picture of Jewish culture and people, which may not do enough to counter stereotypes or simplified notions of Jewish ways of life or offer any details that illustrate the actual events of the Holocaust rather than events of World War II in general. For some, like *Hitler’s Canary* by Sandi Toksvig and *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, the plot instead follows the hopeful arc of a resistance narrative. This is a popular sub-genre for young adult literature on Holocaust themes, with more than fifteen books for adolescents devoted to the Danish resistance alone. Its popularity is understandable, as the Danish opposition was one of the most successful in Europe, saving a huge percentage of their Jewish citizens by smuggling them across the ocean to Sweden. While Denmark had a very small Jewish population, they were able to save nearly all of their Jewish citizens from Nazi roundups. It is estimated that fewer than five hundred Danish Jews were deported, while nearly seven thousand escaped with the help of their neighbors and fellow Danes (Bergen 138). Naturally, the optimistic results of the Danish resistance are seen as a good introduction to Holocaust literature as they do heavily highlight the purported essential goodness of human nature while Danish gentiles risk their lives to save their Jewish neighbors. This, perhaps, flies in the face of what Kertzer is hesitant to say, that anything can be “understood” about the Holocaust, particularly when this extends to arguments regarding hopeful lessons expressing humanistic values that may come out of these texts (91, 54). However, much like *Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl*, these books tell very little about the actual events that

---

6 The popular story about the Danish King wearing a Star of David on his weekly rides around the city is, however, untrue.
characterized the attempted extermination of Europe’s Jewish population. Really, instead of being considered Holocaust books for young adults they should be taken as World War II books for young readers. While there is room for criticism in how little specificity Toksvig and Lowry give to their Jewish characters, their texts both have a basis in historical fact and include useful paratextual notes from the authors to explain the factuality of the texts, making them well worthy of reading in terms of learning more about World War II, but not necessarily more about the Holocaust.

Another text that illustrates troubling Nazi policies but deals with different issues than the Holocaust itself is Joan M. Wolf’s Someone Named Eva, a story of a young girl from Lidice, Czechoslovakia, who is taken from her family to a Lebensborn center in Poland where she is “repatriated” into an ideal young German girl. While Milada (rechristened Eva by the German guards at the Lebensborn center) passes the Nazi exams that certify her as an Aryan, and therefore worthy of reeducation and adoption by a German family, she is in fact Jewish. However, this fact is hardly remarked on as Milada knows that her heritage is Jewish, but her family participates in neither religious nor cultural Jewish practices, and no one else in the village even knows they are Jewish. When contemplating the six-pointed stars that Czech Jews are forced to wear, she notes “I had been glad that no one knew I was Jewish and that I would not have to be marked this way” (13). It is, of course, ironic that the blonde-haired and blue-eyed Milada is so easily certified as Aryan, and the text does an interesting job of drawing readers’ attention to the extreme unreliability of Nazi racial “science.” However, much like the novels on the Danish resistance, Someone Named Eva is an interesting book about specific

---

7 The people of Lidice were singled out by the Nazis for punishment after the assassination attempt on Reinhard Heydrich was falsely connected back to the village (Bergen 200).
events of World War II, but not a text that expands knowledge of the events that characterize the Holocaust itself for Jewish victims, or why they were targeted at all.

How are Jews Specifically Targeted?

To illustrate my larger argument in this chapter, it is necessary to pay particular attention to texts that do a better job of engaging difference and challenging readers to enter into cross-cultural conversations in effective manners. I wish to consider the effectiveness of Holocaust texts for young adults and how they deal with Jewish characters in terms of the framework that Elizabeth Baer sets up in order to think through useful characteristics of Holocaust fiction for young adults. She has four criteria to which she feels texts must adhere: the texts “grapple effectively with the evil of the Holocaust, the evil that is new in a post-Holocaust world” (384). A text, in order to do this sufficiently, should also think of the ways in which this evil was particularly and creatively deployed to attack Jewish cultural mores specifically. Beyond just burning synagogues and desecrating religious artifacts, often persecution was directed at specific Jewish behaviors and beliefs which is a factor that texts for young adults should not leave out.

One of the more interesting books on Nazi persecution of Jews in Austria is the recently translated *Emil and Karl* by Yankev Glatshteyn. *Emil and Karl* was initially written in Yiddish, and published in 1940 to give Jewish-American students who were studying Yiddish some idea of the persecution their fellow Jews were facing overseas. *Emil and Karl* covers the lives of two boys after their parents are taken away: Karl’s mother because of Socialist activities and Emil’s parents because they are Jewish. As they wander Vienna trying to make sense of their new position as orphans under the Nazi regime, they come into direct contact with persecution tactics explicitly aimed at Jews. Here are some of the first examples of the stigmatization of the
“Other,” one of the steps that Semelin describes as fundamental to conceptualizing genocide as opposed to other sorts of violent conflicts (9).

After being captured by an Austrian Nazi, the boys are dragged to a public square full of people scrubbing the pavement with their bare hands. The explanation for this forced labor is directly tied to anti-Semitic beliefs as a Nazi explains:

“But there, in ancient Egypt, they made bricks without straw. Now they wash stones without brushes, but with their bare hands. It’s almost the same thing.”

And the man added, with a little smile, “With their clean, intelligent hands, with their delicate little hands that hate to work.

“But the children of Israel will never escape from this Egypt.” (61)

In this passage, the Nazis create a bizarre explanation for their behavior in order to remind their Jewish victims of their past slavery, and the oppressive tactics that the Pharaoh had employed while the Jews were enslaved in Egypt. While readers of Emil and Karl in the 1940s at Yiddish school would have most likely understood the reference in more detail, the message is still clear: Jews have been persecuted before, and now they are victimized again, but with no chance of escape. The religious taunts that accompany the pointless and painful task assigned to the men, women, and children of Vienna are targeted specifically in a way that highlights some of the history of Jewish culture. Passages like this one illustrate the long standing history of Jewish persecution, but also the way in which the Nazi treatment of the Jews was so often specifically targeted to mimic that history, all the while taking it to never-before seen levels of horror for Europe’s Jewish population.

A more contemporary and widely read text that deals with the evils of the Holocaust and the specificity of attacks on Jews is Art Spiegelman’s Maus. Spiegelman’s graphic novel is
based around recorded conversations with his father which address the story following the process of their relationship as adults, and Vladek Spiegelman’s memories of the Holocaust and his survival. It is characterized by what Marianne Hirsch has deemed “postmemory”—a memory of the Holocaust that echoes within the children of Holocaust survivors who are born after the war itself. Hirsch says Art’s memory is “delayed, indirect, secondary” even as it illustrates “the power of the son to rewrite the father’s words” (13). Vladek’s memories are detailed and extensive, and Art Spiegelman creates a very moving portrayal of his father and their sometimes contentious relationship throughout the two volumes of *Maus.*

In *Volume I: My Father Bleeds History,* readers see one common Nazi tactic to humiliate and violate Jewish customs as they force devout Jews to get rid of their beards, sometimes violently by burning them or removing portions of flesh indiscriminately in addition to the beard. In *Maus I,* Spiegelman’s father Vladek tells the story of his arrival home from prison after the Nazis had overtaken Poland. Vladek is shocked when he first sees his parents to find his father without a beard:

---

The Nazis targeted Jewish citizens with a very specific program of humiliation and estrangement, forcing them to violate core beliefs and driving wedges between the Jews and non-Jews within a given community. Scenes like this one in *My Father Bleeds History* give readers the sense that the persecution by the Nazis is first and foremost a cultural attack; the justification of cultural discrimination comes before Vladek’s father goes on to explain how the Nazis have also taken away his livelihood as a factory owner. Vladek’s father has been relegated to the category of feared “Other,” making him a member of Semilin’s imaginary construct that
deserves destruction. Scenes of these highly selective forms of violence can help readers understand cultural facets of religious difference and how it is variable throughout even individual family members, as neither Vladek nor Art sport the heavy beard Vladek’s father did. As Baer argues, this also helps readers understand how the Nazis exploited those differences in order to perpetrate their particular form of evil.

Second, Baer focuses on the importance of considering the complexity of the events of the Holocaust, “the book should not provide simplistic explanations,” which have the danger of reinforcing those stereotypes like those seen in the Short and Carrington study where students associated persecution of the Jews with their supposed wealth (Baer 384, Short and Carrington 79). Baer proposes that texts should “present the Holocaust in its proper context of complexity, even meaninglessness, of difficult questions for which there are no formulaic answers” (384). One of the most effective ways that sophisticated Holocaust texts are able to express both the complexity of the events of the Holocaust along with ideas about Judaism is by showing how religious belief itself is called into question by Jews who face the horrors of the ghetto and the concentration camp.

Gary Schmidt’s *Mara’s Stories* is an interesting and at times troubling Holocaust text for young adults based around Jewish folklore. Mara, a fictional character in an unnamed concentration camp, gathers her fellow barrack-mates around her on a nightly basis to tell stories that offer a sense of hope, or solace, or occasionally a brief chance to thumb their collective noses at the Nazis themselves.⁹ Mara’s stories rely on Jewish folklore and mythology in ways

---

⁹ One of the troubling things about *Mara’s Stories* is that it is often too hopeful of a book and does not always do a good job of accurately representing some factual information about the Holocaust: namely how unlikely there would
that do an interesting job of illustrating the rich history of Jewish culture, and serve as a reminder that while the stories may be different, the process of storytelling itself is a way to enter into a cross-cultural dialogue. Schmidt includes a much more satisfying set of textual notes to explain the basis for the stories that Mara tells, offering a brief description of where each tale originates as well as specific citations in case the reader wants to know more.

Schmidt’s story “The Pretzel Bakers” in particular highlights the notion of meaninglessness and the moments when belief falters. Hand-in-hand a young boy and a Rabbi exit a synagogue in Nazi Germany. Waiting outside is a Nazi officer, who demands the Rabbi explain to the assembled crowd “Who is responsible for all the troubles of the Fatherland?” The Rabbi carefully considers his response in this passage,

The Rabbi looked down the length of the Luger; it seemed as if he could peer down the very barrel at the waiting bullet. Then he looked at his people, watching him, some with their lips silently moving.

He turned back to the officer and said, quietly, “The Jews.”

The officer smiled, and then laughed out loud. Slowly he put the Luger away.
And the boy’s hand fell from the Rabbi’s grasp. The Rabbi did not look down at him.

The officer smirked, then turned to go.

“And the pretzel bakers,” said the Rabbi loudly.

The officer paused and looked back. Silence. Then, “Why the pretzel bakers?”

be as many young children as there are for Mara to tell stories to and how the small acts of resistance she records would have been a good deal harder (and incurred more punishment) than her stories indicate.
“Why the Jews?” answered the Rabbi, and felt again a warm, small hand grasp his own. (35)

Here, readers can see the moment of the crisis of faith for the young boy, as he pulls away from the Rabbi when he feels as though the Rabbi has turned his back on the community. Of course, because this is a folktale designed to give a sense of hope to the framework of other characters that are ostensibly listening to the story while in a concentration camp, the Rabbi gets the best of the Nazi by asking that fundamental question: why?

Schmidt remarks in his “Notes” at the back of the book, “the question that wins back the young boy” has the power to do so because “that question’s familiarity. It is a question that has been asked in every century, but never with more urgency than during the Holocaust” (130). While this is a rather simplistic tale, it serves to draw readers’ attention to the most difficult question of all, and the fundamental inability to answer it in any satisfactory manner for the people undergoing the evils of Nazi policy.

Other characters in texts for young adults deal with the crisis of faith that the young boy experiences in more complex ways. D. Dina Friedman’s Escaping into the Night is one of the better texts available for looking at a variety of ways in which Jewish characters navigate their religious faith in light of the hopelessness and the horrors of the Holocaust. The three children in the book have escaped from a Polish ghetto into a partisan group, all of them orphaned by the Nazis. Although the main character, Halina, has never really been to synagogue, she naturally discusses religion in light of their current persecution. In one of their first conversations, the beliefs of the three characters are spelled out:

“Do you believe in God?” Reuven asked.

10 This is also an example of one of the problems with Mara’s Stories as the story ends here, but without the most probable resolution of the return of the Luger and the Rabbi’s death at the hands of the Nazi officer.
“I don’t know. I’d like to, but I don’t know.”

“I don’t,” Reuven said. “If there was a God, He never would have let this happen to us.”

I didn’t answer, though I wondered what Batya would say. Batya had lost her entire family, yet when we reached the barn, she had whispered her morning prayers under her breath. Was it just a habit, or did she still believe? (36)

They maintain these positions throughout the book, as Reuven can only believe that God could never allow such events to happen. Batya maintains her religious beliefs even when denying them would have been beneficial, as in the case where she could have eaten bacon in order to avoid detection by a Nazi guard but instead only plays with it on the plate, cutting it into smaller and smaller pieces (124). The complexity of faith and the differing reactions and religious convictions among the characters in *Escaping into the Night* help readers to avoid essentializing portraits of Jewish attitudes towards God. It further serves to illustrate how some children could only respond to the situation by turning away from their faith.

Elie Wiesel’s famous and often taught Holocaust memoir *Night* is one text that grapples with both the meaninglessness and the religious alienation that can help present a “point of entry to [a] cross-cultural conversation” as both Wiesel and readers must go through the process of questioning the fundamental problem of *why* and realize that there are often no answers to give (Appiah 97). In particular, for characters like Wiesel, the process of his arrest and detainment in Auschwitz always lead back to a questioning of God himself. This makes readers engage with the ways Wiesel must think through his religious beliefs in the face of such experiences. Unlike the simple folktale interaction between the Rabbi and the young boy, Wiesel’s process of
questioning is torturous, made so by his extreme helplessness and rage in light of his experiences at the hands of the Nazis.

Wiesel, originally a very religious young man, finds he is unable to reconcile his beliefs with his treatment, while the conversation in the camp barracks inevitably turns to God’s role in their lives and horrific experiences:

In the evening, lying on our beds, we would try to sing some of the Hasidic melodies, and Akiba Drumer would break our hearts with his deep, solemn voice. Some talked of God, of his mysterious ways, of the sins of the Jewish people, and of their future deliverance. But I had ceased to pray. How I identified with Job! I did not deny God’s existence, but I doubted His absolute justice. (42)

This conversation is somewhat reminiscent of Mara’s stories, as Drumer draws on Jewish cultural norms in order to bring together the community and perhaps offer some religious solace. Wiesel has turned away from a belief in a God who makes any sense; while not able to entirely abandon his faith, he accepts that there is some inherent meaninglessness to their persecution in the camps. While some of his fellow prisoners try to answer the question why with assumptions of sins to be atoned for or ineffable plans, those answers fall short for Wiesel. The question of why can become a point for readers of many backgrounds to rally around as that desire to explain why bad things happen to good people is a common concern throughout various cultures. Wiesel’s mention of Job can also help draw connections between Christian readers and Jewish victims in ways that can alleviate the confusion between Judaism and Islam that Short and Carrington identified in their study. This questioning of explanations of the meaningless can then offer readers “a shared language of value, [where] we can often guide one another, in the cosmopolitan spirit to shared responses; and when we cannot agree, the understanding that our
responses are shaped by some of the same vocabulary can make it easier to agree to disagree” (Appiah 30). Texts like these can offer readers both complex portraits of Jewish characters, as well as make sure the larger message is not one that tidily offers meaning to a situation that so many people found to be essentially meaningless.

Third, Baer asks for texts to “convey—through use of facts, emotions, and/or memory—a warning about the dangers of racism and anti-Semitism, and of complacency” (385). The warning that Baer asks for here is important to consider in light of taking a critical view of the idea of tolerance. Once the enforcement of tolerance as a value has dissolved it can be very difficult to reinstate it. Many books include representations of violence directed at Jews that take place after the war has ended, as well as the often troubling reactions of bystanders. It is all too easy to want to believe that after the defeat of the Nazis everyone realized how wrong they were and embraced displaced Jews as they tried to regain their homes and livelihoods. Some texts include references to the violence done to returning Jews by their neighbors. Some exemplify the violence done to the memory of those who died by including characters who refuse to admit that their towns and villages were host to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jewish prisoners. These are the books that make the clearest argument for the ongoing dangers of racism.11

Daniel’s Story by Carol Matas, a book that was distributed with the aid and input of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, is a sometimes stilted but earnestly historical narrative about one young man’s experiences in Lodz, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and just after the war ends. While the events of the camp are distressing in their own way, the most powerful impact the story has is at the end, when Daniel, his father, and his friend Peter are traveling home

11 As do the texts that cover neo-Nazi movements, a set of books that I will cover in chapter five.
to Poland. When they step off the train to stretch their legs at a small station in rural Poland the ongoing anti-Semitism is on display:

“What have we got here?” [One Polish farm boy says]. “Two Jews who escaped the gas?”

I know we are in serious trouble. Even if we were both fit and healthy, these lads could make mincemeat out of us. In our present condition we don’t stand a chance. I start to back away. But one of them grabs Peter, and before I can do anything, he punches him hard, in the stomach. People from the train are milling around, but no one comes to our aid. (122)

Despite Daniel’s calls for help and his use of a gun to deter the attackers, Peter is beaten to death. Readers get the clear sense that with some intervention from the surrounding crowd or the attention of the policeman, who cares for only the wounded Polish farm boy, Peter may have lived (123). The ongoing attacks on Jewish citizens and the senselessness of racist violence are importantly highlighted here, as is the clear implication of the dangers of complacency. This is an important aspect of the aftermath of the Holocaust to make clear to young readers, particularly to contrast against legitimate reactions during the war. While the Nazi terror apparatus was in power over much of Europe, there were genuine consequences for those who spoke out against the persecution of the Jews. During this time there was the threat of retaliation against anyone who resisted or stood up to the Nazis. Additionally, and more threateningly, there were threats of retribution against friends or family members who may not have had any knowledge of resistance activities—essentially punishing the innocent in addition to the guilty. However, in a scene like this from Daniel’s Story, the consequences that one would have faced during Nazi
occupation are no longer a concern, yet anti-Semitism or complacency with the anti-Semitic farm boys leads directly to Peter’s death.

In Jane Yolen’s *Briar Rose*, a different sort of violence towards the victims of the Nazis is illustrated. Drawn to Poland by the fairy tale that her Grandmother told over and over during her youth, Becca arrives in Chelmno to uncover the truth behind the story of the princess rescued from a poisonous mist by a prince’s kiss. What Becca eventually discovers is the truth of both Chelmno and the unique version of Briar Rose that her Grandmother repeatedly told and expanded upon during her youth. Chelmno, unlike portions of Auschwitz that functioned as concentration camps or labor camps, was strictly an extermination site. There was a much smaller infrastructure in place, and most prisoners were taken from trains to running vans which were equipped to feed carbon monoxide from their exhaust pipes into the body of the van, asphyxiating the prisoners inside. *Briar Rose* functions as a fairy tale in more than one way, as Yolen is careful to note, “This is a book of fiction. All the characters are made up. Happily-ever-after is a fairy tale notion, not history. I know of no woman who escaped from Chelmno alive” (202). Yolen has received a good deal of praise for her book, and she successfully uses the fairy tale structure to motivate one young woman’s search for her family history. However, she does not allow readers to forget the overwhelming fact that more than 300,000 deaths took place at Chelmno, and takes advantage of her paratextual space to ultimately dispel any notions about a happy ending.

---

12 Children’s literature scholars such as Jack Zipes and Lydia Kokkola both speak of the book in favorable ways, commenting on the way in which Yolen uses the formula of a fairy tale without allowing for a false sense of happiness at its conclusion.
It is in the confrontation with local Polish residents where Becca encounters the most difficulties. The village looks rather small and sleepy causing Becca’s translator to ponder, “Where would you put 300,000 people, even dead?” (120). The people of the village, when pressed, either refuse to answer questions about the events of the Holocaust, or the respond with a great deal of hostility. One man replies when pressed, “Nothing happened here and that [Becca and Magda] should take their Jew questions away or that the nothing would happen again” (121-122). The residents’ hostility and denial of the events that took place in Chelmno fifty years ago is tinged with a lingering anti-Semitism that threatens not only Becca and Magda, but also the memory of those Polish Jews who lost their lives at Chelmno. In many ways their silence in *Briar Rose* creates a set of ungrievable lives, as unacknowledged and unmarked graves populate the landscape without any recognition on the part of the living residents. The danger of racism and anti-Semitism in this case becomes the danger of forgetting, of burying the past and leaving open the possibility of Holocaust denial. It is denials like this that also threaten any form of cosmopolitan cross-cultural conversation. Delanty suggests “it is the more deeply ingrained practices of everyday life and institutional structures that present the greatest obstacles” to a form of cosmopolitan multiculturalism, and here the ingrained practices are for denial and anti-Semitism in ways that deserve to be brought to the attention of young adult readers (150).

Finally, Baer asks that adolescent texts on the Holocaust give readers “a framework for response” (385). She believes this framework is tied to how fiction and memoirs about the Holocaust actually function to create memories as well as tell stories, which Baer hopes will “create in the child reader a consciousness, a ‘memory,’ and a sense of personal responsibility regarding prejudice, hatred, and racial discrimination” (385). As I have argued, the notion of teaching tolerance alone does not do enough to create a sense of personal responsibility, as it is
often too vague of a value to encourage any sort of action on the part of readers. One can see how texts that promote tolerance often overlook those lives that are not considered worth living, as I discussed in chapter one in terms of Nicole’s uneven application of her newly found compassion in Anne Frank and Me. Instead, texts need to promote engagement and understanding of other cultures to highlight common human bonds that can, in turn, help readers to have a framework for response in situations characterized by hatred or discrimination. Two of the books that best fulfill this category are memoirs, rather than fictional representations: Ruth Minsky Sender’s The Cage and Art Spiegelman’s Maus. Both of these books are intimately connected to the idea of postmemory, as they are motivated by interactions between parent and child in order to speak to those memories that are a “powerful and particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but though an imaginative investment and creation” (Hirsch 22).

The Cage is a story motivated by Sender’s daughter and her need to know about her mother’s ongoing nightmares. Her daughter Nancy’s imaginative investment is that of assuming that others will have a framework for response and believing, “it could not happen here. Our neighbors, our friends, they would help” (6). This is, of course, an assumption that readers would all like to make, particularly in terms of believing that there is an automatic response towards prejudice that is tied to some sort of essentially good human nature. However, the events of the rest of the book do not bear out that claim. Instead, Nazi policies relied in part on underlying anti-Semitism in the countries they occupied. They additionally employed an effective system of terror and social death that discouraged any sort of “help” that may have initially come from friends and neighbors. Nancy, too, desires an answer to that question why, and Sender can only tell her story, in all of its detail and often the meaningless aspects of
persecution that so repeatedly accompany the experiences of those Jews in the camps. However, the end of the story is where the encouragement for responding differently is evident.

After hearing the story, from the betrayal of their neighbor Mrs. Gruber in Lodz to her liberation by Russian soldiers at the very end of the war, a frightened Nancy now wants to know, “Could it happen here? Could it happen again?” (206). Sender can only offer this advice to both Nancy and readers:

“If we forget the past, it could happen again. We must learn from those horrors. We must learn what happens when people remain silent while others are persecuted.” I feel the sharp pain of remembering. “We must learn, my child, not to ignore the ugly signs, the danger signs, as my family—as the people of my generation—did.” (206)

This message is only reinforced by the last moments of the story, as Sender returns to Lodz to try and locate her family, if there were any survivors. When she arrives at her home, she finds an angry woman who reminds her “the Jewish homes were given to the Poles!” and she has thrown out all the pictures and personal items she found in the home (207). Here, the reader’s attention is drawn to the idea that to be a European Jew was often not only to be a victim at the hands of the Nazis, but also to be left with nowhere to return home and often no reminders of their former lives to carry forward as they move on and attempt to start new lives. The focus on the responsibility of neighbors and how often they failed highlights “what happens when people remain silent while others are persecuted” even after the threat of violence against their own lives has passed (Sender 206).13

---

13 Jan Gross’ 2001 book *Neighbors* chronicles how the Polish citizens of Jedwabne murdered 1,600 of their Jewish neighbors with little to no encouragement from the Nazi occupation. Again, anti-Semitism or fear of the “Other” was not limited to Germany during this period.
Vladek and Anja Spiegelman have a similar experience in *Maus* with their Polish housekeeper as they return from the camps to find some, but not nearly all, of the valuables they left with her.

Figure 2: Vladek explains what happened after the war

Readers are given a more sympathetic picture of the Polish governess as Vladek has his photos returned to him, and is able to pass along these memories to Art, who includes both stylized representations and direct copies of the pictures themselves in *Maus*. But not Anja’s diaries, effectively effacing his wife’s experience of the war. Art mourns their loss throughout the *Maus* saga and refuses to forgive his father for destroying them.
Maus and Spiegelman also ask readers to consider what sorts of frameworks for response one needs to have to prejudice and persecution in the post-Holocaust world. Spiegelman deals directly with stereotypes and prejudice in contemporary society, unlike the bulk of The Cage, which draws its examples from the past. He creates a self-aware portrait of both his process of writing his father’s memories as well as the ways in which his aging father is portrayed. In a conversation with his step-mother he draws readers’ attention to the troubling aspects of his father’s representation in the book:

Figure 3: Art’s fears of creating a caricature of Vladek

In pointing to the troubling caricature of his father, Spiegelman asks that readers pay attention to multiple different Jewish characters in his books instead of just focusing on the negative
characteristics of his father. However, he also draws readers to an important point that reconnects with the idea that Russell and other theorists have pointed out so often, “it is not possible for any one book to give children a comprehensive understanding” of the Holocaust and its aftermath (278). Reading only *Maus* could give the impression that these racist caricatures are true, even as Spiegelman tries to draw our attention to how he feels they are inaccurate.

*Maus* also addresses a crucial concept that highlights the importance of having a cosmopolitan worldview, as we see how even though Vladek lived through some of the worst racist persecution the world has ever known, he is unable to extend any sort of sympathy or understanding to other oppressed groups. As Françoise pauses to pick up a hitchhiker, Vladek is horrified:

![Figure 4: Vladek’s racism](image)

---

15 Including his wife, who converted in order to marry Art Spiegelman. This notion of converting to Judaism is important and too often overlooked in literature about Jewish characters for young adults.
After the family drops the hitchiker at his cousin’s home, Françoise and Vladek have a heated discussion:

Figure 5: Françoise’s response to Vladek’s outburst.

The interaction between Vladek, Art, and Françoise highlights one of the most baffling aspects of racism and essentialist notions of minority populations. As Delanty points out, “the obstacles to multiculturalism are not in fact cultural incompatibilities between mainstream groups and migrant and minority groups but very often social obstacles,” which are illustrated here by
Spiegelman as Vladek refuses to equate his racism with “the way the Nazis talked about the Jews” (Delanty 150, Spiegelman 99). This moment in *Maus* highlights the importance of creating multi-faceted frameworks for response to oppression. We see through Vladek’s response to the hitchhiker and Françoise’s frustration how simple it is for people to fall back on social norms that recognize some lives while marginalizing others.

Conclusion

Literature is one of the primary access points for interacting with the “Other” in ways that can have a lasting impression on readers, and can help create cross-cultural dialogues in ways that move beyond teaching tolerance alone. This is critical to a project advocating a cosmopolitan imagination: one that thinks about and engages with difference in a way that can create open a dialogue on the validity of a variety of values. In terms of Holocaust texts for young adults, these books are often both exposing readers to new cultures and ideas as well as creating actual memories of the Holocaust itself, memories that are then drawn upon for the often repeated slogan “Never again!” However, like Rothberg points out in his article on *Maus*: “If memory matters, then representation matters as well, since memory arrives belatedly and is thus shaped by the form and context in which it is articulated” (467). Here, the forms and contexts have varied and have highlighted many different aspects of Jewish culture, and reading multiple texts can help to provide young adults with an appreciation for difference, rather than a tolerance of those who are “Other” in some way. Creating memories and understandings of European Jewish culture is deeply tied to creating effective texts on the Holocaust for young adults. If the representation of the characters in the text are lacking in specificity or clarity, then there is a real danger for misinterpretations and misunderstandings of who the victims of the Holocaust were and how they were specifically targeted by the Nazi regime. Semelin’s point about the
connections between culture, discourse, and genocide are central here. Genocide is in part a mental process of stigmatization and debasement, as texts like Emil and Karl and Maus show. Promoting a cosmopolitan imagination that engages with difference has the potential to disrupt the initial anxiety and discursive practices that Semelin says are at the basis of politically motivated mass-murder.

The number of options for representations of Jewish characters in Holocaust texts is fairly broad, although sometimes unevenly portrayed. While the Nazis considered Jewish lives without value and ungrievable, the plethora of texts that do engage with Jewish culture in interesting and significant ways can help combat that extreme form of essentialism and anti-Semitism. However, as Butler asks, we need to look towards populations that are sometimes still only marginally recognized and examine representational practices that can help constitute these populations too as recognizable and grievable lives. In the next chapter, I examine texts for young adults that cover other identity categories that the Nazis also targeted for elimination: the disabled, the Roma-Sinti, and the homosexuals which are only recently represented in texts for young adults.
CHAPTER III: RECOGNIZING ALL THE “LIVES UNWORTHY OF LIVING”

It's a fish white belly
A lump in the throat
Razor on the wire
Skin and bone
Piss and blood in a railroad car
100 people
Gypsies, queers, and David's star
This train is bound for glory
This train is bound for glory
—Indigo Girls, “This Train Revised”

Just as Nazi ideologues invented the category of “the Jew,” as if all Jews were somehow the same, they created the stereotypical, deformed “life unworthy of living” and the monolithic “Gypsy.” —Doris Bergen

Because the central argument for this project is essentially that there is a need for recognizability in global discourse and a need for an examination of normative power structures that are all too often missing in theories of tolerance and toleration, it is important to look at multiple identity categories that are marginalized in global human rights discourse.¹ In the last chapter, I illustrated how Jewish lives are represented as vulnerable and grievable. This grievability is one way in which vulnerable populations are made recognizable, particularly for young adult readers who often have limited access to diverse populations. Because of the heavy focus on Jewish victims (with greater or lesser success) and the sheer numbers of European Jews murdered by the Nazis, their lives are broadly represented and, as I argued in chapter two, regarded as livable and grievable. However, Jewish lives were not the only lives seen as

¹ Linguistically, the terms we use to refer to the Nazi extermination policies focus on the primacy of the Jewish experience. Both Holocaust and Shoah are specifically Jewish terms, either coined by Jewish victims or taken from Hebrew. The words themselves place an emphasis on the persecution of Europe’s Jewish population during the Nazi-era, in ways that potentially gloss over the experiences of other persecuted groups.
Lebensunwertes Leben or “life unworthy of life” by the Nazi regime. In this chapter, I turn to three identity categories that have a limited amount of exposure in young adult Holocaust literature: the Roma-Sinti, the disabled, and homosexuals. I have chosen to look at these groups due to the ongoing maltreatment and decided lack of tolerance that they face in contemporary society and discourse. I will illustrate both examples of their current persecutions as well as young adult literature that deals with their treatment during the Holocaust. Ultimately, adolescent literature about these victims in the Holocaust is unevenly executed, and often serves to highlight ongoing stereotypes in ways that do not help in the continuing project for the expansion of the category of human itself. If young adult literature about the Holocaust has the potential to get readers to engage with the “Other” in a way that encourages appreciation and acceptance, it is incredibly important that the texts they read do more than recreate limiting stereotypes.

Children’s Literature Association Quarterly has published claims to this effect, where Michael Martin notes the goal of historical fiction for young adults should be to introduce “a historical event or personage and, instead of simply reproducing the culturally cemented historical narrative that exists, work against the grain in an effort to raise new questions and possible understandings of that event or person” (318). In many ways, the books featured in this chapter inherently work against the grain to raise new understandings of Holocaust victims. In other examples, however, they sometimes fail to represent characters in approaches that do

---

2 While I am attempting to broaden the scope of personhood and victimhood in this chapter, these three additional categories are by no means exhaustive. Nazis also targeted black Europeans, Jehovah’s Witnesses, resistant Christian groups, and political dissenters. Some of their stories are featured in Ina Friedman’s ALA Best Book for Young Adults, The Other Victims (1990).
anything more than reproduce what Martin calls “culturally cemented” ideas already circulating in popular discourse (318). Culturally cemented narratives regarding the lives of others often merely rely on stereotypes rather than challenging readers to look at the “Other” with a new level of understanding. As I will illustrate, each group faces unique challenges in contemporary society in ways that indicate the binary relationship that defines how normal (human) and abnormal (less than human) is still firmly in place. Further, the real-life treatment of Roma-Sinti, the disabled, and homosexuals clearly indicates how abnormal populations are still often not even tolerated, much less accepted or acknowledged as valid identity categories and populations. The important thing is to find voices that challenge oppression by encouraging readers to engage with well-rounded characters that speak to the complex identities beyond simplistic stereotypes.

Without these important voices, the complete story of the Holocaust remains untold. For the purposes of this chapter, I have identified seven texts that deal with the experiences of these “other victims.” To challenge culturally cemented narratives effectively these books must present characters and situations that are both multi-dimensional and historically accurate. I argue the texts that are successful in aligning one’s responses and responsibilities in the face of persecution are those that ask adolescents to recognize and engage with difference, and the limited set of texts to draw on for this particular analytical project makes each text covered in this chapter particularly important. In terms of the Roma-Sinti, there are three primary books: Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli, Farewell Sidonia by Erich Hackl, and And the Violins Stopped Playing by Alexander Ramati. Of the three, only Ramati’s book is able to challenge the common stereotypes of “gypsy” culture and give readers a sense of how the Nazis explicitly targeted the Roma-Sinti for elimination. All three of the texts that deal with disabled characters are able to create interesting portraits of individuals that can help readers engage with the unique
experiences that characterize othered bodies. *T4* by Ann Clare LeZotte, *Dreaming in Black and White* by Reinhardt Jung, and selections from Ina Friedman’s *The Other Victims* all illustrate clearly the ways that normal/abnormal binaries are constructed and how that power differential can crush those with “problems.” A text like Lutz Van Dijk’s *Damned Strong Love* holds the primary burden of being the representational text in adolescent literature on the Nazi persecution of gay men, and therefore deserves a close reading in order to evaluate how the characters therein are (or are not) both recognizable as human, and grievable as valued individuals. Van Dijk’s text is certainly historically accurate, as it is autobiographical, but it is not terribly effective on a level of personal engagement, for reasons I cover in detail at the end of this chapter. It is important to have a variety of texts that cover these “other victims” in order to fight against the potential for monolithic generalizations about groups of individuals. Additionally, without a range of representations, important voices and experiences are potentially silenced.

Silencing voices in this way can lead to stereotyping and ongoing discrimination of many forms. In order to illustrate the ways in which the Roma-Sinti, the disabled, and the GLBT community are still considered “abnormal,” and therefore potentially less than human, I turn towards contemporary events in Europe and America and contrast the ongoing discrimination against the representational practices in young adult Holocaust books. I use these current events in order to illustrate what is at stake for individuals in these marginalized groups. These contemporary situations are central to understanding both the ongoing stereotypes and their consequences. The connection between these real-life events and the fiction or memoirs included in this chapter serves to illustrate how the discussion of literature and cosmopolitan values here is not “merely academic.” Cosmopolitan attitudes are characterized by the recognition “that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom
we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship” (Appiah xv). Yet it can be terribly difficult to acknowledge these global obligations to others when hampered by discriminatory stereotypes. Appiah also asks that “we take seriously the value not just of human life, but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (xv). Acknowledging the value of human life in the abstract merely serves to appreciate a normalized version of what a life is. Without an allowance for the particularities of human experience it is all too easy to elide those marginalized groups and the practices that lend their lives significance.

Roma-Sinti Stereotypes and Persecution

I begin with the group that has a clear contemporary experience of persecution in both Europe and America, as well as the largest number of full-length young adult Holocaust texts devoted to it. The ongoing discrimination against the Roma-Sinti population clearly shows continued oppression of a specific population, particularly in terms of the way it illustrates how the abnormal/normal binaries are still firmly in place. 3 I turn to these examples to set up a discussion of how contemporary discourse reifies normal/abnormal binaries in order to illustrate how these narratives are still culturally cemented. I believe this evaluation of contemporary persecution is essential to understanding how limited the category of the “human” still often is,

3 Roma and Sinti are the preferred terms for the still nomadic groups that travel Europe. Their origins are technically “Aryan” as they moved from India to Europe in the Middle Ages, although it is hard to designate whether they are a “racial, ethnic, or social group” because defining the Roma-Sinti could be based around their “family relationships with one another, language and traditions, or lifestyle” (Bergen 13). Roma is a more general term for the population, while Sinti designates the populations in the Germanic areas of Europe. Gypsy is a term designed to be pejorative, and comes from a mistaken claim that the Roma-Sinti populations migrated from Europe (Bergen 13).
and the ways in which young adult literature can either challenge or further cement these opinions. As the BBC reports, in the summer of 2010, French president Nicolas Sarkozy decreed that “some 300 illegal camps and squats would be dismantled within three months” as “part of a raft of new hardline security measures recently announced by the government” (“Q&A: France Roma expulsions”). Sarkozy’s new crackdown on the Roma population came after a clash between the police and a group of Roma in central France, and is characterized by deportations of Roma living illegally in France to Romania and Bulgaria. The current attention and crackdowns also highlight what has been an ongoing French policy, as approximately 10,000 Roma were deported in 2009. Members of the international community, such as Romanian President Traian Brasescu, have called attention to the ways in which France is singling out the Roma population for deportation. European leaders are again creating a monolithic “gypsy” group that is presumed to be incurably criminal and not deserving of the same rights extended to the rest of the European Union’s citizens. Brasescu sees the treatment as denying the rights that should allow “every European citizen to move freely in the EU” (“Q&A: France Roma expulsions”). While Brasescu criticizes Sarkozy’s deportations of Roma, their treatment in Romania and other places in Europe is by no means any more acceptable.

In a 2008 study, the authors found the treatment of the Roma-Sinti does “not appear to be in conformity with European human rights law” particularly in terms of surveillance practices and ethnic profiling (Cahn and Guild 59). They are subject to “regular, invasive controls of home and person by police” as well as “forced evictions from housing” in countries as varied as Italy, Serbia, Romania and France. (Cahn and Guild 59). In 2008 a Romani camp in Italy was burned to the ground, forcing 800 individuals to lose their homes, while Italian citizens looked on and cheered (Popham, “Italian Tolerance”). Amnesty International has drawn attention to how
Romanian police often single out Roma citizens in cases of police brutality, and neo-Fascist organizations in Italy are explicitly targeting Roma residents for violence (Huggler, Popham “Italian Fascism”). Stereotypes are often deployed in political discourse, claiming “Roma use their children to beg and steal, Roma live in unsanitary camps, [and] Roma don't value schooling for girls” (Doland). However, the primary problem seems to be more in how mainstream society treats Roma youth, particularly as they deny them access to goods and services based on false assumptions and stereotypes. It is these stereotypical views of young adults that Holocaust literature has the potential to challenge. However, a text like Erich Hackl’s *Farewell Sidonia* only reinforces the notion that “gypsy” children are abnormally incapable of education, as I illustrate in the next section. Studies have found “thousands of Roma children in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and elsewhere are enrolled in schools for the mentally impaired” and show examples of how students suffer from “low teacher expectations” and are “made to feel unwelcome” in educational institutions (Doland). Their exclusion from mainstream education is one facet of their overall conundrum, as they are “excluded from public life by racism, they are poorly placed to defend themselves against it” (Monbiot). All of these facts add up to create a portrait of an ethnic group that is systematically deemed less than human—shoved into unsuitable schooling, burned out of their homes, attacked by police, and profiled at nearly every turn. Without representational challenges it is easy to maintain these sorts of behaviors.

Stereotypes of “gypsy” populations extend to American culture as well, primarily in the form of popular entertainment and cautionary tales. Films such as *Chocolat* (2000) and *The Man Who Cried* (2000) romanticize the idea of the Gypsy lover and his stereotypically passionate and
However, there is a darker side to American representations of gypsy populations. In films like *Drag Me to Hell* (2009) and Stephen King’s adapted novel *Thinner* (1996) the Gypsy curse is invoked as horror film trope to punish the main characters. In *Thinner*, the character cursed by the gypsy gradually loses weight despite his caloric intake, which eventually kills him. In Sam Raimi’s *Drag Me to Hell*, the main character is a bank employee cursed to hell by a gypsy she evicted. In terms of young adult fiction, both *Milkweed* and *Farewell Sidonia* align their gypsy characters with the exotic and supernatural, maintaining these common representational stereotypes in ways that do not allow for any sort of sophisticated understanding of Roma-Sinti culture. While the plotlines in popular culture texts featuring gypsy characters seem far-fetched, the notion of the gypsy curse as a real life threat definitely exists.

Similar to the plotline of *Drag Me to Hell*, news stories of Russian bank employees hypnotized by gypsies and threatened with curses crop up in alarmist newspapers from time to time. Supposedly, according to the news source *Pravda*, Russian gypsies have learned how to effectively hypnotize and threaten nearly anyone in order to steal money. The swindled bank workers claim either to not know what they were doing, or to be in fear of their lives (Nilolskaya). *The Seattle Times* reports that the Moscow police deal with 300 to 400 reports of gypsy hypnosis a year (Murphy).

This fear of gypsy crime extends to American police forces as well, with the *Boston Globe* reporting on the twenty-first annual National Association of Bunco Investigators.

---

4 The Gypsy lover character in both of these films, both released in 2000, is played by Johnny Depp. Depp’s particular “bad boy” and darker hair and skin tone apparently make him one of Hollywood’s archetypal gypsies.

5 *Pravda* is not necessarily a terribly reputable source, often referred to as the *National Enquirer* of Russia. This hasn’t stopped other news sources from citing these stories, however.
Conference, a meeting of law enforcement figures who track down frauds committed by gypsies. While one of the investigators made sure to preface his talk with, “not all Gypsies or Rom are criminals” the only response from the audience was laughter and shouts of disbelief (Becerra). This conviction leads to similar types of ethnic profiling as those seen in Europe, with American police forces “go[ing] to Gypsy weddings and funerals to shoot photos, take down license plates, and hunt for suspects” (Becerra). In both Europe and America, Roma-Sinti populations are still subject to ethnic profiling, simplistic stereotyping, and state-sanctioned violence. Many current news articles will give a nod to the number of Roma-Sinti killed during the Holocaust, but with so few sympathetic representations in popular media, the numbers of the population that were killed do not seem to translate to the sorts of empathy the Jewish victims often receive.6 Without more sophisticated representations of Roma-Sinti characters, including their experiences in the Holocaust, it is all too easy to perpetuate the stereotypes of the gypsy as an exotic, supernatural, and most importantly criminal Other.

In general, the estimates for the number of Roma-Sinti victims killed by the Nazis are in the realm of a quarter to half a million, although that number could be much higher because the nomadic populace was much more difficult to estimate than the Jewish populations (Berger 190). In terms of their overall world population, the Roma-Sinti lost a larger percentage of their members than even the Jews (Hirsch and Kacandes 9). They have their own term for their

---

6 There is a long history of Gypsy representation in literature and popular media, ranging from *Wuthering Heights* (Bronte 1847), Sherlock Holmes’ case “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” (Doyle 1892), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Hemingway 1940), and contemporary romance novels like *Gypsy Lover* (Layton 2005) and *Mine Till Midnight* (Kleypas 2007). The character Angel from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) is the victim of a Gypsy curse, as are the characters of *The Wolf Man* (1941) and *Cry of the Werewolf* (1944). Holocaust representations are much more limited in general.
population’s destruction: *Porrajmos*, which translates chillingly to the “great devouring” (Lewy 226). Ramati’s *And the Violins Stopped Playing* details the particular experiences of the Holocaust, including details on how the Nazis explicitly targeted Roma-Sinti cultural mores as a tool for persecution, as I detail further in the following section. Like the Jews, the Roma-Sinti had a long tradition of harassment in Europe and shared many of the experiences that Jews suffered in the Holocaust/Porragamos. They were also “classified, dispossessed, deported, forced into ghettos, shot into mass graves, and gassed” although not with “the same fanatical energy” the Nazis devoted to the murder of the Jews (Berger 191). Berger also points out one of the most troubling aspects of the murder of the Roma-Sinti populations: the near non-existence of examples of people who protested on behalf of the Roma or who helped to shelter children from death (191). The examples of contemporary persecution as well as the lack of representation and few examples of anyone willing to speak out for the murdered population all point to the ongoing issues with recognizing the Roma-Sinti as vulnerable and grievable in the same way that other persecuted populations are often recognized.

“Gypsies” in Young Adult Holocaust Literature

Troublingly, the common stereotypes of the “gypsy” illustrated by current events extend to adolescent fiction about Roma-Sinti victims as well.7 Of the three best known books on the subject, *Milkweed* by Jerry Spinelli, *Farewell Sidonia* by Erich Hackl, and *And the Violins Stopped Playing* by Alexander Ramati, only one effectively portrays the Roma-Sinti culture in a well-rounded manner. All three actually offer interesting and fairly sophisticated representations of characters dealing with Nazi persecution. However, only *And the Violins Stopped Playing*

---

7 I am using the terms the authors of the novels choose for their texts. Often the generic term “Gypsy” is the designator, although Roma and Sinti are more specific and accurate terms for the communities themselves.
actually deals with a large population of Roma-Sinti characters as they evade the Nazis successfully for a year before their capture and deportation to Auschwitz. The other two books are worth exploring because of the way they engage with specific Holocaust themes, and it is useful to consider how they portray the lives of the gypsy characters in a limited manner. To return to Appiah’s claim about how evaluating stories helps to align our responses to the world, two of these three books only help to align or responses to very limited and stereotypical portrayals of gypsies. The ways in which these texts define Roma-Sinti identity all too often keeps abnormal/normal binaries in place, which in turn limits the scope of creating a recognizable and grievable population. This is in part evidenced by the very use of “gypsy” in both *Milkweed* and *Farewell Sidonia*, relying on the generic and often pejorative term rather than the specific identities that *And the Violins Stopped Playing* illustrates.

First, there is the recent novel *Milkweed* by Jerry Spinelli. This 2003 text won the Golden Kite Award, an award given annually to by the Society of Children’s Book Writers & Illustrators to recognize excellence in children’s literature (“Golden Kite”). Spinelli’s novel begins with the line “I am running,” as the main character flees from someone chasing him yelling “Stop! Thief!” (1). Readers are immediately introduced to a shoplifter and pickpocket, one who takes those actions to be the essence of his very identity, giving his name as “Stoptheif” when asked (3). The young boy is never in the company of fellow gypsy characters. He is an orphan when the book begins, without memory of his family or community. This, naturally, makes it difficult for him to remember any cultural characteristics of his minority group. In fact, the only stereotypical characteristic that he maintains is his ability to steal from others. His

---

8 The fact of the award follows the tradition of the many awards given to adolescent Holocaust literature, as covered in the introduction.
identity as a gypsy is so nebulous that it is given to him by a group of Jewish children he meets, based on his black eyes, his skin, and a yellow stone he wears around his neck (8). From the very early moments in the book readers are introduced to a person who is defined and described by his interaction with Jewish characters.

The Jewish orphans quickly explain to Stopthief that “next to Jews [the Nazis] hate Gypsies the most” and the difference between them is “everybody doesn’t hate the Gypsies, but there’s nobody that doesn’t hate us. Nobody is hated close to us. They even hate us in Washington America” (8). The homeless kids have a clear idea of their own persecution in relation to the way the Nazis and Polish citizens treat the Jewish population. For the most part, *Milkweed* is a book about the Nazis’ persecution of the Polish Jews, only told through the eyes of a probable Gypsy. Stopthief, later given the name Misha Pilsudski by the leader of the Jewish boys, is uncertain who he wants to be. Uri, the boy who names him, also gives him a background, including these details:

I, Misha Pilsudski, was born a Gypsy somewhere in the land of Russia. My family, including two great-grandfathers and a great-great-grandmother who was one hundred and nine years old, traveled from place to place in seven wagons pulled by fourteen horses. There were nineteen more horses trailing the wagons, as my father was a horse trader. My mother told fortunes with cards. […] I had seven brothers and five sisters. I was not the youngest but I was the smallest. I was so small because I was once cursed by a tinker who did not like the fortune my mother gave him. […] And so, thanks to Uri, in a cellar beneath a barbershop somewhere in Warsaw, Poland, in autumn of the year nineteen thirty-nine, I was born, you might say. (29-31)
Misha’s new identity carries many of the classic tropes of what a Gypsy is and does. The extended family, the wagons and horses, the women telling fortunes, and the inevitable Gypsy curse. As I illustrated in the last section, these elements are still common in contemporary discourse and popular culture representations of gypsies. While Misha takes to this new identity with gusto, he is unsure what to do with it. He admires the Nazi soldiers at first; even claiming that he would like to be a “Jackboot” (22). He actually tracks down two Nazi soldiers to express this wish, and because he has very little idea of the Nazis’ treatment of Jews or gypsies, despite the other boys’ warnings, he comfortably tells the soldiers that he is a gypsy (27).

Misha’s innocence makes him a rather endearing character, but it is also one of the frustrating things about Milkweed. Because his identity is so consistently defined by other characters, he has little chance of engaging readers in an experience of gypsy culture or the ways in which gypsy persecution differed from Jewish persecution during the Nazi era. Misha repeatedly states that he is “glad I’m not a Jew” thereby acknowledging he is beginning to understand the Jews are clearly treated differently by the Nazis (38, 79). His friends attempt to remind him “the ghetto is for you too. I hear they take Gypsies. And cripples. And crazies,” illustrating the extent of categories the Nazis targeted for elimination (79). However, Misha is never specifically targeted for being a gypsy. When his Jewish friends are rounded-up and put in the Warsaw ghetto he chooses to join them, going so far as to wear an armband labeled with the Star of David. Misha becomes, for all intents and purposes, another Jewish victim inside the walls of the ghetto. This elides the specificity of the Roma-Sinti experience during the Nazi era. Spinelli’s book becomes a story of Jewish persecution, told from the perspective of a child who has no real notion of his identity. His only remnant of supposed gypsy culture is his ability to
sneak about and steal from Polish homes outside of the ghetto, again reinforcing ongoing stereotypes of Roma-Sinti as criminals and thieves.

Spinelli’s book is a very compelling story of life (and death) in the Warsaw ghetto; it just is decidedly not a story of Gypsy persecution. It deals with the harshest realities of those imprisoned there, such as the desensitization to death that characterized the lives of the ghetto’s inhabitants. For example, when Misha spots a boy lying “right in the middle” of the sidewalk the “people just walked around him, making the shape of an eye” (85). While Misha is confused as to why the boy is sleeping in the middle of the sidewalk, his friend Uri knows the child is dead. Misha looks around and notices: “We were stopped, looking down at the dead boy, the only ones not walking by” (85). While most inhabitants no longer even notice the dead bodies of their fellow ghetto residents at their feet, Misha comments that “from then on, I saw dead people under newspapers every day. It was easy to tell the children—only one page was needed to cover them” (86). Only once does he notice someone else seeing the bodies, a man who “put his foot on top of the humped newspaper and tied his shoe” (86). These examples of the harsh conditions and the desensitization of the ghetto are fairly rarely illustrated in young adult Holocaust literature. Milkweed is a text that follows important experiences of the Holocaust, and illustrates the lives of Warsaw’s Jewish population in interesting and engaging ways. However, because Misha has no memory of his life before Uri defined him as a gypsy, it is difficult to call this novel a story that illustrates and engages with the particular ways this group was targeted and treated by the Nazi regime.

Erich Hackl’s book Farewell Sidonia is another book on the gypsy experience that suffers from similar problems. Some of the promotional material quoted on the back of the book from Review of Contemporary Fiction claims, “The Jews have Anne Frank. The gypsies, thanks
to Erich Hackl, have Sidonia Adlersburg.” The publishers, by including this quote from the journal review, strive to make an immediate connection between Sidonia and the iconic Jewish Holocaust victim. This is, in fact, the very first thing one sees when looking at the back of the book. However, far from creating an iconic gypsy victim, the book creates a portrait of the persecution of Austrian Communists at the time of Germany’s annex of Austria. Sidonia, abandoned by her gypsy mother at birth, is placed in the Austrian government’s care, and when none of her kin can be found she is sent into foster homes. The first is an absolute failure, with the father figure chasing his wife and the “black bastard” she has brought home out of the house (9). He fears for his family’s good name, claiming his wife wants “everyone making fun of us, even my apprentices. No one wants anything to do with gypsies and you bring this plague into the house!” (9). Because of Sidonia’s obvious physical differences, the first foster family rejects her, even before the Nazi annexation of Austria.

However, a more progressive family willingly adopts Sidonia, as her foster-mother Josepha Breirather bypasses cribs full of blonde babies in order to take the gypsy girl with the comment, “it needs a home too” (17). The baby is dehumanized by her foster-mother’s very choice of pronoun here. It is in the descriptions of the foster-family that the book switches from being a book about gypsy persecution to a book about political harassment. The foster-father, Hans, is a member of the Social Democratic Party and is repeatedly sent to prison for his political beliefs. Their home is raided for the membership dues that Josepha collects weekly, and

---

9 Attacks and arrests of the communists and socialists are also uncommon in young adult Holocaust fiction. This is, of course, problematic in its own way, particularly as contemporary American rhetoric refers to President Obama as both a communist and a Nazi. Perhaps if the fundamental disagreement between these two groups was made clearer in young adult literature, it would not be so easy to conflate the two.
Hans’ refusal to refute his beliefs is a constant struggle for the Breirather family (36). So much of the book is devoted to the Breirather family’s political position that it is difficult to really get a handle on what being a “gypsy” means to Sidonia.

Much like Misha in Milkweed, Sidonia’s identity as a foundling makes it difficult to engage with any aspects of gypsy culture. Doris Bergen defines Roma-Sinti identity as being connected to “family relationships with one another, language and traditions, or lifestyle” (13). Sidonia’s experience growing up involves none of these cultural elements. Her only experience of being a Gypsy is the different color of her skin, which is commented on often throughout the book. She is referred to as “a black one,” a “Moor’s happy child,” a “black little thing,” and as having “dark skin and shiny blue-black hair” (17, 27, 49, 104). The potential interpretation from reading Farewell Sidonia is that “gypsy” is a distinct race rather than a complex ethnic and cultural designation. Political philosopher Elisabeth Galeotti’s book on tolerance points out the issue at hand by noting that “some differences are more different than others” including “race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and culture—[and] are markers of oppressed or excluded collective identities” (19). By acknowledging only one aspect of Sidonia’s difference, her physical appearance, the complex ways in which the gypsies were “more different than others” according to the Nazis are ignored. Because gypsies were technically Aryan, as they migrated from the Indian sub-continent, the Nazis needed to create an ethnic and social reason for their elimination. The Nazis labeled them as socially inferior and criminal, qualities which were based in their supposed “racial impurity” (Friedman 7). It is important to note, again, that these stereotypes are still very much at work in terms of the expectations for education and ethnic profiling mentioned earlier in the chapter.
The novel does deal with the ethnic profiling of the gypsies that was taking place in Austria in the late 1930s, although not in relation to Sidonia’s character. Austrian authorities, promptly after Germany’s invasion in March of 1938, moved against the gypsy population. The police “did not need much convincing” and were able to accomplish what had taken several years in Germany “within a matter of months” (Lewy 57). Gypsies were quickly “subject to compulsory labor at public works for ten hours a day” while “almost half of their wages were to be paid to the communities in which they lived as compensation for many years of welfare relief” (Lewy 57). The first deportations to concentration camps began in May 1938 (Lewy 57). By 1940 the “asocials” had been sent to a variety of camps including Ravensbrück, Dachau, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen (Lewy 59). Because of the preexisting prejudice against the Austrian gypsies, Nazi policies were quickly implemented, and the speed with which they happened allowed very few options for escape (Bergen 84). Hackl’s text illustrates the immediate implementation of anti-gypsy policies as the Austrian government created the “International Center to Combat Gypsy Terror” that would categorize and track gypsy citizens by fingerprints, one of the first steps to defining and rounding up a population for extermination (52). The way the book calls attention to governmental policies is useful in looking at the ways existing stereotypes can be expanded.

The moments where *Farewell Sidonia* focuses on Sidonia’s character are problematic because Hackl chooses to do so in ways that support the same sorts of stereotypes seen in contemporary discourse. This is particularly evident in the discussion of her school life. When she begins school in 1939, her enthusiasm makes her a favorite of her teachers. However, “when called on she couldn’t think of the answer or had long forgotten the question and said whatever came to mind” (72). This causes her teacher to feel “tricked” and as though Sidonia is a “bad
child” (72). These moments illustrating her experiences in the classroom echo the contemporary problems that Roma-Sinti students have in Europe. Even when they are not placed in schools for the mentally impaired, they are made to “feel unwelcome” (Dolan). Beyond her class behavior there is also Sidonia’s inability to learn to read and write. She “inverted her letters or lined them up in the wrong order,” and cannot write her own name (72). When her instructor suggests her inability comes from something in her “nature,” the text does little to dispel this implication of racial inferiority (73). Because of the ongoing policy of discrimination against gypsies for racial reasons, Sidonia is eventually taken from her adopted family and returned to the mother and group of gypsies that abandoned her at birth. The entire community is deported to a concentration camp, at which point the narrative picks back up the story of Hans’ political involvement and his position in town government after the war ends. Rather than relying on the pathos or grief that the concentration camps can so often evoke in readers, Hackl chooses to focus his narrative back on the conflicts between socialism and fascism. For this reason the quote on the back of the book from the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* would probably be more accurate if it read “The Jews have Anne Frank. The communists, thanks to Erich Hackl, have Hans Breirather.” Hackl’s text, like Spinelli’s *Milkweed*, is a book ostensibly about Roma-Sinti persecution, but upon closer examination fails to accurately represent their specific experiences at all.

The final young adult text that discusses the Nazi persecution of the Roma-Sinti is the only one that does a good job of asking readers to engage with difference and places the story itself in Roma culture. The book illustrates a considerably different view of Roma-Sinti culture, one that deals with elements of family relationships, language and traditions, and lifestyle, all elements that Bergen uses to complicate simplistic portrayals of Roma-Sinti identity. Alexander
Ramati’s *And the Violins Stopped Playing* is a book based on a true story, given to him in the form of several notebooks from the Polish survivor Roman Migra. Migra has explicitly been looking for an American to write his story, because he feels as though it would do little good to only have his story told in Polish (Ramati 8). Ramati takes the notebooks and creates a fictionalized story based on the experiences that Migra carefully recorded. When the book begins, Migra and his family are living in Warsaw in an apartment, described as *forytka Roma* or big-town gypsies, and earning a living playing music in bars for both the Nazis and Poles (20). Migra and his sister are in school, and they live a largely assimilated life. Their living situation as the novel begins challenges the stereotypes of gypsies as unable to work, live in a city, or hold down a job. Their position changes quickly when a family member arrives on their doorstep after escaping from the Łódź ghetto. He reports on the deaths and deportations to Chelmno, due to the confusing Nazi logic of race and undesirability. He explains their supposed crimes as follows: “They say—not for racial reasons as we are originally from India—we are *Aryans*. But they say for social reasons—we are nomads—thieves, criminals and parasites” (23). This information spurs the Migra family into action, and they leave their comfortable city life for the nomadic camp where the extended Migra family still lives.

It is in the Roma community that the unique culture of the Roma-Sinti is most clearly represented and written in ways that expand and challenge stereotypes of gypsy curses and dirty criminals such as those seen in contemporary discourse. While the extended Migra family is close knit and welcoming to their city relatives, they are not the family with an imaginary 109 year old great-great-great grandmother that Uri bestows on Misha in *Milkweed* (29). The overall societal structure is very patriarchal, with a male leader, the Shero Rom, making decisions for the rest of the group. He also relies on the advice of a council of elders to help him make decisions,
including whether or not to flee Poland when the first news of Sinti in the Łódź ghetto makes its way to the larger community (55-56). Ramati’s descriptions of the family life and the political organization of the camp help to create a picture of a complex society, governed by rules and laws and centrally organized. The Shero Rom who rules their particular group has, unfortunately, developed a relationship with the local Nazi leaders and refuses to flee when Migra advises they do so. Luckily, Migra’s warning keeps the kumpania from accepting the German’s offer of indoor housing for the long winter. The Keldari kumpania, who do accept the invitation, are rounded up and deported before the end of the season (89).

As I have argued in chapter two, in order to create a recognizable and grievable population, the specific customs of that group must be taken into account when illustrating the attempted Nazi extermination. The “new algorithm in horror, [and] in evil” that Baer illustrated and that formed the framework for my evaluation of Jewish persecution needs to be dealt with in terms of groups like the Roma-Sinti as well. My discussion of Milkweed and Farewell Sidonia are examples of how they fail to illustrate any specifics of Gypsy culture, and therefore cannot describe the full extent of Nazi atrocities leveled against the Roma-Sinti population. And the Violins Stopped Playing, however, describes the ways in which Nazi persecution differed for the Roma-Sinti (or Zigeuner in German) population in ways that serve to further create a uniquely recognizable and grievable population. While the Migra kumpania successfully avoid the Nazis in Poland and escapes to Hungary, their safety only lasts until the fall of Hungary itself. At this point, the band is captured and deported, but not without specific attacks on what the group values. Their “wagons were capsized into a ditch, as the horses harnessed to them, whinnying wildly and rearing on their hind legs in terror were forced over on to their rumps” (168). The Nazis then proceed to shoot all the horses, because they are “sorry for” them (168). These two
actions immediately destroy the Sinti’s homes and livelihood, and the group must watch the lives they have worked so hard to rebuild in Hungary vanish, along with their identity as nomads.

Migra and his community are deported to Auschwitz, but their treatment differs from the Jewish prisoners in important ways. They are placed in Auschwitz II-BII E, a section of barracks housing only gypsy prisoners, the “Gypsy Family Camp” that opened in February 1943 (“Auschwitz-Birkenau Auschwitz II”). While Auschwitz II was largely known as the primary extermination center for European Jews, the Gypsy Family Camp operated for seventeen months and was often a seemingly better place to be than the other sections. Prisoners were allowed to stay with their families, they were not subject to immediate selection upon arrival, and over 300 children were born at the camp (“Auschwitz-Birkenau—Sinti and Roma”). Of course, it was really only a temporary stay of extermination, as 20,000 of the 23,000 “died [due to disease and starvation] or were murdered in gas chambers” (“Auschwitz-Birkenau—Sinti and Roma”).

Upon their arrival, the Migra family is assigned jobs in the camp orchestra, the kitchens, and the main character, Roman, as a translator. Although the elder members of the family are too old to work, they are allowed to live with their family in the barracks (Ramati 188). The most chilling aspect of this particular camp, and one also unique to BII E, is the presence of Dr. Josef Mengele. Roman Migra gets a position as translator for Mengele, and therefore has first-hand access to the experiments on the Roma-Sinti population with the ostensible goal of discovering what made them “asocial” and then figuring out a way to distill the Aryan aspects of their blood in order to create a purer race. Mengele’s experiments on the Roma-Sinti involved his fascination with twins, his interest in differently colored eyes, and research on *noma faciei* (gangrenous stomatitis), a disease that eventually kills Migra’s wife. Mengele’s interest in the
Mengele’s experiments are illustrated in the stories Ramati writes, based on Migra’s experiences while working as Mengele’s translator. Mengele has been attempting to modify a young pair of twins’ outward appearance to be more Aryan. He examines their eyes, ten days after their last injection, and exclaims “They are almost blue! Schwester!” followed by an order to his nurse: “I want their eyes preserved in flacons” (203). The girls, subjected to injections and testing for an indeterminate period of time, are summarily dispatched, and Migra witnesses how shortly after the girls exit the room “the nurse brought to Mengele’s office two flacons, each with a pair of eyeballs swimming in alcohol” (203). This scene illustrates several of Mengele’s particular concerns with his Roma-Sinti inmates as he shows his fascination with trying to purify their blood and track eye color. He explains his interest:

If we discover all the advantages of being a twin; if in addition we learn how to breed them and at the same time how to improve the human stock—and, believe me, my experiences show that we can lighten the color of hair and brown eyes into blue—we could twice as quickly repopulate those areas emptied of inferior people with the Aryan race. *Twice* as fast! (212)

Without the combination of inferior, yet still Aryan, genes and the impulse to attempt a purification of their blood, the Roma-Sinti in Auschwitz would have been murdered much sooner than they were. Yet it is their very survival over that seventeen-month period that also defines their unique experience in the camp. Elements of their culture come into play even in the camps, as extended families stay together and patriarchal elders are still viewed as leaders. *And the Violins Stopped Playing* is a book that illustrates both the complexities of Roma-Sinti culture, the camp’s population for his particular experiments is one of the ways in which the experiences of the Roma-Sinti population differ from those of the Jewish population in Auschwitz.
ways in which “gypsy” lives lost in the *porrajmos* are equally grievable, and the almost complete decimation of vibrant groups of Roma-Sinti. Roman Migra, his sister, and his sworn enemy Zoya are the only three who escape death. Migra has become the new Shero Rom, and he takes his responsibility as leader seriously, seeking out ways to tell his story in English so a wider world can comprehend both the nuances of Roma culture and the ways their lives should be equally recognized as victims at the hands of the Nazis. These three books on the Roma-Sinti experience have their limitations, but they do comprise a growing body of work on the subject. Similarly, there are a limited number of narratives on both the disabled and the homosexual victims of the Nazis that deserve close evaluation in order to see how they create recognizable human lives out of often overlooked identity categories.

**Disability is a Human Rights Issue**

Much like the many examples of the ongoing persecution of the contemporary Roma-Sinti population, in both Europe and America, there are similar problems with the way the disabled are treated in modern society. Organizations such as the International Disability and Human Rights Network (www.daa.org.uk) seek to illustrate the contemporary abuses of the disabled, often in ways that serve to egregiously highlight a normal/abnormal binary and the ways in which the abnormality is often tolerated only in terms of exclusionary practices. Young adult Holocaust literature featuring disabled characters, such as *T4, Dreaming in Black and White*, and *The Other Victims*, speak to these exclusionary practices, both in the Holocaust and after. In contemporary society, the Disability and Awareness Action (DAA) group seeks recognition not only of their varied population, but also acknowledgement of the social construction of the abled/disabled binary: “We believe that it is only through recognition that disability is socially constructed that we will achieve dignity” (“DAA—Human Rights”). One of
the ways contemporary theorists attempt to examine how disability is socially constructed is through an examination of how normalcy is created. In terms of my criticisms of tolerance and toleration, normalcy often revolves around creating exclusionary systems that extend power and privilege to the “normal” while the “abnormal” is extended the consolation prize of tolerance. Critics like Lennard Davis tackle this construction of normalcy by pointing out “the ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (3).

Davis points out the relatively recent categorization of lives into “normal,” “average,” and abnormal. The terms themselves develop in the early years of the industrial revolution, primarily in the years 1840-1860 (3). The creation of this lexicon coincides with the rise in eugenics-based scientific investigation, the philosophies that eventually lead to many of Hitler’s policies. It is often all too easy to look at the events of the Nazi era as the work of one madman, but that ignores many of the specifics of history. In fact, “While we tend to associate eugenics with a Nazi-like racial supremacy, it is important to realize that eugenics was not the trade of a fringe group of right-wing, fascist maniacs. Rather, it became the common practice of many, if not most, European and American citizens” (Davis 8). Unfortunately, there are contemporary ways in which the “abnormal” are still targeted for elimination. The DAA points out some of the problems inherent in advanced genetic research: “Anyone who does not conform to the idea of perfection or who is not straining for happiness becomes socially unacceptable,” while “It becomes morally and ethically sound to eliminate these so-called imperfections from the human genome and to ensure that the public purse is not wasted on those imperfect lives that appear to have no quality.” No one knows this better than Hannes, the protagonist of *Dreaming in Black and White*. He references genetic testing and his father’s hope that “in the future they’ll even be
able to repair defective genes” (95). Hannes knows that what his father wants most of all is a “normal” son, something he will never be. Both the DAA and *Dreaming in Black and White* show how contemporary genetic advances promise the creation of a more perfect society, with fewer abnormal bodies to contend with. There are, however, multiple problems with this train of thought, and they tend to point to the connections that create othered bodies for individuals.

The consideration of the disabled as less than human is perhaps most clearly seen in the world-wide mistreatment and hate crimes committed against disabled individuals. Some of the following examples show the violence done to the physical bodies of the disabled, while some illustrate the violence of denying the disabled the minimum requirements for life itself. When Judith Butler discusses the ideas of recognition and grievablity, she also connects them integrally to the precariousness of life. In this formulation, she writes “To say that life is precarious is to say that the possibility of being sustained relies fundamentally on social and political conditions, and not only on a postulated internal drive to live” (*FoW* 21). The internal desire to live is not enough to have a recognizable life for Butler. There must also be the social and political conditions that make life possible in the first place. In *T4* and *The Other Victims*, the deaf characters show how the social and political conditions for life are limited in Germany both before and after the war. The “abnormal” bodies that these characters inhabit have more or less limited options for sustaining their life regardless of who is in power. However, examples of both physical violence and social violence against worldwide disabled communities speak to the contemporary exclusionary practices of those deemed physically or mentally abnormal.

Troublingly, disabled individuals are “at least one and a half times more likely to be the victim of assault or abuse than other people of similar age and gender. Compared to nondisabled people of the same age and gender, disabled people typically experience more prolonged and
severe abuse, with more serious effects” (Sherry). This is, in part, because the abuse often comes at the hands of institutions or caretakers, and is coupled with the sometimes limited communication abilities of disabled individuals (Sherry). Examples of physical abuse, which social worker Mark Sherry makes a point of calling hate crimes, are global and widespread. They are also under reported and only recently defined as hate crimes, with the first American indictments issued in June of 1999 (Sherry). While hate crimes against a variety of races, ethnicities, religions, and sexualities are to a greater or lesser extent commonly recognized, those against the disabled population are much more rarely acknowledged as such. It is easy to forget, then, that “Anti-disability violence is produced by a whole series of ideological structures that legitimize oppressive behavior” (Waxman 3). The ideological structures that legitimize oppressive behavior are often ignored by the authorities or called into question because the victim is presumed to be unable to correctly remember, identify, or recognize their attacker (Sherry, Waxman, DAA). There is nothing that more clearly indicates a lack of tolerance than a hate crime, and the overall societal response to the instances of violence points towards a systemic intolerance for those disabled “Others.”

Beyond physical violence, there are the limitations placed on a livable life by creating social conditions that inhibit their very survival. Butler rightly points out that “life requires support and enabling conditions in order to be a liveable life” (FoW, 21). Therefore, even when direct physical violence is not being leveled against a person with disabilities, the policy-based limitations placed on their lives create individuals who are less than human in the eyes of the law. In the Netherlands, “A judge ruled that a wheelchair user was not entitled to accessible transport because he was not a member of the public,” while throughout Europe “people who are seen as not able to make a decision about their lives can have their right to own a property
denied” (“Are Disabled People Included?”). In Venezuela the disabled are not allowed to own businesses, and in Romania one interviewee commented on how there are “no possibilities for social integration because of the existence of architectural barriers, lack of working conditions for disabled people and no access to any public means of transportation. In spite of the fact that [they] would like to learn, there were and are no possibilities for study for people with severe impairments” (“Are Disabled People Included?”) In the United States, financial reform and welfare panic has led states like Indiana to end food aid to those who are developmentally disabled (C. Wilson). While these examples do not illustrate any form of physical violence, they clearly illustrate the lack of support and enabling conditions for life extended to those with disabilities. Franziska from The Other Victims illustrates how the lack of enabling conditions definitely existed even after the Nazis were defeated. Discriminatory attitudes towards difference are never merely externally imposed by a dictator or oppressive regime, as I illustrated in chapter two.

Finally, there are those policies that seem frighteningly familiar to nineteenth century eugenics and Nazi ideals. Modern genetic science labels the disabled body as one where disability is “a flawed genetic text in need of rewriting” (J. Wilson 67) in ways that may promote policies like genetic testing and selective abortion. Mapping the human genome, in many ways, seeks to create an ultimate human norm, what Donna Haraway calls “a standard reference work” that could create “a national or international genetic bureau of standards” (qtd. J. Wilson 68). Projects such as this one can clearly solidify normal/abnormal binaries. Then, public discourse regarding the ways in which the abnormal can be effectively eliminated from contemporary society become more prominent. Recently, in the Ukraine, “6 disabled children starved to death at a hospital because staff stole the food that was destined for them,” a situation which echoes the
Nazi policy of considering the disabled as useless eaters, and presuming the food they consume could be better used elsewhere (“Are Disabled People Included?”). Contemporary eugenics practices are not only used but governmentally-sanctioned in some places such as China where, in 1994, they “introduced a law designed to eliminate 'inferior births' and heighten the standards of the whole population through enforced sterilization of disabled people, compulsory abortion of disabled fetuses and the prohibition of marriage between people with certain hereditary conditions” (“Are Disabled People Included?”). Policies such as this are only reinforced by the creation of a genome-based normalizing system. Forced sterilization was one of the Nazis’ most common policies towards the disabled in the 1930s, as illustrated in The Other Victims. All of these contemporary examples show how the disabled are continually treated as less than human, and denied the basic rights that are laid out in documents like the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” The binary relationship of abnormal/normal that Davis defined as beginning during the industrial revolution is still very much in place.

The Disabled in Young Adult Holocaust Literature

Lennard Davis’ article also points out how novels themselves are often normative, “ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her” (11). However, in young adult literature about the Nazis’ treatment of the disabled, readers are asked to identify with non-normative characters in ways that can be productive for helping promote a discourse where abnormal/normal binaries can be challenged. There are two recent novels on the experiences of the disabled in Nazi Germany: Ann Clare LeZotte’s T4 and Reinhardt Jung’s Dreaming in Black and White. Additionally, Ina Friedman’s collection The Other Victims contains an interesting and important memoir that covers the sterilization policies of the Nazis.
Because *The Other Victims* offers some important historical context, I begin with the story of Fraziska, a deaf girl in 1930s Germany. Friedman’s book of short memoirs illustrates a variety of experiences of those deemed unworthy of life by the Nazi regime. Each chronicle begins with a brief historical introduction that serves to highlight the historical context of the narratives that follow. One of the important aspects of Franziska’s story is its illustration of how early the Nazi policies against the disabled were put into place. While much of the focus of Holocaust education is on the “Final Solution” and the active extermination of Jews in death camps, the murder and sterilization of innocent Germans for the sake of racial purity was happening much earlier. Friedman’s section “Franziska: A Silent Protest Against Sterilization” begins with a reminder of the historical context of Nazi social policies and their connections to eugenic scientific beliefs, noting “Eugenics is the study of how hereditary traits can be altered and ‘improved,’” which required “cooperative efforts between science and politics [that] began with the ‘identification’ of inferior people” (63). Friedman also highlights how all of these policies were perfectly legal in the 1930s, and the populations were sterilized, euthanized, and finally simply murdered. The policies for euthanasia and murder were accelerated after Germany declared war on Poland in 1939 because supplies were needed for soldiers at the front, and Hitler instituted plans to assure food and medical supplies were not “wasted” on the disabled population by killing the “useless eaters” (64-65).

Franziska’s story highlights how deafness was constructed as a social problem. When viewing deafness as a social issue, it was defined as a disability, rather than a linguistic minority or something to be accommodated within the family (Lane 80). Franziska’s family is approximately half deaf, while the other half hear normally. However, her family is quickly identified as disabled, most likely based on her enrollment in a deaf school and deaf Catholic
organization. In 1935 Franziska and her mother are both summoned to report to their local health office to arrange for their sterilization (69). Her petition for clemency is denied by the local health court and she is sterilized against her will. When the sterilization for some reason fails and she becomes pregnant, her gynecologist quickly reports her to the authorities where she is forced to have an abortion, and then told again to report to the health office for sterilization (71-73). When her Uncle speaks up on her behalf and curses Hitler’s policies, he is executed and the family is billed for his cremation. Franziska is not allowed to marry until she submits to being sterilized in 1941. The war is still going well for Nazi Germany, and therefore she submits to the procedure under the assumption that she has no choice and cannot escape. Franziska’s story illustrates the continued surveillance and focus on one disabled woman’s fertility, and the extent that the Nazis were willing to go to in order to keep her from having children. While less insidious, contemporary genetic monitoring also has a similar sense of surveillance and control. Beyond the direct violence to her body, she is also kept from having any sort of support or enabling conditions to live a “normal” life. She and her husband are paid less because they are deaf, despite their quality of work (70). They are also denied housing after the end of the war, emphasizing how anti-disability policies extended beyond Nazi leadership.

Franziska’s story is one of two narratives of deaf adolescents in Nazi Germany. The fictional T4 by Ann Clare LeZotte also covers Nazi eugenic policies against the deaf population through the story of the young Paula Becker. Lennard Davis argues “Normalcy must be constantly enforced in public venues (like the novel), [and] must always be creating and bolstering its image by processing, comparing, constructing, deconstructing images of normalcy and the abnormal” (12). T4 actually helps to disrupt the normative structure of the traditional novel itself. In doing so, it gives readers access to a character who can potentially help readers
successfully engage with difference. LeZotte constructs her novel in a series of short poems, rather than traditional prose. This stylistic choice signifies difference in a very clear manner, and immediately places readers in a position to engage with a different form of writing, even as they interact with a character traditionally deemed “abnormal.” Even the book’s paratexual information, or explanation of the story’s truthfulness, comes in the form of free verse: “In T4, the facts / About history are true, and / My characters tell the story” (1). The story of Paula Becker highlights the history of Nazi policies against the disabled, including “Action T4” which “Was the Nazi program that / Almost cost me my life. / It was named after / The address of its / Headquarters in Berlin / Tiergartenstrasse 4” (19).

The sometimes forgotten history of the disabled is clearly spelled out by LeZotte, covering the fact that the Nazis considered people like Becker “useless eaters’ / Who were ‘unfit to live’” and were therefore slowly murdered (22). LeZotte’s text indicates a refusal to let an important voice be “silenced” even as it must be told without vocal cords or traditional narrative structures. The poem/chapter entitled “Patients in institutions” notes they “Were the first to die,” and references the Nazi’s euphemistic language regarding the deaths of disabled children:

The Nazis knew that many Germans
Would be opposed to Action T4
If they knew the whole truth.
So they had to hide the facts.

They said “specialist children’s wards,”
But they meant children-killing centers.
They said “final medical assistance,”
But they meant murder. (23)

LeZotte’s sparse stylistic choices require readers to think about Becker’s life and experiences through a lens that is at the same time both terribly honest and representative of difference itself. Becker’s life is not characterized by the constant stream of voices and sound that many readers are used to. Instead, she distills the facts down to their essential elements by using as few words as possible to express herself.10

*T4* also comments on the extent of eugenicist beliefs in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s as Becker tells readers the T4 program was publicly ended in 1941 yet “the killings didn’t stop,” because as she “learned much later that individual physicians / were making choices themselves as to whether / or not their patients were / ‘fit for life’” (77). Even without the official policies against the disabled, the medical establishment was still bent on eradicating the abnormal population of Germany. In *T4* this is explained in the following poem: “For decades after, they tried to hide the numbers. / It is estimated that 275,000 Disable people / Were ‘euthanized’ by the Nazis. / Another 400,000 were sterilized / So they couldn’t / Bear children like themselves” (77). LeZotte’s style demands an engagement with a character labeled abnormal and in many ways less-than-human to illustrate the bare facts of history as well as a life that readers can definitely deem worth living. By choosing to narrate Becker’s story in these brief poems rather than traditional prose, readers can engage with these stories in a new way.

Historical fiction for young adults, as Martin suggests, is supposed to help readers “work against

---

10 There is a mistaken notion that American Sign Language (ASL) is a physical code for English. ASL has its own grammatical structure, expectations for accompanying non-verbal cues (facial expressions, body language), and regional variations (“About ASL”). LeZotte’s text points to the communication differences between ASL and English as she does not reproduce expected English narrative forms.
the grain” in order to think through new “possible understandings of that event” (318). Presenting this narrative in a non-standard format can help readers experience Becker’s world in ways that offer new understandings of what it may be like to perceive the world as a deaf person. The way the narrative is structured, such as its very lack of wordiness and dialogue, speak to a very different way of interpreting the world. LeZotte’s stylistic choices “work against the grain” of traditional narrative structure to offer new interpretations of the “Other” that challenge “culturally cemented narratives” of what it means to represent human stories (Martin 318). In the book, Becker survives the war with the help of Christian organizations that come to her aid, and ends up meeting a Romani man whom she marries and has children with. Becker therefore not only escapes death, but also manages to avoid sterilization as well, a rarity considering the numbers she herself lists for readers. LeZotte ends the novel with a reminder of those who were not so lucky, “[we] Had survived the worst, but we also felt guilty. / That feeling—that we had escaped when others equally / Important had died—would never subside” (103). The final poem in the book reminds readers that it is not merely one individual who counts as a grievable life. Instead there are entire populations, deemed lives unworthy of living, that deserve both recognition and grievability.

Of course, it is not merely the deaf population that was targeted for elimination. The category of the disabled also extended to those who were developmentally disabled, blind, epileptic, and also physically challenged. Reinhardt Jung’s book *Dreaming in Black and White* is the story of Hannes, a contemporary German boy who finds himself dreaming incredibly vivid dreams of what his life would have been like in the 1930s under Nazi control. Both Hannes of the contemporary world and the dream Hannes in the 1930s are disabled; he uses crutches and
has difficulty speaking clearly. His experience at school highlights the Nazi policies towards “useless eaters” and is summed up in this math problem:

According to conservative estimates, there are three hundred thousand mentally ill patients, epileptics, cripples, and so forth in institutional care in Germany. a) What do these people cost annually, in all, given the expenses of four Reichsmarks a day per person? b) How many low-interest government loans of one thousand Reichsmarks each could be made each year to young married couples with the same sum of money? (53)

The logic of lives unworthy of living are drilled into students at a young age, and it is not terribly surprising when Hanne’s math teacher recommends he be institutionalized. While he can answer problems such as these correctly, his mental abilities are continually called into question because he speaks slowly and has difficulty writing on the blackboard. Hannes recognizes “Back then, people like me were supposed to be dead. Ours were lives not worth living. Even as it is, I’m really a survivor: I survived my birth. Which you can’t always take for granted. Some parents don’t want to carry the burden, and some doctors know it” (11). It is in the interaction between the past and present that Dreaming in Black and White has the most power. Hannes explains how the discrimination and condescension he experiences are by no means something relegated to the past. While Hanne’s survived his birth, other children like him may not, even in contemporary society. There are those who choose selective abortions, and even doctors that suggest babies can be “put aside” in America long after the end of World War II (Galloway 205).

If one is uncertain about the fate of Hannes in the black and white world of the past, the author leaves no such questions open about where readers’ sympathies should lie in the present. Hannes continually asks readers to reflect on how contemporary polices all too often mirror the philosophies on how to treat those labeled not quite human in the 1930s. At the end of the novel,
when Hannes is “back here in the world of color all the time” he rails against the actions of his parents and their friends (90). He notes that “any visitors who want me to stay downstairs had better leave their sympathy outside at the door” because their well-meaning comments on how his parents bear the strain of having a disabled son “makes Mother feel ashamed” (91). He reminds us that even in contemporary society there are a variety of ways that those with disabilities are made to feel less than human: “I don’t want to be loved ‘all the same.’ And I don’t want to be loved ‘in spite of’ it, or ‘although,’ and most certainly not ‘all the more because’ I’m the way I am” (91). Hannes very successfully challenges how discourse often highlights the “abnormality” of the disabled body even while trying for a sort of liberal inclusiveness.

Hannes’ realization regarding the ongoing discriminatory practices is an example of how “Liberal multiculturalism is inadequately prepared to combat systemic and structural forms of exclusion since it does not seek to change mainstream society” (Delanty 148). While an attitude of what Delanty calls liberal multiculturalism might encourage sympathy and the condescending attitudes towards love that Hanne’s identifies, Dreaming in Black and White acknowledges there is often a much darker side to consider. Systemic and structural forms of exclusion clearly still exist, as the examples of contemporary discrimination against disabled populations illustrate. There is the potential for mainstream society to only promote genetic selection, assuring the population will adhere to the genetic standards defined and delimited by the human genome project. Hannes, however, knows this ideal deems his life unworthy of living. This happens in terms of how he is told he is loved “all the more” because of how he is, and in his sophisticated understanding of the tenuous place the disabled body occupies (91). He recognizes how “Father is more ashamed of me than Mother is” and has a “suspicion that Father’s sorry these genetic tests weren’t around before I was born” (95). The changes to mainstream society that Hannes’
father would have preferred are clearly not the ones that Hannes himself would push for. As the book ends he again emphasizes the need for acceptance, rather than his father’s shame-tinged tolerance:

He thinks that in the future they’ll even be able to repair defective genes. What he doesn’t say is that then I’ll still be just the way I am now. He’d have liked me to be normal and complete, which you can maybe understand, but I’d never want to be like him! I’d rather be “defective.” (95)

Both Hannes and Becker’s characters create complex portraits of the ways in which the disabled were persecuted by the Nazis. They also ask contemporary readers to consider the larger populations targeted for elimination, and the ongoing discriminatory practices that still preference the “normal and complete” in ways that often threaten the very existence of those labeled abnormal or defective (Jung 95).

Contemporary Intolerance of GLBT Communities

Nineteenth century eugenicist policies targeted a wide variety of populations and labeled and conflated them all as abnormal and less than human, including the “criminal” or “asocial” Roma-Sinti, the “useless eaters” trying to survive in Germany, and finally the homosexuals. All of these groups still suffer from racist, ablest, and homophobic treatment in contemporary society. One of the previously stated problems with the concept of tolerance is that it always revolves around exclusionary discourses. As Wendy Brown notes, “Practices of tolerance are tacit acknowledgments that the Other remains politically outside a norm of citizenship, that the Other remains politically other, that it has not been fully incorporated by a liberal discourse of equality” (75). While there may be contemporary discourses of tolerance extended towards these three groups, their overall treatment indicates how often tolerance fails, and how political and
social systems keep the “Other” outside the exclusionary circle of equality. This is similarly evident in the contemporary treatment of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) populations. Current examples of the oppression of GLBT individuals highlights how tolerance education fails, as the discourse of tolerance can be appropriated without any change in behavior or treatment. Therefore, it is important to rethink educational practices that promote tolerance instead of pushing for acceptance or appreciation of difference. Young adult literature is one site for promoting engagement and acceptance of the “Other.” It may help readers realign their responses to the world in ways that are overall more motivated by social justice and important considerations of human rights. Because Holocaust literature focuses so clearly on the worst sort of discriminatory practices, it can be an excellent first site for thinking through the experience of being labeled “abnormal” and targeted for persecution. However, if texts like Damned Strong Love alienate rather than engage readers, that potential for realignment ultimately fails, often leaving in place the empty phrases of tolerance discourse, such as in the following examples.

Like the stereotypes of the gypsy that still regulate behaviors towards that particular population, there are a solid set of stereotypes that impact the treatment of homosexuals in contemporary society. There are stereotypes involving “alleged mistakes in an individual’s gender identity” claiming that an inversion in gendered behavior characterizes sexuality (Mohr

---

11 Here I focus primarily on the experiences of gay men, largely because the limited number of books for adolescents focuses on gay men rather than lesbians. Homosexual behavior between men was also much more often persecuted by Nazi officials. Because so much of Nazi policy revolved around the need to reproduce good Aryan citizens for the nation, lesbians deemed Aryan were raped and impregnated rather than deported and murdered in concentration camps. There is very little research to date on transgender populations in Europe during the Nazi era, and no adolescent literature covering these experiences.
However, more destructive if not necessarily more pervasive is the stereotype of the gay individual as a “pervasive, sinister, conspiratorial, and corruptive threat” to the “family and civilization itself” (Mohr 604). It is this presumption that leads to discourses regarding a “radical gay agenda” and fears of sex-crazed maniacs that will stop at nothing, including child abuse, to satisfy “unnatural” desires. One current example is the year-long campaign of Michigan Assistant Attorney General Andrew Shirvell to discredit the student body president of the Michigan Student Assembly. Shirvell stalked Chris Armstrong, protested outside of his home, created a website where he referred to Armstrong as “a radical homosexual, a Nazi and Satan’s representative on the assembly” including superimposing a swastika on Armstrong’s face and publishing the photo online (Higgins, Besen). Shirvell responded to the allegations that he may be doing something wrong by stalking, protesting, and slandering Armstrong with an odd combination of gay stereotypes and pseudo-tolerance towards the gay population. "I'm a Christian citizen exercising my First Amendment rights," [Shirvell] told Anderson Cooper. "I have no problem with the fact that Chris is a homosexual. I have a problem with the fact that he's advancing a radical homosexual agenda" (qtd. Besen).

Shirvell’s claims in this interview indicate that he understands he is supposed to be tolerant of difference. He claims to have no problems with Armstrong’s orientation, just with his actions. His responses point to one of the problems with the ideal of tolerance itself as it “requires us to accept people and permit their practices even when we strongly disapprove of them. Tolerance thus involves an attitude that is intermediate between wholehearted acceptance and unrestrained opposition. This intermediate status makes tolerance a puzzling attitude” (Scanlon 187). Shirvell is expressing that knowledge that he should accept Armstrong. Yet his underlying dislike of Armstrong’s homosexuality leaves him grasping for the stereotype of the
gay conspiracy that legitimates his “unrestrained opposition” (Scanlon 187). After approximately a year of targeting Armstrong and his “radical homosexual agenda” Shirvell was fired for behavior that “violated office policies, engaged in borderline stalking behavior, and inappropriately used state resources” (Higgins). The fact that Anderson was unable to get a restraining order, the University of Michigan reneged on its ban of Shirvell on campus, and the extended period of time that Shirvell remained an employee of the state all speak to the continued attitude of discrimination towards gay men in American society (Higgins). This recent example illustrates what is at stake in a supposedly tolerant society—stalking, slander, and the refusal of larger institutions to defend Anderson.

This case shows the decided lack of tolerance still evident in a society that espouses a certain amount of liberal multiculturalism. Fortunately, the events never degenerated into physical violence, but that is not necessarily characteristic of the treatment of gays and lesbians in contemporary society. In the fall of 2005, the Southern Poverty Law Center noted that “anti-gay hate crimes may now be even more widespread and vicious than before” as gays have continued to successfully challenge the status quo (Buchanan). Gay adolescents are much more likely to be harassed at school, and more than one-third of GLBT students have attempted suicide (“What is the…”). Effective young adult literature texts, including adolescent Holocaust narratives, could go a long way towards challenging these behaviors. Direct engagement with homosexual characters and frank discussions on the existence and normalcy of homosexuality could potentially be constructed, rather than allowing for the fear and misinformation that categorizes anti-homosexual education.

One of the most recent attacks on gay rights comes in the form of school anti-bullying campaigns as they limit any sort of curricular focus on gay lives as worth living and clearly limit
the voices of persecuted gay youth. Focus on the Family, a Colorado-based Christian organization has argued that “anti-bullying efforts that draw attention to the harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students are part of a “gay agenda” to “sneak homosexuality lessons into classrooms” (Costello). Those same stereotypes of homosexuality as a pervasive and corrupting threat are evident in Focus on the Family’s, ultimately, pro-bullying stance. Like Shirvell’s strange combination of a tolerance discourse melded to an attitude of hatred, Focus on the Family has launched TrueTolerance.org, a website that encourages parents to “challenge the monopoly” and refuse anti-bullying initiatives in public schools. They produce newsletters that decry “special rights” and refer to schools with anti-bullying measures as “indoctrination centers” (Cushman 9). The True Tolerance initiative is one of many examples of how the ideas of liberal multiculturalism can be twisted by discriminatory organizations to support oppressive power structures in the name of tolerance or toleration. 12 Without sophisticated narratives that challenge these simplistic notions of difference, tolerance discourse has the potential to reinforce existing systems of power and privilege even more strongly. In terms of Holocaust literature, the lack of engaging voices ultimately fails to dispute the stereotypes of GLBT individuals that allow for this sort of ongoing discrimination.

*Damned Strong Love* and nothing more?

With this sort of backlash to anti-gay bullying initiatives for young adults, it is not surprising that, in general, homosexuality receives too little attention in various curriculums,

---

12 An outbreak of suicides of young gay men who were bullied because of their sexuality (or perceived sexuality) coincides with the True Tolerance initiatives of conservative Christian organizations. The experiences of these young men highlight the importance of anti-bullying initiatives. Their stories (and the supportive public response) can be found at [www.itgetsbetterproject.com](http://www.itgetsbetterproject.com) (“What is the…”).
including Holocaust education. While there has been a growing body of books for young adults that deal with gay or lesbian issues, it is still a small subset of texts, and they are regularly targeted for attempted bans. In terms of Holocaust narratives, only one full-length text for young adults exists.\textsuperscript{13} In general, the persecution of gay men during the Holocaust is under-represented. Camp liberators noticed and reported on the presence of men wearing the pink triangle, the Nazi symbol for those considered “gender traitors,” yet relatively few survivors have come forward to tell their stories (Heger 7). Laws against homosexuality had been in place in Germany since 1871, but the Nazis revised the existing laws in 1935 to be much stricter, and the Reich Special Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion was created to combat any activities that limited reproduction (“Paragraph 175”). These allowed for the arrest and imprisonment of gay men explicitly, for three months to ten years, but often that sentence was served in a concentration camp which made many punishments into death sentences (“Paragraph 175”).

Lutz Van Dijk’s \textit{Damned Strong Love: the True Story of Willi G. and Stephan K.}\textsuperscript{14} is a text with a lot of good intention but some serious flaws. These flaws make it a less than ideal text to have as \textit{the} representation of gay persecution. It tells the story of Stephan, a teenager in Nazi-occupied Poland, and Willi, a Nazi soldier. Stephan is a character who longs to fit in, even

\textsuperscript{13} There are several fictional or memoir-based books that deal with the Nazi persecution of the gays, \textit{The Tree and The Vine} by Dola de Jong, \textit{Walk the Night} by Robert C. Reinhart, \textit{I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual} by Pierre Seel, and \textit{Behold a Pale Horse} by Lannon D. Reed. However, the only book I have found marketed to young adults specifically in \textit{Damned Strong Love}. \textit{Hitler’s Canary} by Sandi Toksvig features a minor character that is gay, but the book’s primary focus is still on the Jewish and Danish experiences.

\textsuperscript{14} Stefan’s name alternates in spelling throughout the book. I use the \textit{Stephan} of the title for the sake of clarity, but some quotations will list the character as \textit{Stefan}.  

wishing that he could be a member of the Hilter Youth so he could have “so many friends and companions” (Van Dijk 22). However, Stephan’s Polish identity automatically disqualifies him from any sort of camaraderie with the brown-tunic wearing Hitler Youth. When he is fifteen, a group of them beats Stephan nearly to death. He is only saved at the last moment by the butcher’s wife who breaks up the fight (23). These representations of violence make it clear how difficult it was to be a “normal” Pole under Nazi occupation, much less an “unworthy” Jew, Gypsy, or gay man.

*Damned Strong Love* tracks Stephan’s sexual awakening and his first relationship with the young Nazi soldier, Willi. It is in these moments that the book exposes some of its flaws, particularly in terms of awkward scenes that border on incestuous. There are uncomfortable moments as Stephan discovers his actual desires, and the conversations between Willi and Stephan are often stilted and mawkish. Stephan begins to realize that his desires are different on his sixteenth birthday when he becomes “a man” according to his older brother Mikolai (34). Stephan and Mikolai sneak away after curfew to have a few drinks and some birthday bonding. During their time together, Mikolai begins to describe his love of “naked girls, of breasts and thighs” and encourages Stephan to masturbate with him to thoughts of these naked women (34). Stephan joins in, with the realization that “everything that he’d told me so trustingly about girls, I felt exactly the same towards him” and considers telling Mikolai that he “didn’t dream of naked girls at all but of him” (35). Stephan leaves his birthday celebration with a new knowledge of his identity, able for the first time to identify the object of his sexual desires. While the honesty of this scene could be commendable, the near-universal societal incest taboo creates a space where recognition and acceptance of difference are potentially difficult to feel. This taboo has been attributed to “natural” aversion, genetic issues with inbreeding, family disruption, or the need to
expand family alliances (Ferraro 206-207). Cultural anthropologists may disagree with these varied explanations, but they tend to agree that the “most common form of [sexual] prohibition is mating with certain types of kin who are defined by society as being unacceptable sexual partners” (Ferraro 206). Stephan crosses this line of what is socially acceptable as he fantasizes about his brother. This moment in the text can serve to heighten already existing senses that homosexuality is pathologically abnormal, and distance sympathetic reactions from young adult readers who are unfamiliar with frank discussions of sexual desire.

Stephan’s desire to tell his brother about his attraction to men only lasts until Mikolai begins to mock Stephan’s participation in the theater, noting “most of the [men in the theater] are queers anyhow!” (43). Stephan feels shocked hearing disparaging remarks towards homosexuals coming from Mikolai, wondering, “Did my brother believe that garbage about how all homosexual men can be recognized immediately—as clowns in women’s clothes, or affected aesthetes?” (44). Stephan draws the narrative focus to the simplistic stereotypes of those “alleged mistakes in an individual’s gender identity” in ways that are positive in scenes like this one (Mohr 605). The book’s challenges to simplistic notions of gay men as inherently effeminate is a positive example of how Stephan can represent his difference without relying on stereotypes that classify him as either effeminate or a corrupting threat.

Stephan’s relationship with Willi is another place where the abnormal/normal binary has the potential to be challenged. They have a very sweet love affair, particularly when not saddled with overly-sentimental language. After they first make love, Stefan comments “I sensed that touching him did as much good as it did me and that we could give each other so much joy, as only two people can who…love each other!” (58). They speculate in amazement that “you could be openly homosexual in the major [German] cities” before the Nazi regime (59). Their
excitement about being in love and longing for the opportunity to be together are both rather normal, sweet sentiments. However, the clunky prose interspersed with their claims of love creates a much less sophisticated narrative which, in turn, may cause readers to not take their story seriously. Their exchange that echoes the title of the book is one example:

This fellow in the German uniform, this tender man in my arms—he was my first great love!

For a long, silent moment Willi gazed piercingly at me. Then he whispered softly into my ear, “I’ve got it bad, Stefan! I want to live with you!” And after a while, “Just sweet words, huh?”

“No!” I contradicted him joyfully. “It’s damned good…It’s damned strong!”

Imitating my Polish accent, Willi answered, “You’ve got it right, Stefan—it’s good and strong for both of us! But damned, too!” (59)

They maintain a relationship in secret, repeatedly proclaiming their love for each other and their fears of being discovered until Willi is sent to the Eastern Front to fight.

Stephan foolishly sends Willi a letter at the front, signing his own name. The secret police promptly track down Stephan, arrest him, torture him into a confession and try him under the statutes of Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code. Stephan is sentenced to 5 years “in order to isolate him from society and give him the opportunity to become a human being again” (103). The Nazi treatment of gay men as less than human is clear in the judge’s sentence of Stephan. His experience in prison is marked by better and worse times, the worst ones punctuated by homophobic inmates and guards. One of the guards, Petersen, shuts all of the prisoners convicted under Paragraph 175 in solitary cells at night. The doors are labeled “Caution—Fornication With Animals!” to further emphasize the purported abnormality of their
actions. They are labeled “creatures” and treated as though they are untouchables while in Petersen’s control. Stephan barely survives the ordeal, but he does make it to the end of the war, surviving a death march and his years of imprisonment. Willi is most likely not so lucky, and Stefan never hears of him again, and eventually realizes that even if he tried to contact him after the war it may just cause him a new set of difficulties. After the war, in the paratextual note included at the end of the book, the contemporary Stefan K writes how he “realized that despite the liberation from Nazi rule, there would be no concomitant liberation for homosexual men and women for a long time” (132). While the real-life Stefan K has been trying for years to “obtain acknowledgement as a victim of Nazi persecution” his applications have been unaccepted, despite the evidence of his “prison file card” (133). Like the experiences of the deaf woman Franziska, Stephan’s persecution lasts long after the war ends; even decades later his victimhood at the hands of the Nazis remains unacknowledged by Polish authorities. This intolerance and continued persecution naturally contributes to both the lack of representation of homosexual victims in general, and the extremely limited portrayal of gay victims in young adult literature. Just as Hamida Bosmajian states about Holocaust literature in general, “no one book is likely to have made a young reader a life-long witness to the Shoah perpetrated by Nazi Germany,” the same principle applies to texts about gay victims (242). The fact that there is only one book on the subject for adolescent readers speaks to how the “concomitant liberation” that Stephan K speaks of is something still deeply lacking (132).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have illustrated the ways in which intolerance towards a variety of groups is still present in contemporary society, alongside the often limited portrayals of their populations in adolescent Holocaust literature. If, as Butler claims, “Subjects are constituted
through norms which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are 
recognized” there are a variety of examples present showing how certain subjects are still 
unrecognized and excluded from full participation in contemporary society (FoW 3). Their 
contemporary treatment clearly shows the ongoing limitations of how the “human” is 
represented, as the problematic stereotypes allow for ongoing mistreatment of populations 
labeled abnormal in some way. While toleration may be an “indispensable part of ideal liberal 
political practice” one of its major failings is “without further specification of what toleration 
demands and how it is to be understood, this commitment gives no practical guidance 
whatsoever” (McKinnon, Tolerance, 16). Failures of this sort are exemplified by the cheering 
crowds at a burning gypsy camp, the exclusion of the disabled from full participation in society, 
and the ongoing persecution of homosexuals in public life and educational institutions. 
Adolescent literature about these victims in the Holocaust is unevenly executed, and often serves 
to highlight ongoing stereotypes in ways that do not help in the overall project for the expansion 
of the category of human itself.

Thus far I have discussed a variety of victims of Nazi policies: Anne Frank, the larger 
body of Jewish victims, and the less often represented Roma-Sinti, disabled, and homosexual 
victims. However, along with populations targeted for elimination, all of these books also 
contain representations of Germans, either as perpetrators or bystanders. There are a wide 
variety of recent books that focus explicitly on the German character, in particular what I call the 
“Good German” or even “Good Nazi” persona. In the following chapter I consider the ways in 
which this can help readers avoid an entirely monolithic experience of the German population as 
“Bogeymen” also defined by their ethnicity (Kokkola 137). There are definite benefits of 
looking at the German population as varied and potentially sympathetic. However, I am hesitant
to accept positive portrayals too easily, not wanting to lose the experience of those killed at the hands of “willing executioners” or “ordinary men” in favor of a portrait of Germans as victims.
CHAPTER IV: GOOD NAZIS AND GERMANS AS VICTIMS

When the Second World War
Came to an end
We forgave the Germans
And we were friends
Though they murdered six million
In the ovens they fried
The Germans now too
Have God on their side
--Bob Dylan, “With God on Our Side”

The Nazi figure has operated solely as a figure to be feared. […] At this point we should pause to consider how responsible this is. For in creating a Bogeyman figure, who is once again defined by his ethnicity, have we not merely inverted the traditional figure?—Lydia Kokkola

One of the growing sub-genres of Holocaust fiction for young adults is texts that deal sympathetically with non-Jewish German characters. Books like Marcus Zusak’s The Book Thief, John Boyne’s The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, and Bette Greene’s Summer of my German Soldier all feature benevolent German protagonists who are worth a close evaluation. Books that include the experiences of German characters during the Nazi era are important to consider in order to evaluate how the concepts of tolerance are deployed beyond persecuted characters. On one hand, it is important to create a portrait of the German people that avoids being a caricature of the Nazi Bogeyman. However, I am hesitant to embrace overly-sympathetic portraits of the German people, particularly due to the way representation of the victims of the Holocaust is still uneven and sometimes almost entirely lacking, such as in the case of homosexual victims. These two concerns are coupled with the ongoing importance of historical accuracy when dealing with Holocaust literature for young adults. While I have argued for the necessity of nuanced and accurate portraits of vulnerable populations, it is just as important to call for the representation of Germans in a way that reflects history and does not gloss over the negative even while emphasizing the difficulties many of the German people faced under the Nazi regime.
These concerns about historical accuracy are as equally vital now as they were in 1977 when Dieter Bossmann published his study *What I heard about Adolf Hitler: the Consequences of a Taboo*.\(^1\) What he found were a series of misconceptions that are still rampant today, including how students of various ages “assumed Nazism and Communism were the same, that unemployment led to fascism, that Hitler was Jewish, and that he had a Jewish mistress” (Bosmajian 21).\(^2\) Some of these misconceptions actually point towards the fact that the Nazi party was often very uneven in the application of its tenets, such as the inclusion of the Japanese as honorary Aryans, and the fact that only one high-ranking Nazi official actually met the qualifications of a true Aryan: the “blonde beast” Reinhard Heydrich. The myth that Hitler himself was Jewish (or had a Jewish mistress) seems to exaggerate the hypocrisy of Nazi leadership rather than lead directly to fundamental misunderstandings about the way that genocidal policies are formed. The myths regarding the political tenets of Nazism and the causes for the rise of fascism are, for me, much more troubling. Bossmann’s study also indicated these more serious problems as he found students’ “understanding of Nazi racialism and the Holocaust was muddled at best and disabled by inarticulateness and incoherence in thought and language” (Bosmajian 21). The misconceptions and incoherence that Bosmajian discusses in relation to Bossmann’s study are topics for concern, both in terms of my evaluation here of German characters and the following chapter on Holocaust denial and neo-Nazis in young adult literature.

---

1. This was a German study, interviewing young adults in Germany, thus the subtitle regarding what happens when a taboo prevents education.

2. These myths about Hitler are persistent, as a basic internet search reveals. The most common today appear to be Hitler was Jewish, Hitler had one testicle, Hitler was a vegetarian, Hitler invented the blow-up doll, Hitler survived the war, Hitler was/was not Christian/religious, and Hitler was a meth addict.
In order to give readers the chance at a more coherent and articulate understanding of Nazi Germany, texts for young adults should both illustrate historical events accurately and give a sense of the ways in which it may be possible to understand the German people without necessarily offering forgiveness.

Bossmann’s study, a 350 page book including the writings of thousands of German teenagers, also includes some indications of the potential failings of children’s Holocaust literature. One sixteen-year-old said:

One reads books—for example I have read Judith Kerr’s *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*—which talk about the fact the Jews were persecuted. But the exact reason is rarely there in the books. Generally, people just say ‘Hitler did this and that,’ but if the Germans really didn’t like what he was planning, why did they do it? (qtd. Crawshaw 42)

In the bulk of the books for young adults that I have discussed up to this point, this level of contextualization for German motivations is often missing. While the books do a better or worse job of explaining the complexity of the persecution leveled at Jews, Roma-Sinti, the disabled, and homosexuals, many still leave the question “Why did the Germans do it?” unanswered. Of course, “the Germans” is an incredibly broad set of individuals in itself. More than those actively involved in the Nazi party, “the Germans” indicates the multiple and varied Aryan citizens of Germany. These were the people fortunate enough to be within the parameters of “normal” dictated by the Nazi Party. Yet, they were not necessarily Nazis themselves, and

---

3 *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* is a 1971 text recommended for ages 9-12. I have excluded it from this study because it falls more in the children’s literature and less into the adolescent literature category on which my project focuses.
certainly not camp guards or SS men. The primary question revolves around the idea of “average citizens” who either rose up against their Jewish neighbors or who merely failed to speak out in opposition to the Nazis murderous policies. There is no one response, but there are options beyond “Hitler is evil” and the faceless hordes behind him that popular culture so often illustrates.

One of the primary considerations of German characters and Nazi characters in terms of the issues of tolerance and toleration is the fact that it is necessary to avoid creating a monolithic group that can be universally reviled. Creating a group of this sort does nothing to offer readers a better sense of the complexity of the events of the Holocaust, and can continue the muddled understanding of the events of the Nazi era. This has been a problem consistently in young adult literature, as Lydia Kokkala noted in her text *Representing the Holocaust in Children’s Literature*:

> For the most part, the perpetrators in Holocaust literature are presented as completely dehumanized monsters. They tend to be neither round nor dynamic, and are almost always observed rather than internally focalized.\(^4\) Emphasis is placed on their physical attributes such as shiny boots, set jaws, polished belts, and shining weaponry. These are humans in disguise; they are Bogeymen. (134)

This image of the Nazi is one that I have illustrated in earlier chapters, one example being the soldiers from *Milkweed* that Misha desires to emulate as a “jackboot” when he grows up. The Nazi characters that are present throughout the first three chapters of this project can all too often

---

\(^4\) What Kokkola means here is that we very rarely get to see the internal thoughts or motives of German characters, merely observe their often horrific actions from another character’s eyes. This is problematic because it also serves to simplify the complexities of the Holocaust itself.
fall into the Bogeyman stereotype. However, what this stereotype does is obscure the actual German population behind a terrifying caricature that can easily be reduced to an inarticulate “evil” in ways that can lead to misunderstandings and incoherency regarding historical facts.

My concerns about how authors negotiate a space between Nazi caricature and overly-sympathetic portrayals of the German people echo the ongoing debates regarding the Germans during the Nazi era. One of the most fundamental questions that historians and scholars ask and are asked is in regards to the average citizens of Nazi Germany: how could they let this happen? Why did no one stand up to the Nazis? Were they all, in some fundamental way, bad people or were they ordinary people in an extraordinarily bad situation? In this chapter, I will outline some of the major debates on the culpability of the German people in the events of the Nazi era and then examine how young adult literature can help readers see the complexity of these debates. Two of the most prevalent opinions on how the German people were convinced to engage in genocidal behavior are expressed by historians Daniel Goldhagen and Christopher Browning. Goldhagen’s book, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, argues that the German people willingly participated in genocide because of the underlying and near universal anti-Semitism that had been present in Germany for generations. Browning, in his book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, on the other hand, claims that while many Germans may have been willing to participate in the social death of the Jewish population, far fewer were willing to commit mass murder. Both historians deal particularly with the killers, and use their studies to come to conclusions about the larger population.
Willing Executioners: the Average Bogeyman

Thinking through the motivations of anyone who participates in genocide or the more euphemistic “ethnic cleansing” is always a particularly troubling enterprise.5 L.A. Times opinion columnist Professor Crispin Sartwell has perhaps one of the most negative views of humanity in relation to genocide, expressed here in his reflection on Rwanda:

We—and by this I mean me and you—are deeply evil. I would like to believe that I am too good, too smart, too decent to hop on the genocide bandwagon. But I know better. It's obvious, and it's a familiar point, that average Germans, average Hutus, average Americans, have been mobilized for genocide. I am not profoundly different than these people, and if you think you are, then you are either a moral hero or you are profoundly self-deluded. (“Genocide, You, and Me”)

In some ways, Sartwell has a valid point. The perpetrators of so many genocides or ethnic cleansings were non-military, or even militant, citizens of their particular nations and eras. While there may be a variety of different motives for these state-sponsored mass murders, they were still undertaken by a large portion of the citizenry of particular countries. However, passing the message along to young adults that we “are deeply evil” is problematic because it limits any sense of personal agency in a situation like this. The logic behind creating one-dimensional evil Nazi characters runs something akin to if “they” are evil, then “we” must not

---

5 Examples of recent government-supported mass murders that demand this type of investigation are the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide of the early twentieth century (still unrecognized by the United States government as a genocide), Stalin’s mass executions in Russia, Mao’s cultural revolution in China, the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot in Cambodia, Guatemala’s attacks on indigenous peoples in the 1980s, the extermination of Muslims in Bosnia, and the recent genocides in both Rwanda and Darfur.
be. This, of course, only exacerbates an us/them separation that characterizes the deep cultural divides and demonizations that may lead to genocide or ethnic cleansing in the first place.\(^6\)

Sartwell’s concerns about human nature are echoed more specifically, and in a much more detailed manner, by Daniel Goldhagen. He claims that from the nineteenth century onwards, Jews were characterized as “unalterably different” in Germany (“An Interview”). Because they had been conceptualized as somehow fundamentally different than other Germans, the policies towards European Jews were “to turn them into ‘socially dead’ beings” and “to remove the Jews as thoroughly and permanently from the social […] and physical contact with the German people” as possible (Goldhagen 135). Books like David Chotjewitz’s *Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi* and Hans Richter’s *Friedrich* both illustrate the process by which Germans went about creating a sense of social death for their Jewish neighbors. The notion of social death again points to the ways in which the persecution of the Jews and other groups in Nazi Germany was directly tied to specific attacks on cultural beliefs that delegitimized the practices of Jews, Roma-Sinti, homosexuals, and disallowed the disabled in many cases altogether.

However, for Goldhagen this argument about a variety of cultural practices is limited as he focuses primarily on European Jews. In fact, his thesis would make little sense if he expanded his argument to include the many and varied categories of people the Nazis targeted for elimination. Instead, his claim is “anti-Semitism moved many thousands of ‘ordinary’ Germans […] to slaughter Jews” and that it is this alone, “Not economic hardship, not social

\(^6\) Political science Professor Jacques Semelin calls the us/them dynamic an *imaginaire* of fear, “which draws on the most archaic of human anxieties, feeds on real phenomena to distort the reality of those it designates as victims to make this reality truly frightening. Imaginary and real thus seem inexorably linked” (21).
psychological pressure, not invariable psychological propensities, but ideas about Jews that were pervasive in Germany” that can explain the Holocaust (9). According to Goldhagen, the Germans were always willing to say “yes” rather than “no” when faced with the option to kill or not kill a Jewish individual (381). His argument is, in many ways, one that perfectly supports various forms of tolerance discourse. For Goldhagen, the average daily citizen was already primed for mass-murder, based on their anti-Semitic beliefs. The question that this prompts readers to ask in terms of tolerance and toleration is this: if the Germans had been trained to tolerate Jewish difference, rather than harbor anti-Semitic thoughts and imaginary threats, would the Holocaust have been prevented?

Another way of phrasing this question brings me back to Sartwell. As average citizens have been “mobilized for genocide,” he asks us to recognize our similarities with these other ordinary people: “I am not profoundly different than these people, and if you think you are, then you are either a moral hero or you are profoundly self-deluded” (“Genocide, You, and Me”). Keeping both Goldhagen and Sartwell in mind the question must be this one: does learning tolerance and toleration ever make us “profoundly different” than the average German or Hutu or Cambodian? It is essential to take into consideration my previous claims regarding power and privilege in relation to tolerance when attempting to answer a question of this sort. Wendy Brown, in her book *Regulating Aversion*, also notes the ways in which tolerance discourse can become a form of self-delusion. For Brown, “Tolerance is never innocent of power or normativity” as tolerance is directly connected to those with power tolerating those without it (14). Because of this ongoing connection to power and normativity, tolerance is “inappropriate for conceptualizations of morality and virtue that fancy themselves independent of power and subjection” (Brown 14). Therefore, if an individual fancies themselves to be a moral or virtuous
being because of their capability to tolerate the “Other” and in some way feels as though this capacity to tolerate positions them outside the realm of sometimes murderous power-structures, they may be profoundly self-deluded. So while Goldhagen argues that “re-education is possible” in order to avoid future genocides based on wide-spread racist or anti-Semitic beliefs, I must emphasize the quality of that education is central to the larger anti-Genocide project (“An Interview”). As I have argued, the idea of engagement with difference instead of tolerance of difference is essential to recognizing vulnerable populations, as is an acknowledgement of power structures that allocate recognizability differently. Perhaps, with that engagement and acknowledgement there is the possibility for an ethics that will create a profoundly different population.

However, when looking at the group that retains the power and privilege and uses it to genocidal ends, it is easy to resort to the answer, as Goldhagen does, that “The perpetrators, having consulted their own convictions and morality and having judged the mass annihilation of the Jews to be right, did not want to say “no” (14). Goldhagen confronts the perpetrators with the basic idea that the Germans’ fundamental understanding of the Jews as unalterably different when legitimized by Nazi leadership lead inexorably to genocide. This thought process really only serves to reinforce the categorization of an entire population as Bogeymen, an entire population of people who found mass-murder to be “right” and therefore become the evil “them” versus the presumably good “us.” Then again, other theorists and historians have called for more nuanced evaluations of the situation than Goldhagen’s, particularly in light of the evidence of German citizens who did resist the Nazi’s murder of the Jews. The question that Jaques Semelin poses in his assessment of comparative genocides revolves around how much we should seek to understand, and if understanding the actions of the Nazis (or other perpetrators) implies that we
are then somehow colluding with them (2)? Answering questions of this sort are some of the hardest work of genocide studies, and are important to include when introducing young adults to Holocaust literature and history. Literary scholars such as Froma Zietlin, as well as historians, call for the consideration of questions regarding understanding and forgiveness, particularly in terms of representational practices. Zietlin notes that it is “essential at some point to confront [the perpetrators] face to face, as it were, and even to examine their point of view” (70). She feels this is necessary because, “It was not enough merely to label them as evil and depraved, or even insane, as some have insisted. This effort to mystify genocidal desire, thus situating these extremes of evildoing outside the boundaries of our mental universe, would be too easy” (70). So, instead of looking at a cast of characters that are faceless “jackboots” or a unified front of willing executioners, both historians and literary critics must move beyond the mystification of genocidal desire in order to confront it “face to face,” often giving expression to perpetrators in order to strive for understanding, while withholding any sense of forgiveness. This, of course, is a tall order. However, there are some texts in the young adult Holocaust canon that allow for this sort of complex analysis. Some of the most interesting and multifaceted portraits of a Nazi character which readers are asked to understand but not forgive can be found in Armin in David Chotjewitz’s *Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi* and the mayor’s wife in Marcus Zusak’s *The Book Thief*.

Ordinary Men: the Average Man

While Goldhagen argues that there was an inevitable causality between the anti-Semitism of the German people and the genocide that occurred once Hitler came to power, other theorists are hesitant to accept this sort of fundamental relationship. Comparative genocide scholar Jacques Semelin notes the need to complicate our understanding of how genocides happen
because “identifying historic, ethnic or religious tensions in a given region is not enough to explain why, when and how massacres occur. Groups can experience tension and conflict without killing each other: there is no direct causal relation” (13). The anxieties in Germany during the rise of the Nazi party, in fact, were defined by many more conflicts and tensions in addition to their clashes with the Jews. Even the Nazi leadership was not entirely focused on Jewish annihilation alone, as their treatment of other marginalized groups indicates. Christopher Browning points out: “[Nazi leaders] strove to end the allegedly “inordinate” Jewish influence on German life, though this was scarcely a priority equal to dismantling the labor unions, Marxist parties, and parliamentary democracy, or to rearmament and the restoration of Germany’s great-power status. They often spoke the language of racial anti-Semitism, but not consistently” (199). Far from a unified front of murderous Nazis behind every corner, many of the goals of the Nazi party were more often focused on regaining the “great power status” that Germans felt their country had held prior to and during World War I. This aspect of the growth of the Nazi party is illustrated in young adult literature on occasion, particularly in Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi.

Additionally, Christopher Browning creates a portrait of the German population that is less defined by their evil intentions than by their desire for an orderly society. While the party leadership was pushing an overtly anti-Semitic agenda throughout the 1930s, “the vast majority of the general population did not clamor or press for anti-Semitic measures” (200). In fact, “the boycott of 1933, the vandalistic outbreaks of 1935, and above all the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 1938 produced a negative response among much of the German population” (200).

---

7 Semelin’s book, Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide, is covered in more detail in chapter two.
155

Browning claims that the German population was disturbed by the violence of these three events, actions which readers can see when examining some of the representations of German people in young adult Holocaust literature. However, the continuing persecution and violence toward the Jews, along with the Nazi terror apparatus that discouraged Germans from speaking up in favor of Communism, democracy and free speech, and the disabled, led to a population willing to endure a variety of repressive laws in order to live orderly lives. Browning describes this process in a way that is worth quoting at some length:

A gulf had opened up between the Jewish minority and the general population. The latter, while not mobilized around strident and violent anti-Semitism, were increasingly “apathetic,” “passive,” and “indifferent” to the fate of the former. Anti-Semitic measures—if carried out in an orderly and legal manner—were widely accepted for two main reasons: such measures sustained the hope of curbing the violence most Germans found so distasteful, and most Germans now accepted the goal of limiting, and even ending, the role of Jews in German society. This was a major accomplishment for the regime, but it still did not offer the prospect that most “ordinary Germans” would approve of, much less participate in, the mass murder of European Jewry, that the “onlookers” of 1938 would become the genocidal killers of 1941-1942. (200)

Browning points to one of the elements that is central to the persecution of the Jewish population in Nazi era Germany, the Germans’ willingness to participate in the social death of the Jews. However, he also claims that this is a far cry from “limiting […] the role of Jews in German society” and participating in “the mass murder of European Jewry” (200). While there is no

---

8 Examples of this German distaste after Kristallnacht come in Elizabeth Bartoletti’s The Boy Who Dared and Marcus Zusak’s The Book Thief.
denying that mass-murders did occur, Browning attributes these actions to not only anti-Semitic behavior, but also the public opinions regarding the loss of World War I and the Brest-Litvosk treaty, the notion of German racial superiority over Eastern Europeans in general, and the strong aversion to Communism (202). Connecting all of these contributing factors to the rise of Nazism and the mass-murder of various vulnerable populations may help dispel some of the simplistic notions students hold, such as that the Jews were murdered because they were rich (as seen in chapter two), and that Nazism and Communism are the same, or that unemployment led to Fascism as the Bosmann study I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter noted.

While all of these contributing factors add to the mass-murder of Jews in Eastern Europe in particular, I believe the initial persecution of German Jews began with the social death that led to the apathetic or indifferent responses of the German population to the exclusion of Jews from German society. It is this notion of social death that I wish to turn to first when looking at portraits of German characters in young adult literature. In Kokkola’s opinion, “If we accept Browning’s views of who the perpetrators were and what they were like, then responsible works of literature would represent the ordinariness of the Nazi guards. This is incompatible with the Bogeyman Nazi figure who dominates Holocaust literature for children and young adults written in English” (138-139). This is what some recent books strive to do by creating characters that I call ordinary Germans, good Nazis, and Germans as victims. It is whether or not the individual authors do it in what Kokkola deems a “responsible” manner that is up for debate.

Social Death and Ordinary Germans

In the preceding chapters I have illustrated a variety of vile Nazi characters. Soldiers taunt rabbis and machine-gun innocent children in *Mara’s Stories*, the horrors of the concentration camps are illustrated in *Night* and *The Cage*, the horses and livelihood of the
Roma-Sinti are coldly slaughtered in *And the Violins Stopped Playing*, and the detached efficiency of the death camps is shown in *Briar Rose*. These situations and characters are all perfect examples of the Bogeymen that Kokkola discusses in her examination of Holocaust literature for children. However, there are a variety of German characters who are not characterized by their outright physical cruelty and murder, but rather by their participation in the process of Jewish alienation and social death within German society. Characters of this sort are more difficult to grasp than the Bogeymen, as readers would like to see people fight back when limitations were gradually placed on Jewish individuals in Germany. Examples of the measured persecution of Jews are as varied as the exclusion of Jews from professional jobs and government employment, the boycotts of Jewish stores, the gradual elimination of locations where Jews were allowed to be present, the requirements for name changes and public labels in terms of the yellow stars, not to mention the out-and-out violence of events such as *Kristallnacht*. While there are several texts that deal explicitly with the themes of social death from an “outside” or German perspective, one of the most powerful is Hans Richter’s *Friedrich*, which I will focus on here.

The concept of social death is no less important to the definition of genocide than the mass murders themselves, at least according to feminist philosopher Claudia Card. She claims, “It is social death that enables us to distinguish the peculiar evil of genocide from the evils of other mass murders” and genocide is characterized by a loss of identity in addition to the loss of life which leads to, “serious loss of meaning for one’s existence” (Card 71). This claim has been borne out by my preceding examination of the ways that vulnerable lives were targeted not only

---

9 Many of these examples are based on the authors’ real-life experience, so I am certainly not trying to deny that there were horrible humans who willingly committed atrocities in the name of an idealized Aryan Germany future.
for physical elimination, but also for cultural attacks and humiliation. What happens, however, when we look at those cultural attacks through the lens of German characters and books that seem more sympathetic to the overall experience of ordinary men in Nazi Germany? One of the earliest texts to do this work is Hans Richter’s *Friedrich*, which first appeared in English in 1970. Friedrich is the name of the young Jewish character in the book, and the person the book is ostensibly “about.” However, the story is told through a nameless German narrator, an attribute that Holocaust literature scholar Hamida Bosmajian claims offers a sense of safety to the narrator as well as “the anonymity [that] adds a universality of guilt to the story, which could be the story of many a German family” (“Nightmares” 21). Richter puts the weight of telling the story of Friedrich’s death on a German character, making the book both a story of Jewish persecution and a narrative that may answer the question “How did this happen?”

The narrator and his family are suffering through common problems of Weimar Republic Germany. Richter opens the book for readers noting, “By 1925 most Germans had run through their savings trying to survive the devaluation of the mark. There was very little prospect of finding work. Hardship and unemployment were on the rise throughout Germany” (2). The narrator’s Father is unemployed, his Mother secretly takes in washing and borrows money from her father to support the family, and they continually struggle to make ends meet. Their Jewish upstairs neighbors, the Schneider family, are the “lucky” family in the apartment building. Herr Schneider is employed as a civil servant, and his wife and son Friedrich are comfortable enough because of the steady job that Herr Schneider maintains. The Schneider’s and the narrator’s family are friends throughout the beginning of the book, despite the objections of the narrator’s

---

10 This situation does nothing to dispel the notion that the unemployment leads to fascism rumor that the Nazi rise to power is so often characterized by.
grandfather who claims “the Jews crucified our Lord” (Richter 15). Even though the narrator’s Father objects, “But not the Schneiders!” Grandfather still puts his foot down and tries to intervene, attempting to block the narrator from playing with Friedrich (15). In terms of looking at the German population, readers get the sense of the economic desperation of the late 1920s, but also the knowledge that some Germans had close friendships with Jews and were willing to stand up for them—in certain circumstances. The repercussions of standing up to Grandfather were largely based on internal family conflict, not external threats to the family itself. Grandfather clearly holds economic power and privilege in the family, meaning that Father and Mother back down and make the choice to keep the narrator inside when Friedrich rings the bell during Grandfather’s visit (16).

Friedrich is, in general, a story about making choices. This first example of anti-Semitism is coupled by Father and Mother choosing to limit some of their son’s activities based on the threat of family instability if they continue to stand up for their friends. Clearly, in Nazi-era Germany, family conflicts are not the only ones the narrator and his family will need to deal with. As Bosmajian points out, “Richter wants to show the young reader that we do make choices and even have the choice to give up on our freedom to choose until there is no choice left” (“Nightmares” 22). There are a variety of choices that the narrator and his family could have made during the progression of the book that may have led to a different ending. We see throughout the novel how the choices of the Germans affect the Schneider family. Herr Schneider is fired as a civil servant in 1933, in keeping with the government decree (48). However, their landlord makes the choice to evict the family, even when not coerced by the government to do so. This attempt ultimately fails, when faced with a judge who reminds the
landlord, “Since you became a member of the NSDAP\textsuperscript{11} you cannot tolerate a Jew in your house. Can you assure me that in the near future you may not join a party which is against Catholics or vegetarians?” (Richter 53). Back and forth it goes, throughout the course of the narrative. Gradually, the Germans making choices like the pragmatic judge and the narrator’s family become fewer and more far between, while indifference and outright hatred increase.

Throughout the course of the novel, Friedrich is kicked out of school, no longer allowed to visit the public pool or parks, their home is attacked during \textit{Kristallnacht}, and he is eventually left as an orphan after his mother’s death and father’s deportation (64, 77, 85, 124). These events follow an all-too familiar trajectory for Jewish characters in Holocaust fiction. The process of the Schneider family’s increasingly poor treatment at the hands of their neighbors effectively illustrates the social death that slowly occurred before any of the family physically died. Friedrich’s loss of his family is tragic both because of his parents’ actual deaths as well as the way that he loses what Card calls “social vitality” which “exists though relationships, contemporary and intergenerational, that create an identity that gives meaning to life”\textsuperscript{(71)}. Had Friedrich lived, he still would have faced what many Holocaust survivors must deal with: the loss of social vitality that then leads to a sense of meaninglessness. However, what is worth commenting on in \textit{Friedrich} is not necessarily the way the Jewish characters react to their slow loss of liberties, but rather, the way the narrator’s family does. Despite watching Herr Schneider lose his job and refusing to support their mutual landlord in evicting the Schneiders, the narrator’s father joins the NSDAP and makes sure that the narrator joins the \textit{Jungvolk}. The reasons for this decision remain ambiguous, but the narrator notes his Father’s opinion that “It can only be good for us,” possibly opening up new opportunities for employment (58). When

\footnote{\textit{Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei}, or National Socialist German Workers Party.}
Father tries to warn Herr Schneider about the shape of things to come, he also promises to take care of Frau Schneider and Friedrich if anything should happen to Herr Schneider (74). This promise turns out to be worth very little, however, as the regime moves forward with their anti-Semitic policies and the narrator’s family does little to intervene.

On Kristallnacht the narrator finds himself pulled into a Jewish home with the promise that he will see something he “can tell his grandchildren about” (89). Once in the home, the narrator smashes his way through the house with the rest of the attackers, finding that he is both “enjoying” himself and he “could have sung” due to being “drunk with the desire to swing [his] hammer” (92). When the narrator arrives at his home and is invited by another attacker to “come and help!” destroying the Schneider’s apartment upstairs, he instead “slunk downstairs” and “wept” with his Mother (94-95). In all situations where the narrator’s family could have chosen to make a public stand, or at the very least a protective one, they ultimately bow to passivity and desire for order over violence that all too often exemplified Germans, at least as far as Browning argues. Friedrich dies at the book’s end, forced out of an air-raid shelter and into the Allied bombs by his former landlord (and air-raid warden). While several of his neighbors argue that he should be allowed in the shelter, eventually the consensus is that he should “go voluntarily” back into the bombing, “otherwise there’ll be nothing but annoyance” (136). Here, the gradual exclusion of the Schneider family from public life coupled with vague threats of consequences from the air-raid warden end in an adolescent boy’s death.

David Russell argues that Friedrich is “a piece of didactic literature, a work intended to instruct us in human behavior, it succeeds because it does not lecture to us, but forces us to seek the answers within ourselves” (274). *Friedrich* does cause the reader to ask more questions regarding the German population at large than reductionist Bogeyman representations do.
Readers face questions such as: is the narrator’s family evil? Are they deeply evil, like Sartwell claims we are? Can readers understand their actions? Should readers forgive them? Since the portrait of the narrator and his family is more nuanced than many seen in chapters one through three, these important questions are at least moved towards the forefront of the narrative.

However, the overall message is still at times terribly problematic, particularly in terms of the simplistic connection between economic hardship and fascism. The narrative also maintains a character that readers are comfortable hating—the landlord and air-warden who officially causes Friedrich’s death. There is at least one character who remains outside the realm of understanding, and therefore one that readers can potentially label “evil.”

Friedrich illustrates some of Browning’s claims regarding the German people’s desire for order and their discomfort when faced with the violence of the Nazi regime and its treatment of Jewish citizens. However, while Browning notes that anti-Semitism alone cannot explain why the “onlookers of 1938 would become the genocidal killers of 1941-1942,” there is no arguing that there were genocidal killers, culled from the German population, circulating in 1941-1942 (200). Camp guards, Nazi soldiers, and the Einsatzgruppen12 all efficiently did their jobs, murdering millions of Jews by the time the war ended. There are very few books that attempt to deal with the internal thoughts of these characters, for good reason. Of any group, the killers themselves are the ones readers are the least comfortable trying to understand, because that tension between understanding and forgiveness mentioned by Semelin and others. There are two short graphic novels that ask readers to at least glance into the minds of the killers in order to

---

12 “Task forces,” or the mobile killing squads that swept through following the Nazi war effort in order to make sure the territory was Judenfei, or free of Jews.
find some aspects that may make them more comprehensible: Eric Huevel’s *A Family Secret* and *The Search*.¹³

**Mass-Murder and Ordinary Germans**

Both of Heuvel’s graphic novels are published in conjunction with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam as well as in cooperation with the Jewish Historical Museum of Amsterdam and are widely used in Holocaust education courses, particularly in Europe (Smee). Their pedigree allows both books a certain amount of cultural caché, and the connection to the Anne Frank House indicates several things about the overall ideological framework of the texts. As I discussed in chapter one, Anne Frank’s *Diary* is one of the books most often used to deploy tolerance education. This is not an accidental focus, or one picked up by outside media in ways that distort the intentions of Otto Frank. Upon publication of Frank’s book, Otto Frank began a specific campaign to universalize Frank and make her a symbol for worldwide tolerance initiatives (Ozick 80). Keeping this explicit goal of the Anne Frank House in mind, Huevel’s two texts are approved for some level of tolerance education in a variety of languages. The books also include the stories of Dutch Jews who go through the social death characterized by Nazi rule, prior to the physical death of some of the characters. However, once again, it is the portrayal of German and Dutch Nazi characters that I am particularly interested in.

The first example from Heuvel on this topic comes from *A Family Secret*. Helena, a young Aryan girl in Nazi-controlled Holland, and her family, have a variety of reactions to the invasion and occupation of their country. Her father follows orders as a way to maintain his job as a policeman, eventually working to remove Jewish people from their homes and transport

---

¹³ I use Heuvel’s name because he is primary author, also included on the cover are two secondary authors, Ruud van der Rol and Lies Schippers.
them to Westerbork (18). One of Helena’s brothers joins the resistance, and Helena finds herself helping him (45). Her eldest brother Theo, however, joins the Dutch Nazi Party and goes to fight for Germany (25). While in the Soviet Union, Theo has to face some aspects of the Nazi invasion that he was previously unaware of:

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 6:** An injured Theo explains his experiences to his sister Helena and his mother (32).

Theo faces the “awful things” that happen during wartime, although arguably the level of civilian slaughter seen in the next panels is not a defining factor of all wars, but more indicative of genocide specifically (32).
Figure 7: Readers see a flashback to Theo’s first experience with the *Einsatzgruppen* (32). Regardless of how we define Theo’s experience in terms of the larger nature of war itself, it is Theo’s choices that characterize him for readers. He is injured, sent home, and at that time relays this information to his mother and sister. Theo has multiple choices in this situation. He could attempt to get a medical discharge. He could flee and go into hiding with his parents’ help. Instead, Theo chooses to help the Nazis “win this war” even while knowing exactly what that entails (32). His choice to stay in the army ultimately leads to his death, but readers are left
wondering why someone clearly disturbed by the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* would continue to fight with them. As the novel is told from Helena’s perspective, readers get frustratingly little insight into Theo’s reasoning for the choices he makes. However, his explanation of how he must go back because the Nazis “will win this war” is a far cry from “I will come to harm if I disobey”—an argument all too often made by captured Nazis after the war.

The second example I include comes from *The Search*, in one of the explanatory historical interventions that support the narrative. This informative section addresses the processes leading to the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” The scene I turn my attention to is an example of the *Einsatzgruppen*, the armed men who followed the army into the Soviet Union with the orders to “shoot and kill as many Jews as possible” (Heuvel 40).

![Figure 8: the *Einsatzgruppen* in action.](image)

This scene shows events rarely explicitly covered in Holocaust fiction for young adults. The implied series of events: a large group of people in the background with an ominous pit before them and the foregrounded machine gun are followed by the horrified look of a group of Jews (marked as such by their headgear and facial hair) and the final scene that merely contains a
large pile of clothing. Heuvel has coupled this scene with the thoughts of the German soldiers, rather than the Jewish victims. The soldiers in this scene, the Einsatzgruppen, are the same men studied by both Browning and Goldhagen in their evaluation of the intentions of the German people. In this panel from Heuvel’s work, the diversity of reactions to mass-murder is illustrated. However, does the one indication of distaste for the job at hand, the thought bubble with “I can’t stomach it,” give readers a sense of understanding or forgiveness (40)? Browning’s conclusion in Ordinary Men can perhaps offer some insight into this question:

This story of ordinary men is not the story of all men. The reserve policemen faced choices, and most of them committed terrible deeds. But those who killed cannot be absolved by the notion that anyone in the same situation would have done as they did. For even among them, some refused to kill and stopped killing. Human responsibility is ultimately an individual matter. (Browning 188)

Readers have no follow-up regarding any of these Nazis. There is no way to tell if the proud Nazi retained his pride, nor if the one who felt the need to flee actually did. Readers may have the ability to understand the motives of either the one who felt as though he was merely doing his job, or the one young man who expresses disgust at the whole thing. But readers can get the sense that there were options in both thought and actions. Some Nazis made the choice to turn away from their jobs as killers. They were able to exercise personal responsibility even in situations where most of their peers were committing “terrible deeds” (Browning 188). Huevel’s novels give readers the chance to evaluate the actions of soldiers, and find them often to be troublingly ambivalent or enthusiastic. Both Richter’s and Heuvel’s novels portray a good degree of historical accuracy in terms of ultimately unforgivable characters. However, beyond
these ambivalent individuals, texts that deal explicitly with German characters for young adults also strive to create the often troubling “good Nazi.”

**Historical Accuracy and the “Good Nazi”**

The characters in *Friedrich, A Family Secret*, and *The Search* all exemplify the ambiguity of German characters. In *Friedrich*, readers are challenged to look for answers regarding what they may have done in a similar situation. In Huevel’s graphic novels, momentary glimpses into the minds of the killers are shown, in ways that at least briefly disrupt the Bogeyman figure. However, none of these characters can be described with that most oxymoronic seeming combination of words: the “good Nazi.” These characters show up occasionally throughout young adult fiction, largely in ways that fail to represent the events of the Holocaust accurately. I want to quickly discuss two of the texts that fail at the complex combination of historical accuracy and the good Nazi, Bette Greene’s *Summer of My German Soldier* and John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, before moving on to a book that is much more successful at attempting to understand Nazi motivations even while withholding forgiveness, Daniel Half-Human and the Good Nazi.

Bette Greene’s *Summer of My German Soldier* is a classic work of young adult fiction.14 The text, which is required reading in some junior high and high school English courses, features a wildly improbable series of events revolving around the experiences of a Jewish girl growing up in Arkansas and an escaped Nazi prisoner of war. Patty, the protagonist, is a girl badly in need of attention and friendship. Her mother and father strongly dislike her, and she faces near

---

14 Initially published in 1973, the book was an ALA notable book, a National Book Award Finalist, and won the New York Times “Outstanding Book of the Year” award in 1973 (Greene “Afterward”). It was also adapted into a made-for-TV film in 1978, and won an Emmy (“Summer”).
continual mental and physical abuse at home (77, 69). In the summer of her twelfth year, the U.S. government establishes a prisoner of war (POW) camp outside of her Arkansas town. This aspect of the book is accurate, as there were POW camps in the state that housed approximately 23,000 German and Italian prisoners (Bowman). Naturally, the arrival of the prisoners causes quite a stir in the small southern town. As they step off the train, Patty comments, “I searched their faces for brutality, terror, humiliation—something” (6). These signs are considerably lacking from the surprisingly normal looking men. The scene ends with Patty feeling “disappointed as though something were missing” as the anticipated drama is lacking, and while she had been hoping to see how “their ravaged faces would tell a story of defeat, disgrace, and downfall. But in real life it didn’t seem all that important” (7). The drama and terror of a train-load of Nazi soldiers arriving in her town does not live up to the larger than life image of the Nazi soldier in the shiny boots and impeccable uniform. Even their activities while in prison are surprisingly banal, both in the book itself and historically. According to one historian, the prisoners lived in “pleasant circumstances,” were paid for their work at the rate of eighty cents a day, and enjoyed playing soccer when not working (Bowman).

One particular blonde Nazi who arrives in this shipment of POWs is of special interest to Patty from the first moment he stepped off the train. He “smiled and waved” to the waiting crowd, causing Patty to reflexively wave back (6). This event stuck in her mind and allowed her to recognize the blonde Nazi, Anton Reiker, when he arrived at her father’s store a short time later. The prisoners show up with their guards to do some shopping, the first anachronistic moment in the story. While prisoners were allowed to spend their wages, they did so in camp shops, not local department stores (Bowman). Anton conveniently speaks perfect English, and immediately charms Patty. As she helps him purchase a “pocket pencil sharpener” she thinks to
herself, “He was so nice. How could he have been one of those—those brutal, black-booted Nazis?” (43). After his escape from prison and subsequent rescue by Patty, Anton turns into the very antithesis of the brutal Nazi, son of a Professor and a mother of limitless virtues (90-91). Still, despite their evident dislike of Hitler and the government, his father capitulates to pressure and quits criticizing Hitler and Anton joins the army (90-93). Explanations as to why are largely glossed over, but Patty is deeply convinced that Anton is worth saving.

Anton’s escape is both inaccurate and troubling in terms of his relationship to Patty. Very few prisoners attempted escape due to the remote locations of the camps (Bowman). His dishonesty in convincing an American guard that he had thousands of dollars of jewelry that he somehow managed to sneak into the camp in order to escape never seems to make Patty suspicions. After all, if he lied so convincingly to the guard in order to escape, why be completely honest with a twelve year old girl who is willing to protect him in order to maintain an adolescent crush? (94-95). \(^{15}\) Anton’s chivalry extends to his near-exposure after attempting to keep Patty’s father from beating her yet again (130). He is the perfect gentleman in every way, drawing Patty out of her shell, listening to her teenage concerns and nearly giving up his life to protect her. All of his actions certainly complicate what a “brutal, black-booted” Nazi should be (43). Yet the portrayal falls flat, and the actions of the Nazis are boiled down to Anton’s philosophical musings, “Cruelty is cruelty and the difference between [Patty’s father and Hitler] may have more to do with their degrees of power than their degrees of cruelty. […]”

Trying to calculate different degrees of cruelty is like trying to calculate different degrees of

\(^{15}\) The way that Anton pursues this relationship is also rather creepy, as he is twenty-one and Patty only twelve. Their “love affair” tends to be touted as one of the best things about the book, apparently putting aside all concerns about pedophilia and sexual abuse.
death” (134). Just like that, Hitler’s actions and one young girl’s abusive father are conflated to one and the same. This ignores, of course, the variety of people who supported Hitler and made his decisions possible. One might assume, after reading Summer of My German Soldier that all German soldiers were just unhappily following a cruel leader who could have just as easily merely been beating his children. His comment about “calculate[ing] different degrees of death” ignores the whole fact that while millions of Holocaust victims lay dead in Europe, Patty is still living in Arkansas, despite the proposed “cruelty is cruelty” (134). If this was, in fact, the case, Patty would be dead as a doornail. Anton, on closer examination, is far from a “good Nazi” and instead comes off as a manipulative borderline pedophile who covers for his actions with weak philosophies that gloss over any atrocities that are taking place.

Another text that fails to effectively present a “good Nazi” character is John Boyne’s The Boy in the Striped Pajamas.16 Bruno, the main character, is an incredibly naïve boy living in Berlin during the height of World War II and Nazi domination. Boyne calls the book “a fable,” perhaps in order to excuse some of the more extraordinarily unbelievable portions of the text. Bruno’s father is an officer in some undisclosed army, characterized by his boots, his freshly pressed uniform, and his incredibly well-maintained hair (42). Readers with an already solidified knowledge of the Nazi Bogeyman will recognize Bruno’s father as an officer in the Nazi party. He is a high-ranking officer, apparently, as the “Fury” himself dines at their house. Bruno is apparently unable to pronounce “Führer” and therefore the identity of his dinner guest (and partner Eva) are obscured for readers. Shortly after this visit the family departs for another locale that Bruno finds unpronounceable: the bleak landscape of “Out-With.” “Out with what?”

16 Boyne’s book was also made into a 2008 film, one that won the audience choice award at the Chicago International Film Festival and a best actress award from the British Independent Film Awards (“The Boy”).
Bruno asks his older sister, who replies, “That’s the name of the house […] out with the people who lived here before us, I expect” (25). Bruno’s convenient inability to pronounce any of the terms generally associated with the Holocaust may be forgiven as a mere innocent reaction to events that he doesn’t understand and a general childlike naïveté. However, it is his failure to recognize the giant prison behind the house as such that is an even further stretch on the reader’s suspension of disbelief.

When Bruno and his sister Gretel, the brightest girl in her class, first see the camp behind their new home at Out-With, they are at a loss for an explanation. Despite the incredibly tall fence surrounded by barbed wire, the best that twelve-year-old Gretel can come up with is “This must be the countryside” (32-33). They quickly move on from that explanation, but even upon recognizing there are thousands of people behind the wires, all in the same outfits, they are unable to conceptualize the idea of a prison. They view a “chain gang” pushing wheelbarrows, people who “carried spades and were being led by groups of soldiers to a place where they could not be seen,” and soldiers laughing at terrified, filthy children (36-37). The horrors of these scenes leave little impression on the two children, who return to complaining about the loss of their nice home and friends in Berlin.

Eventually, Bruno begins to play explorer, and discovers Shmuel, the boy in the striped pajamas on the other side of the fence. Shmuel explains his family’s long journey from a small town in Poland to Auschwitz, but the story has little impact on Bruno.\(^{17}\) Instead, Bruno is jealous of Shmuel’s opportunity to play with the hundreds of children on the other side of the fence.

---

\(^{17}\) Shmuel’s journey includes all-too-common experiences of Polish Jews—the arm-bands, the deportation to ghettos, crowded trains with no air and horrible stenches on the way to the camps, being separated from his mother and sisters upon arrival, and imprisonment (126-130).
fence, and begins to express an interest in crawling under the fence to continue playing explorer. After their first encounter Bruno begins to visit Shmuel every day, despite the extreme unlikelihood that Shmuel could wander off every day without any guards, capos, or even his father noticing. Bruno begins taking Shmuel food, but often eats it himself on the way to their meeting place if he is feeling “peckish,” not realizing Shmuel is starving (138). The text culminates with Bruno’s desire to play explorer leading him to enter the camp in a pair of pajama’s Shmuel has stolen for him. Together, they are rounded up and herded into a “long room” that felt “completely airtight” (212). Both boys die in the gas chamber they have been funneled into, Bruno maintaining his naïveté to the last: “Bruno raised an eyebrow, unable to understand the sense in all of this, but he assumed it had something to do with keeping the rain out and stopping people from catching colds” (213). The two boys die, and are buried in unmarked graves.

At the book’s end, Bruno’s father discovers his son’s abandoned pile of clothing next to the loose bit of fence where he crawled under to be with Shmuel. When he considers the logical train of events “his legs seemed to stop working right—as if they couldn’t hold up his body any longer—and he ended up sitting on the ground” (216). This one moment of grief hardly makes up for the extended cruelties he oversaw throughout the book as the head of the camp. It is difficult to extend too much sympathy to a man who only grieves for his own blood, and not the hundreds if not thousands of other children whose deaths he oversaw. While his sorrow potentially exposes the vulnerability underneath the monstrous Nazi exterior, it ultimately feels contrived. Meanwhile, Bruno’s “goodness” comes off as mere foolishness. Perhaps, if he had

---

18 Another extremely unlikely scenario, as clothing was guarded in the camps and not available for anyone to commandeer.
been older and a bit less idiotic, he may have acted in the same manner as Lieutenant Kotler, the “bad Nazi” that his sister Gretel so admires.

For those unfamiliar with the Holocaust, the sorts of memories this historical fable may create for readers are particularly troubling. Boyne could have mediated these failings somewhat with a detailed paratext, explaining the extreme unlikelihood of the events as he has depicted them.\(^\text{19}\) There is an author’s note included at the end of the book, but in terms of expanding readers’ knowledge of the Holocaust itself the note disappoints. Boyne explains the process by which he developed the idea for the story and notes,

> The issue of writing about the Holocaust is, of course, a contentious matter, and any novelist who explores it had better be sure about his or her intentions before setting out. It’s presumptuous to assume that from today’s perspective one can truly understand the horrors of the concentration camps, although it’s the responsibility of the writer to uncover as much emotional truth within that desperate landscape as he possibly can.

(Boyne)

Boyne’s claims about emotional truth are troubling, particularly in light of the writing that comes from many camp survivors. Ruth Kluger notes with frustration, “Auschwitz was no instructional institution […] You learned nothing there, and least of all humanity and tolerance” (52).

Bruno’s inconsistent compassion towards Shmuel and accidental death are not ethically transformative in terms of how to behave in light of cruelty and persecution. While he and his family seem horrified by Lieutenant Kotler’s “extremely unpleasant” treatment of their Jewish waiter, no one does anything about it (148). The family is deeply saddened upon discovering

\(^{19}\) Instead, Boyne ends the book with the troubling, “And that’s the end of the story about Bruno and his family. Of course this all happened a long time ago and nothing like that could happen again. Not in this day and age” (214).
Bruno’s probable death in the gas chamber, yet they grieve for none of the Jewish children that were also gassed there. Certainly, terrible things might also happen to innocent people in Boyne’s book, but by no means do readers get a sense of the scope of the events at the camp. The sorts of memories regarding the Holocaust and the Germans’ participation in it are troubling at best. The text also maintains the good/evil binary system so often seen when Nazi characters crop up. Bruno’s family are all likable people, “good” Nazis following the “Fury’s” orders. Lieutenant Kotler is the “evil” Nazi, the one who participates in cruel behaviors for his own enjoyment. Bruno’s innocence is not a substitute for goodness, and the book asks us to seek very few answers about the complexities of Germans in Nazi Germany.

Finally, I want to turn to a book that does ask us to look closely and sympathetically at the actions of one Nazi, in a way that touches on the issues of both understanding and forgiveness. Russell noted that a book like *Friedrich* asks readers to “seek the answers within ourselves” in terms of how we would behave in similar situations (274). David Chotjewitz’s *Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi* requires that readers ask these questions of both the Nazi character and the Jewish character, as well as maintaining a level of historical accuracy that moves beyond the realm of anti-Semitic executioners and into the various facets that promoted the Nazis rise to power. The text begins in 1933 with two boys enamored with the newly empowered Nazi Party, Armin and Daniel, sneaking out into the night to write anti-Communist graffiti in the Red section of town (16-17). When caught by the authorities and imprisoned overnight, they swear allegiance to each other, pledging blood brotherhood before being released back to their families (25). Readers see the boys recreating the final battles of World War I, creating a German victory and crushing the French forces, playing at the thought of a Germany not crippled by the Treaty of Versailles and weakened by demilitarization. Daniel longs to join
the HJ, feeling as though the boys who march through the streets singing anti-Communist songs “were doing something important” and “committed to a cause of the highest importance: the future of Germany” (51). These three early scenes are examples that serve to complicate the motives for the rise of Nazism. The boys express far more anti-Communist sentiments than they do anti-Semitic ones, and they have absorbed the message about the importance of the loss of World War I to the German psyche, even though it occurred before they were born.

Nevertheless, the peace between Daniel and larger German society can only last so long. Daniel is part Jewish, and therefore the “half human” of the title. His mother’s family, long since converted to Christianity, is still considered inhuman in the eyes of the new Nazi regime. Daniel reacts with horror to this news, asking his father “Why did you marry a Jewess? […] That’s why I’m half Jewish now” (65). Daniel briefly fantasizes about running away from home and hoping for a special dispensation from the Führer to become an honorary Aryan, so he can still follow his dream of joining the SS (68). Of course, this desire only amounts to an afternoon’s fantasy. While Daniel’s father assumes his own Aryan status and impeccable war record will save the family from any unpleasantness, he is wrong. They stay in Germany, and he stays married to Sophie, which means he is slowly pushed out of his law partnership, his home, and suffers the same attacks on Kristallnacht as other Jewish families. Daniel must leave his prestigious school and soccer team, and accept the fact that being half Jewish, in the eyes of the Nazi leadership, truly does make him “half human.”

However, it is the character of Daniel’s best friend and blood brother, Armin, who is so interesting to consider. Armin joins the Nazi party in order to rebel against his unemployed, drunken, abusive, Communist father. The issues that draw Armin to the Party are far from the pervasive anti-Semitism that Goldhagen defines as the motivating factor for Nazi membership.
These reasons all give readers an insight into Armin’s mind. Instead of being motivated to brutally destroy his neighbors, or even instead of being coerced into Party membership by threats of violence, he joins out of adolescent rebellion. Of course, once Armin saw the path of anti-Semitism that the Nazi party was laying out for its members, he could have left. He does not, however, because for him it takes away all chance of a future. Like many a young man from a poor family who cannot afford to send their children on for higher education, Armin hopes for a future in the armed forces: specifically the SS. All of these factors offer a chance for readers to understand Armin, even when he is pressured into attacking Daniel’s father on Kristallnacht.

While the image of Armin smacking around a broken former war hero is decidedly troubling, Armin has also taken the time to warn Daniel and his cousin of the attacks, and give them a safe place to hide. He participates in the violence under threat of both blackmail and expulsion from the Nazi party: the only option for a future as he sees it. These events are all understandable in their own way. Armin never comes across as evil, merely striving for the best future he can see in a time where violence is the answer to getting ahead. Once this fact is established for readers, the next half of Browning and Semilen’s compelling question has to be asked. Because readers potentially understand his motives, does that mean readers should forgive him? Armin certainly thinks so:

“My career is over,” he said. My whole future, and you know why? Because I didn’t betray our friendship.”

Daniel leaned back. “You sound as though you’ve faced some god-awful tragedy.”

Armin faced Daniel. “You don’t understand. If I hadn’t warned you, we wouldn’t be having this conversation, because you’d be sitting in Fuhlbüttel. Instead,
you’re here, in my uncle’s apartment. Which I am responsible for. So I actually should be going to the police right now. But I’m not. So I’m taking still another risk for you. What else am I supposed to do? (303)

What is Armin to do? This is one of the few instances in young adult Holocaust literature where we come face to face with one of the persecutors in a way that asks for reflection, rather than revulsion. In terms of forgiveness, for Chotjewitz’s narrative, it is up to Daniel to make this decision.

Interspersed throughout the narrative that takes place in the 1930s are scenes in post-World War II Germany. Daniel, having managed to escape to America with his family, has joined the army and has been sent to Germany to interrogate German prisoners because of his language skills. The narrative is told in a series of flashbacks as Daniel navigates his former home. At the novel’s close, during an interrogation of a group of German POW’s, Daniel feels as though he recognizes one of the prisoners. “He was fairly tall and strongly built. He wore an officer’s uniform and had a bandage around his head, with straggly blonde hair sticking up” (322). Far from his career being over, as he assumed in 1938 when he protected Daniel, Armin has gone on to become an officer. While Daniel and Armin initially share uncertain smiles when meeting each other in a situation where power and privilege have decidedly swapped, their old friendship only goes so far. When Daniel examines Armin’s interrogation sheet, he finds under the category “SS Membership” a decided “No” (323). Daniel reacts incredulously, “But you absolutely wanted to join the SS” and is certain that Armin is lying to him regarding his level of Nazi involvement (323). While Armin tries to convince Daniel that he was in a “simple battle unit” and that he cannot possibly be the bad Nazi, Daniel is not willing to accept that as an answer:
Armin, supposedly, had also just done his job. And now I did mine. I took the form about Sergeant Armin Hillmann, crossed out the no in the SS Membership line, and wrote Yes.

I did the same in the next line about Nazi party membership.

Then I went back to my desk, sat down, looked at the cadet, and asked, “Where did I leave off?” (325)

Readers are left in a unique position at this interaction. Armin did save Daniel’s life. But at the same time, his SS affiliations and Nazi party membership indicate there is a good chance not everyone who crossed his path received the same treatment. There are not any tidy answers at the end of Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi. Armin was a good Nazi. But Daniel does not forgive him. For readers, Chojewitz’s narrative functions to both complicate Nazi motives and historicize the events of Germany in the 1930s. The conclusion of the text echoes Browning’s requests from his introduction: “Explaining is not excusing, understanding is not forgiving. Not trying to understand the perpetrators in human terms would make impossible not only [Ordinary Men] but any history of Holocaust perpetrators that sought to go beyond one dimensional caricature” (Browning xx). Armin, of any character in this study, succeeds in moving beyond a one dimensional character and instead requires readers to think through both the process of understanding Armin’s motives and Daniel’s motives.

Germans as Victims

So far I have discussed a variety of characters who have direct links to the Nazi party, and the ways in which they help readers understand the sometimes complex motives and concerns that individual Nazis may have had. However, not all Germans were members of the Nazi party. Not all Germans willingly participated in the persecution of their Jewish neighbors,
and many German civilians died in various Allied attacks, particularly the night-time air raids. Markus Zusak’s 2005 novel *The Book Thief* deals explicitly with the category of German as victim in interesting ways. The same year Zusak’s novel appeared in paperback, historian Bill Niven released *Germans as Victims*, a collection on representational practices of German victimhood. Contemporary historians and cultural critics are taking the opportunity to critically evaluate the ways in which German victimhood is both a valid expression of recovery and a troubling turn in terms of the larger historical project of Holocaust remembrance.

In terms of representational practice, Helmut Schmitz notes the importance of uniqueness of imagery when dealing with the two separate sets of victims: “Despite the frequent insistence that to commemorate German suffering does not mean to equate it with the suffering of Nazi victims, one of the central rhetorical operations in the current allocation of victim status of the Germans is the employment of images and *topoi* otherwise familiar from Holocaust discourse” (Schmitz 94-95). His demand that we not reappropriate imagery traditionally associated with the death of European Jews is central to an evaluation of *The Book Thief*. The novel, told from the perspective of Death (who wears a robe but never carries a scythe) includes a variety of images of war victims. He collects the souls of soldiers, concentration camp victims, and Germans. One of the first descriptions of the German victims is this one, where Death evaluates the “packet of souls” who died not from “misfortune,” but rather:

---

20 One of the most well-known books on the deaths of German people during the air raids during WWII is Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*. Because it’s told from the perspective of an American soldier with very little interaction with German civilians I have chosen not to cover it here.

21 *The Book Thief* has won the Booksense Book of the Year award for Children’s Literature, the Michael L. Printz Honor Book Award, the National Jewish Book Award, *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year, *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, and a *Booklist* Best Book of the Year.
It probably had more to do with the hurled bombs, thrown down by humans hiding in the clouds.

Yes, the sky was now a devastating, home-cooked red. The small German town had been flung apart one more time. Snowflakes of ash fell so *lovelily* [sic] you were tempted to stretch out your tongue to catch them, taste them. Only, they would have scorched your lips. They would have cooked your mouth. (12-13)

Zusak’s imagery echoes many of the themes of Holocaust representation: the sky and ashes are both “cooked,” reminiscent of the description of the crematoria as “ovens.” The ashes floating in the sky similarly echo the smoke comprised of human remains that hung in thick clouds over camps like Auschwitz. The conflation of camp victims and German victims here is troubling, and the ways in which Zusak uses this imagery are worth drawing attention to, particularly because the book at large is able to create a sympathetic portrait of several German victims.

*The Book Thief*, narrated by Death, follows the story of Liesel Meminger who oddly does *not* die in the course of the book.²² Liesel is put into foster care by her mother, a woman fleeing from the label placed on her and her husband: *kommunist* (31). Liesel slowly overcomes the trauma of losing her brother to starvation and illness, in a train, on the way to her new foster family, another moment reminiscent of Schmitz’s concerns about imagery. Hans Hubermann, Liesel’s foster father, is explicitly anti-Nazi, even though his son has long since joined the NSDAP. Hans Junior thinks of his father as “part of an old, decrepit Germany—one that allowed everyone else to take it for the proverbial ride while its own people suffered” (104). He accuses his father of having “never cared about this country […] not enough, anyway” (105). Of course, Hans Junior’s accusations point directly to what Hans Senior *does* care for—his family,

---

²² Odd only because the choice of narrator, that is.
his community, and his duty to old friends instead of allegiance to a party that promotes violence in the streets and abuses of humanity. It is this duty to his old friends that makes the Hubermann family into what readers might identify as the “moral heroes” that Sartwell so roundly denied.

Hans Hubermann consistently stands up against the Nazis violent actions in the book, going so far as to paint over slurs like “Jewish filth” on his neighbor’s shops (181). While Hubermann is guilty of the classic mistake of many German citizens, “he didn’t think the hatred could last” he refuses to merely put his head down and join the Party for appearance’s sake (180). However, it is not these small acts of resistance that characterize Hubermann as a moral hero. He made a promise to a fellow soldier during World War I that should anything happen to Vandenburg, he would do whatever he could to help his widow and child. Of course, Vandenburg just so happened to be Jewish, and now his son is desperately in need of help. He and his wife take him in, “despite this iridescent fear glowing as it did in the dark, they somehow resisted the urge for hysteria” (199-200). The Hubermanns take in Max Vandenburg in order to save his life and fulfill Hans’ promise to his war companion. In the process Liesel and Max bond over their shared nightmares—both traumatized from the lives they have been forced to flee at the hands of the Nazi regime. The Hubermann family is the ideal portrait of honorable, caring Germans. However, they do not exist in a vacuum, and the book is full of portraits of the city’s various residents and their relationship to the Nazi party.

Liesel’s neighbor Rudy Steiner also becomes her best friend. Rudy is the quintessential Aryan boy—strong, fast, intelligent, blonde-haired and blue-eyed. The Steiner family could, from the outside, be seen as the ideal German family. They have the right genetics, lots of children, and they faithfully attend BDM and HJ meetings. Rudy’s father, Alex Steiner, is far
from a Party follower however. Death introduces him, in Zusak’s non-traditional narrative style, in this manner:

*** THE CONTRADICTORY POLITICS ***

OF ALEX STEINER

**Point One:** He was a member of the Nazi Party, but he did not hate Jews, or anyone else for that matter.

**Point Two:** Secretly, though, he couldn’t help feeling a percentage of relief (or worse—gladness!) when Jewish shop owners were put out of business—propaganda informed him that it was only a matter of time before a plague of Jewish tailors showed up and stole his customers.

**Point Three:** But did that mean they should be driven out completely?

**Point Four:** His family. Surely, he had to do whatever he could to support them. If that meant being in the party, it meant being in the party.

**Point Five:** Somewhere, far down, there was an itch in his heart, but he made a point not to scratch it. He was afraid of what might come leaking out. (49-50)

Alex Steiner takes the path of least resistance, much like the narrator’s family in *Friedrich*. Certainly, given this list of traits, Alex Steiner is no moral hero. As readers we have no idea what might come “leaking out” of his heart if it was scratched (50). One might like to think that scratching his itchy heart would lead to a total rejection of Nazi policies. The ambiguity of this statement is one of the powerful parts about it. While Steiner may look into his heart and find the motivation to turn away from Nazi policies, he may just as likely find an evil heart under there, one that will fully accept that propaganda and embrace the opportunities the Nazi regime is supposedly giving him. This ambiguity remains intact until two monsters show up and sit down
in his kitchen (407). What they want is to take Rudy away to a special school designed to
“create an elite group of German citizens in the name of the Führer” (409). When his own
family is faced with an external Nazi threat, Steiner is willing to fight back. Hardly an example
of a moral hero, but also illustrating the possibilities for resistance that was available to an
average German.23

So far Zusak’s text has illustrated examples of truly good heroic Germans and normal
people caught in a bad situation. However, what about those who embrace Nazism and profit
from it? The Book Thief also offers readers a complex set of characters who exemplify this
category. The Mayor and his wife Ilsa Hermann are two characters whom Liesel interacts with
throughout the book, despite their clear class differences. The Mayor’s wife spots Liesel stealing
a book from a public book-burning staged by the Nazi party. Rather than report her for stealing
an illegal book, however, the lonely and silent Ilsa coaxes Liesel into her library (133). Liesel is
able to enjoy her book fetish in peace for a while, reading books in the Bürgermeister’s library.
Their odd relationship continues even after Liesel quits legitimately visiting the library and
instead begins stealing books from the Bürgermeister’s wife.24 Ilsa allows Liesel to steal books
from her library, using the girl as a substitute for her own book-loving son who died in World
War I. Ilsa Hermann’s willingness to overlook the very small transgressions of an adolescent
girl is clearly not earth-shaking compassion. However, after the Hubermann home is destroyed

23 Steiner is punished for this refusal to send his son into the hands of the Nazi leaders. He is conscripted and sent to
fight, which ultimately saves his life when his home is bombed. Rudy, however, is not so lucky in an ironic turn the
narrator definitely does not fail to point out (411).

24 She does this partly from a compulsion to both read and steal, as well as to get revenge on the Bürgermeister’s
family for no longer sending their washing to the Hubermann household, making their survival all that more perilous
as the money for food becomes steadily more scarce.
in an Allied bombing and Liesel loses both her foster-father and foster-mother, it is Ilса and the
Mayor who show up to take Liesel home. They step in to adopt the foster-daughter of a known
resistor solely based on the interactions that Ilса and Liesel have over the theft of books. At the
book’s close there are several things about the German people made clear for the reader:
attitudes toward the Nazis were many and varied, some Germans lost everything they had to
senseless violence (even if they may have been moral heroes), and the Nazi Mayor could make
compassionate choices. While I think the way that Holocaust imagery gets deployed in the
book is worthy of close criticism, the many and varied cast of German characters are worth
holding up as a good example of the potential for young adult texts to deal with the issues of the
German population in complex ways. *The Book Thief*, however, like so many adolescent
Holocaust texts, can never stand on its own as the definitive book on the Holocaust. It should be
treated carefully, particularly in terms of its co-opting Holocaust imagery and the potential it has
to extend the idea of the moral hero to young adults. After all, Hans Hubermann was hiding Max
in his basement not out of the goodness of his heart, but because he felt an obligation to Max’s
dead father. Everyone in the text has motives for their actions that defy a simplistic good/evil
binary, with the exception of perhaps the specter of War itself, which Death references often.

Conclusion

So where do all of these German characters—the ordinary men, the Bogeymen killers,
the good Nazis, and the innocent victims leave me in terms of tolerance? One problem with
tolerance discourse is how it can create a simplistic series of events that fail to take historical

---

25 One wonders what the end of the war brought for Liesel and her new family. With the collapse of the Nazi
regime the mayor may have been deposed and possibly even tried for his collusion with the regular humiliation and
persecution of the Jews in the fictional Molching.
facts or differences into consideration. Wendy Brown notes the simplistic rubric that often characterizes discussions of tolerance:

> An interlocked series of generalizations—difference as the cause of prejudice, prejudice as the cause of injustice, and tolerance as attenuating the dangers of prejudice—permits the gathering of an extraordinary range of phenomena into the same explanatory rubric and the same justice project, as well as the exile of serious political and historical analysis. (Brown 143)

The trajectory that Brown demonstrates here points to the way that conceptualizations of tolerance actually encourage readers to *not* engage with persecuted characters. In particular they fail to do this in any specific way that acknowledges larger vulnerable populations. Without the “serious political and historical analysis” that Brown asks for, texts that ostensibly teach tolerance can end up teaching a troubling relativism that allows for its extension to groups who perhaps should not be tolerated. Some of the books in this chapter, notably *Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi* and *The Book Thief*, may allow readers to look at the complexities of the politics and history that led to the rise of the Nazi regime.

Through characters like Zusak’s Alex Steiner, it may be possible to complicate the notion that tolerance could have done anything to change his behavior. What he does, after all, is tolerate the Nazi behaviors. His motives are not because of hate, but out of a sense of disinterest and a discomforting consideration for his own well-being. Steiner is, by all accounts, a tolerant being. He doesn’t hate either the Nazis or the Jews or anyone else. He is willing to take a stand

---

26 One concern with the entire cosmopolitan project that I argue for in this dissertation is that in encouraging engagement with vulnerable lives, one could also support a relativism that allows for any sort of behavior. I want to explicitly address this concern in terms of contemporary life choices in Chapter Five.
for his family, but not anyone else. Similarly, Armin of *Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi* has motives to join the Nazis not out of hate, but out of a need to find a future for himself in an era with few choices. Readers are left understanding the motives of each of these characters. Like Daniel, however, each individual needs to look inwards and see if that understanding equals forgiveness.

Striving for acceptance and engagement with marginalized groups is one of the tenets of the cosmopolitan project I have illustrated up to this point. This chapter, particularly the attitude of characters like the narrator’s family in *Friedrich* and Alex Steiner from *The Book Thief* show the dangers of tolerating a repressive regime that you feel may benefit you. Can education that promotes engagement and acceptance make us “profoundly different” than the indifferent perpetrators of various genocides (Sartwell)? I believe that this may be a possibility. However, it requires putting limits on what sorts of behaviors we are willing to either engage or accept.

Appiah deals with this tricky issue in this manner:

> To say what, in principle, distinguishes the cosmopolitan from the counter-cosmopolitan, we plainly need to go beyond talk of truth and tolerance. One distinctively cosmopolitan commitment is to *pluralism*. Cosmopolitans think that there are many values worth living by and that you cannot live by all of them. So we hope and expect that different people and different societies will embody different values. (But they have to be values *worth* living by.) Another aspect of cosmopolitanism is what philosophers call *fallibilism*—the sense that our knowledge is imperfect, provisional, subject to revision in the face of new evidence. (144)

Totalitarian states are notably unwilling to accept any level of fallibilism—Hitler himself refused to ever deviate from his initial plan for a renewed Germany. So while a cosmopolitan may be
able to find a variety of ways of living that are perfectly acceptable, they have to be “worth living by” (Appiah 144). This, of course, enters a tricky area. Who gets to decide what values are worthwhile? How can issues of this sort be negotiated without creating new repressive power structures that encourage marginalization and discrimination? I want to turn, oddly enough, to science in order to answer this question. Sam Harris, in his book *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* makes the argument that there are absolutely scientific reasons for treating others well. Instead of the eugenic science that the Nazis so famously embraced, Harris argues that finding many values worth living by and acknowledging their legitimacy is absolutely in humanity’s best interest. In the next chapter, I cover both his argument about an ethical science as well as some values that should not be considered worth living by: the choice to embrace neo-Nazism and how neo-Nazi characters are dealt with in young adult literature.
CHAPTER V: NEO-NAZI REPRESENTATION AND VALUES WORTH LIVING BY

All I see in the distance
Is an ocean of warriors
Marching forward to battle
An ocean of warriors
Ready to kill
With a fist of steel
Ready to fight to cure our nation’s ills
White resistance has risen
Freed from the bond of this emotional prison
--Prussian Blue “Ocean of Warriors”

Entire cultures and traditions can be wrong. They can be wrong in the sense of being misinformed or incorrect with respect to the information they are built on. They also can be morally wrong with regard to the corporate behavioral practices that are based on the misinformation.—John Kavanaugh

Up to this point, the problems I have illustrated regarding toleration and tolerance initiatives have been directly connected to systems that allocate power and privilege differently. I have shown how those who retain power and privilege are encouraged to tolerate those different than themselves, maintaining the structures that have reified a number of normal/abnormal binary relationships. One aspect of tolerance that needs further consideration is how it is deployed as not only an idealized set of behaviors, but also as a moral issue. Assumptions about the morality of tolerance reinforce its association as the appropriate response

---

1 Prussian Blue is a white supremacist girl band composed of a pair of twins from California who “have been performing songs about white nationalism before all-white crowds since they were nine” (“Young Singers”). The girls seem to be marketed as the white supremacist Olsen twins and they are decidedly used to recruit members to Aryan organizations: “Prussian Blue supporter Erich Gliebe, operator of one of the nation's most notorious hate music labels, Resistance Records, hopes younger performers like Lynx and Lamb will help expand the base of the White Nationalist cause” (“Young Singers”).
to any perceived difference. I have argued for a cosmopolitan ethics of difference throughout this project, an argument that needs to be defined in opposition to the presumed morality of tolerance. Wendy Brown, in *Regulating Aversion*, points out how tolerance is often accompanied by a sense of moral superiority. To be tolerant, asserts Brown, “conjures seemliness, propriety, forbearance, magnanimity, cosmopolitanism, universality, and the large view,” all ideals that allow one to express some sense of superiority over those who cannot claim that same sort of tolerant worldview (178). It is perhaps this connection with viewing tolerance as the most enlightened way to deal with difference that encourages an overriding sense of cultural relativism where one is expected to be tolerant of all views, no matter how troubling.

Young adult fiction that deals with white supremacist characters creates an interesting lens for evaluating how neo-Nazis can be the very limits of tolerance, and also how texts with neo-Nazi characters can be used as a tool to assess values that are not worth living by. The books in this chapter illustrate problematic values largely in two ways. First, there are texts featuring neo-Nazi protagonists and the values they choose to embrace which eventually lead to violence: Laura Williams’ *The Spider’s Web*, Han Nolan’s *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, and Stephen King’s “Apt Pupil.” Second, there are books that discuss the impact of violence inflicted by neo-Nazis on other characters, such as Carol Matas’ *The Freak* and Mats Wahl’s *The Invisible*. The idea that there are, in fact, values that are not worth living by or tolerating is potentially unpopular, as relativism has been taught so heavily in conjunction with tolerance initiatives.

One of the fundamental problems behind making claims about values tends to be the way that cultural relativism, or moral relativism, can be deployed to defend all practices, even those
that harm others. Philosophy professor Chris Gowans defines one facet of moral relativism in the following manner:

The term ‘moral relativism’ is sometimes associated with a normative position concerning how we ought to think about, or behave towards, persons with whom we morally disagree. Usually the position is formulated in terms of tolerance. In particular, it is said that we should not interfere with the actions of persons that are based on moral judgments we reject, when the disagreement is not or cannot be rationally resolved.²

The characters in this chapter often exhibit values that are morally disagreeable—they are violent, destructive, and hateful. They also help readers see how sometimes interference, even in a moral judgment, is warranted. The challenge to relativism can also aid in the creation of a cosmopolitan ethic—a position that argues for the acceptance of all values worth living by. Defining what that means, exactly, is perhaps easier than it seems. As I illustrate, values worth living by must support human well-being. What these fictional texts have the potential to do is help readers reject moral judgments that limit human well-being. Ultimately, I wish to challenge the connection between tolerance and relativism, arguing that both are stumbling blocks to a world of cosmopolitan ethics.

In this chapter I argue that adolescent literature featuring neo-Nazi characters has the potential to exemplify the problems with moral relativism and the ways in which the characters learn from their experiences with neo-Nazi violence. The texts in this chapter show the possibility for an ethical framework that does not rely only on relativism. The books demonstrate the need to act in opposition to hatred, they emphasize the importance of human

---

² Gowans also explains that philosophers often reject this definition as it is quite simplistic. For the sake of my argument regarding tolerance and toleration, however, this definition holds true.
well-being, and they can help readers recognize more progressive decisions about lives other than their own. Characters in *The Spiders Web* and *If I Should Die Before I Wake* both discover the way neo-Nazi values are ultimately incompatible with their desires for friendship and a sense of belonging. Stephen King’s novella “Apt Pupil” tells the story of how embracing a love of Nazi violence can lead to both self destruction and the devastation of those around the protagonist. *The Freak* and *The Invisible* both show the results of neo-Nazi violence as well as the importance of community responses to these events. I begin with a brief discussion of the connections between relativism and tolerance, and some arguments to counter the presumed usefulness of these two terms. This section is followed by an analysis of the fictional texts dealing with neo-Nazi characters illustrating how ethical frameworks that do not rely on moral relativism can be developed. All these texts highlight how sometimes one should and must interfere to make a judgment that promotes human well-being rather than maintains relativistic attitudes.

**Why It May Not All Be Relative**

The framework for modern relativism lies in the characteristic split between the concept of facts and the concept of values. One common presumption is that facts and values occupy entirely different spectrums of human understanding, and therefore have no joint role in human behavior, and if one were to make the connection between facts, values, and corresponding behavior one would be committing the “naturalistic fallacy.”

---

3 One explanation of this fallacy comes from twentieth-century British philosopher G.E. Moore who “accused anyone who infers that \( X \) is good from any proposition about \( X \)'s natural properties of having committed the naturalistic fallacy. Assuming that being pleasant is a natural property, for example, someone who infers that drinking beer is good from the premise that drinking beer is pleasant is supposed to have committed the naturalistic
Ethics in a World of Strangers calls this notion Positivism, which he frames in terms of beliefs and desires. Beliefs are ideas that are based on evidence and desires are feelings which “are satisfied or unsatisfied” but there is no way to determine which desires are right or wrong (18-19). Throughout this chapter, when I refer to beliefs or desires, I am using Appiah’s sense of the words. As a specific example, one might believe the events of the Holocaust are real because there is documented evidence that supports this belief. However, based on this Positivist approach, one would never be able to claim the desires leading to the Holocaust were either good or bad, because it is impossible to determine right or wrong based on evidence or facts. Based on the texts I have already covered, one can already see the problems with making relativistic claims of this sort. It is nearly impossible to say that there are no value judgments to be made when faced with the stories of characters from Night, Maus, The Cage, T4, and other novels.

Another way of explaining positivism comes from the philosopher David Hume and his notion that moral decisions are made based on sentiment, rather than on reason. One common interpretation of Hume within twentieth century philosophy is to “den[y] ethical realism, excluding values from the domain of facts” (Cohon). Yet to claim that values and facts occupy significantly different realms ignores the way that values and facts are both forged within existing systems of power and privilege. In this chapter, texts for adolescent readers featuring neo-Nazi characters can help to challenge the idea that all values are equally worthwhile. There are genuine connections between the facts of discrimination and oppression and the values these choices express. Young adult fiction can help draw attention to the connection between how the world is and what an individual ought to do when faced with difficult decisions.

fallacy. The intuitive idea is that evaluative conclusions require at least one evaluative premise—purely factual premises about the naturalistic features of things do not entail or even support evaluative conclusions” (Ridge).
Another way of phrasing the fact/values interpretation of Hume’s work is known as the is/ought distinction.4 According to this reading, “no description of the way the world is (facts) can tell us how we ought to behave (morally)” (Harris 10). This is/ought binary relationship has been used as the underlying argument for tolerance and toleration, as there is presumably no way of deciding whether any individual’s desires are right or wrong, and therefore they all must be tolerated equally. Appiah claims there is a “disconnect” between these claims and the idea that “we ought not to intercede in other societies on behalf of our own values” (24). The argument seems to undo itself:

For on the Positivist account, to value something is, roughly, to want everyone to want it. And if that’s the case, then values are, in a certain way, naturally imperialistic. So the whole strategy of arguing toleration for other cultures on the basis of positivism seems self-contradictory. How can you argue rationally that other people’s basic value choices should be tolerated on the basis of a view that says there are no rational arguments for such basic choices? (Appiah 24-25)

The disconnect comes down to the troubling argument that every single moral choice is relative, and therefore one can never draw distinctions between what is right and wrong except in terms of

---

4 Whether or not Hume would have endorsed the theory as deployed in the discourse of science and morals since his death is certainly up for debate. “Hume famously closes the section of the Treatise that argues against moral rationalism by observing that other systems of moral philosophy, proceeding in the ordinary way of reasoning, at some point make an unremarked transition from premises whose parts are linked only by “is” to conclusions whose parts are linked by “ought” (expressing a new relation) — a deduction that seems to Hume “altogether inconceivable” (T3.1.1.27). Attention to this transition would “subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv’d by reason” (ibid.)” (Cohon).
Tolerance seems to be one of the few things not considered relative in the Positivist or relativist account of the world. The politics of genocide itself are one example of this. The United Nations policies on genocide clearly require the international community take action once it is decided a genocide is taking place. However, the UN often side-steps their own requirements by using varying terms such as ethnic cleansing or mass murder that do not necessitate the same sort of immediate reaction. When dealing with ethnic cleansing or mass murder the prevailing assumption is more often that unilateral action cannot be taken based on external value systems and that state sovereignty trumps external valuation of human lives. In this situation, “ethnic cleansing” is viewed as a moral judgment and one that necessitates the United Nations non-involvement. The idea of state sovereignty and cultural relativism can have devastating effects, as recent examples in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Sudan all attest.

The notions of cultural relativism and tolerance are deeply connected, and in popular opinion are often assumed to have some form of moral superiority or enlightenment over those who judge values on a scale other than relativism. As Appiah says, “People often recommend relativism because they think it will lead to tolerance. But if we cannot learn from one another what it is right to think and feel and do, then conversation between us will be pointless. Relativism of this sort isn’t a way to encourage conversation; it’s just a reason to fall silent” (31). If there is nothing to be said on the subject of values because all values are equal, then what is the point in consuming narratives dealing with anyone outside the limited “norm?” This is particularly important in terms of fiction or memoirs that feature differing values such as those I have illustrated in the preceding chapters. My argument has been that fiction and memoirs regarding the Holocaust have the potential to “align our responses to the world” and perhaps get readers to engage with other ways of living and thinking on a level that encourages responses
other than the desire to maintain existing structures of power and privilege (Appiah 29). We must conceive of ethical frameworks that do not strictly rely on a structure of relativism. Neo-Nazi characters, particularly those in *The Spiders Web*, *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, and “Apt Pupil,” are excellent sites for evaluating how relativism is inapplicable when looking at certain values held by literary characters. This, in turn, has the potential to encourage readers to assess the necessity of making solid value judgments. However, this is often an uphill battle in societies that have been encouraged to embrace tolerance as a value that offers both a sense of moral superiority and a notion that facts cannot impact values. While McKinnon acknowledges that in contemporary society tolerance is central to “liberal conceptions of justice” it is also problematic because, “without further specification of what toleration demands and how it is to be understood, this commitment gives no practical guidance whatsoever” (*Toleration* 16).

Tolerance, as a value, offers little guidance for how to behave when faced with discrimination and hatred. In fact, the combination of relativism and toleration often leads to arguments for why one should tolerate even the intolerable.

One of the difficulties in overcoming the relativism that limits cosmopolitan understandings of the world is the hesitance on the part of many liberals to make solid value claims. The fear is primarily of promoting new forms of master narratives or imperial practices that ultimately disallow perfectly legitimate ways of being. That is why Appiah’s claim about how “there are many values worth living by” is so important to remember when shifting towards a framework that works to recognize vulnerable populations and challenge structures that allocate recognizability differently (144). Appiah also reminds us that these many and varied values that the cosmopolitan individual recognizes and engages with also must be “values worth living by” (144). This is one of the largest challenges of any cosmopolitan project. How, in a
world so enthusiastically encouraged to embrace relativism as the peak of enlightened thinking, are we to define which values have worth and which do not? Sam Harris, in his 2010 book *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* argues that we can and should use neuroscience to help us make these determinations.⁵ This is because the human brain itself is “an engine of belief” one that “continually consume[s], produce[s], and attempt[s] to integrate ideas about ourselves and the world that purport to be true” (14). Our brains not only form beliefs (in the sense previously defined by Appiah) but our brains also produce desires. What Harris strives to do is “suggest that the divide between facts and values is illusory” both in terms of philosophical propositions and neuroscience (14). He, like Appiah, argues that there are multiple points worth living by, what he calls various peaks on a moral landscape, “a space of real and potential outcomes whose peaks correspond to the heights of potential well-being and whose valleys represent the deepest possible suffering” (7). Unlike a linear scale or some teleological model, the use of the landscape metaphor allows for a multitude of possible ways to live and many different high points to strive for in terms of human values.

The one thing that Harris insists values worth living by have in common is a focus on improving human well-being. It is this notion of well-being that the books in this chapter do an excellent job of highlighting as they show how various values held by the characters can negatively impact the well-being of others. Lexi and Hilary, of *The Spider’s Web* and *If I Should*
*Die Before I Wake*, both initially embrace neo-Nazi values before they recognize the violence is too destructive for them. Todd, in “Apt Pupil” adopts violent values and acts on them with no regard for the lives of others. And Jade and Hilmer from *The Freak* and *The Invisible* both are on the receiving end of neo-Nazi violence. Their lives are clearly and negatively impacted by the values and actions of white supremacist characters. Harris’ basic premise is that “It is good to avoid behaving in such a way as to produce the worst possible misery for everyone” (39). For Harris, determining a scientific argument for human values can help individuals overcome the limitations of both relativism and rigid universalism. While we may not “personally care about the experience of all conscious beings” it stands to reason “that a universe in which all conscious beings suffer the worst possible misery is worse than a universe in which they experience well-being” (39). Harris’ claims seem nearly impossible to disagree with, largely due to the generalized phrasing here. He defines well-being in part as safety, health, and intellectual engagement that allows for life to thrive. To find examples of Harris’ “worst possible misery” one could point directly back to the experiences of the victims of the Holocaust, particularly those seen in books for young adults that begin to illustrate the vulnerability of life itself. Characters in *The Book Thief*, *Emil and Karl*, and *Friedrich* have their safety, health, and ability to live (much less thrive) taken from them by a regime bent on their ultimate destruction. Without the acknowledgement that this sort of experience is inherently bad, there would be no reason for the cry “never again!” Of course, creating a universe where everyone suffers the worst possible misery is to be discouraged.

In terms of the larger goals of this project, discouraging human misery comes in the form of recognizing existing systems of power and privilege and working to challenge those systems, rather than uphold them. I believe literature can help young adults begin to make connections
between oppressive power structures that limit human well-being and their own capability to make progressive decisions about the lives of those other than themselves. Harris’ claims about a moral landscape where well-being is to be promoted above the worst possible misery for everyone also aligns with Butler’s arguments in *Frames of War* that I covered in chapter three. The issues regarding cosmopolitanism and human rights I have discussed from Butler, Harris, and Appiah are not merely theoretical and limited to metaphysical abstraction. Rather, Butler reminds us how life “is precarious [and] the possibility of being sustained relies fundamentally on social and political conditions and not only on a postulated internal drive to live” (21). For human beings to thrive, the social and political conditions must be focused on well-being rather than human misery. The problem is that all too often the encouragement of tolerance as a near universal value allows for the continuation of practices which limit the social and political conditions that allow for human well-being. My argument, supported by Harris and others, stands in opposition to relativism. It encourages individuals to view how facts and values can and must be connected in order to promote a future where well-being is encouraged. Literature, particularly literature that helps create memories for young adults, can help them connect the facts of oppression to a more cosmopolitan ethics regarding the acceptable treatment of those different than themselves. In order to encourage a world-view where values are connected to the “well-being of conscious creatures,” it is important to look beyond the limitations of consigning values to particular populations or nation-states (Harris 180). For individuals to allow for recognizable and grievable populations, “the social cannot be separated from cosmopolitan principles” and “national interests have to be balanced with other kinds of interests” (Delanty 7). These interests can and should incorporate notions of well-being—life sustained by political and social conditions that allow for safety, health, and care.
Thus far I have looked at a variety of identity categories that are represented with varying degrees of success in young adult Holocaust literature. Many of them have illustrated ongoing forms of discrimination and unrecognized populations, and many experience what Harris would identify as the worst possible misery. I have attempted to illustrate how fiction and memoirs help readers engage populations in order to make them more recognizable and therefore more deserving of the social and political conditions that make life possible. It may be impossible for individuals to care for every other human on the planet in the way they care for their closest friends and relatives. This, in fact, does not necessarily limit the cosmopolitan project that I am advocating. A cosmopolitan imagination can merely help individuals recognize “Others,” engage with the notion of difference, and recognize the fact that the worst possible misery does exist and we should do something to discourage that—in ways that may require more than tolerance of the differences. In the preceding chapter I extended my analysis to German characters and examined their representations in young adult literature in ways that complicate the Bogeyman character, yet in many cases still illustrate how individuals were willing to accept the worst possible misery for a sub-set of their population. This chapter will look at characters who illustrate values not worth living by, particularly the unique form of hate practiced by neo-Nazis, in ways that challenge messages of tolerance that all too often fail to motivate action.

Representations of the Experiences of Neo-Nazi Characters

There are fewer books for young adults featuring neo-Nazis than there are on the topic of the Holocaust or even books that explicitly feature Jewish or German characters as protagonists.6

---

6 There are a good number of films that feature neo-Nazi characters, often featuring very well known actors. Some examples are Edward Norton in American History X, Russell Crowe in Romper Stomper, Ryan Gosling in The Believer, Will Farrell in The Producers, and Brad Renfro in Apt Pupil.
However, there are three fairly popular and well-received texts featuring neo-Nazi main characters for adolescent readers. I have identified the audience of adolescent literature as roughly from the ages of twelve to twenty-one, and these three texts are targeted towards more or less sophisticated readers within this spectrum. The first, Laura Williams’ *The Spider’s Web* is targeted to the youngest readers with a message about the results of parental neglect that one reviewer calls “heavily overstated” but still acceptable for grades seven through nine (Rochman). The second is Han Nolan’s *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, a narrative that intertwines the stories of its neo-Nazi protagonist and a young Polish Jew during the Holocaust itself. Finally, there is the most well-known of the three: Steven King’s novella “Apt Pupil” which features an “all-American” boy who becomes fascinated with the events of the Holocaust in incredibly unhealthy ways. Interestingly, these texts also all feature characters that have lived in Nazi-occupied Europe, either former Nazis or Holocaust victims.7 This combination serves to underscore the concept that some values are not worth living by, as the books illustrate both contemporary characters who are struggling with their problematic values and desires as well as characters who have more fully experienced the long-term impact of these beliefs.

The basic plot structure of Williams’ novel involves Lexi Jordan, a troubled young girl, and her brief friendship with a group of skinheads. While participating in minor acts of vandalism, she meets an elderly woman who was once in the League of German Girls (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*). The interactions she has with Ursula help her realize some of the problems with her newfound friends. Eventually, Lexi turns away from the skinhead group as their actions escalate from vandalism to violence. The book begins as Lexi is frustrated with her broken home

---

7 These characters deserve close attention as well; however, since they are secondary to the neo-Nazi characters in the book I do not cover them in great detail here.
and neglectful mother and has found a new “family” instead—a group of local skinheads who adopt her as a new member of their group and whom Lexi comes to regard as family. Lexi implicitly trusts the Nazi skinheads who she has found herself involved with. However, the book ultimately illustrates how violence fractures the group and Nazi ideologies are ultimately not to be tolerated. Lexi’s embrace of her newfound family comes from an insistent desire for friendship and attention. She truly believes the group cares about her and denies that they are in any way “hard and ruthless” (88). Her devotion to the group has led her to shave her head and adopt the classic accompaniments of a skinhead: heavy boots, black clothes, and pegged jeans. By getting a tattoo of a swastika on the side of her shaved head Lexi has gone above and beyond the normal skinhead trappings. Lexi refers to it as her “spider” and considers it to be a “good luck charm” because “it keeps [her] safe” (10). While Lexi sees it as “just a pattern,” it is definitely one that her new friends appreciate greatly, as “Mick and the others had praised her and said that getting it done showed her loyalty, and they had treated her like she was their sister, like family” (21). For Lexi, the swastika becomes a symbol for belonging, rather than a symbol of fear or hatred.8 She embraces it without recognizing the symbolic nature of the mark, seeing only the sense of belonging and praise that it gets her from her newfound friends.

In fact, Lexi’s knowledge regarding the facts and beliefs of the neo-Nazi movement are muddled at best. She refers to herself as a member of the “Aran race [sic]” which is “the white race. The strongest race. We’re going to rule the world” (17). Yet when pressed as to why the

---

8 For another text that covers the connections between belonging, symbols, and fascism see Todd Strasser’s *The Wave*. Strasser’s novel covers a high school history experiment illustrating to students how fascism emerges and eventually leads to violence. The book was also made into an early-1980s *Afterschool Special* and a 2008 film in Germany.
white race is the strongest and has the potential to rule the world, her response is a weak: “We’re smarter … and stuff like that” (18). Lexi’s values have almost no basis in evidence or belief, as she has no idea why she is supposed to dislike the “bla—niggers and—spicks and kikes and people like that” (18). In fact, no-one in her gang seems to know much about the basis for their actions. When she asks Mick, the leader of the group, why “White is might! White is right!” he responds angrily with “Because it is!” (22). Her naïveté as to the basis of her actions potentially allows readers to be sympathetic towards her, as Williams heavily employs Lexi’s poor home life as a blanket explanation for her behavior. *The Spider’s Web* creates a portrait of neo-Nazism as a behavior wildly divorced from any fact, with a bunch of inexperienced children acting out against their broken homes. Their values are based strictly around the desire to rebel, and therefore are easier for Lexi to turn her back on once things go too far. Her eventual rejection of the group is spurred on by the character Devon, a member of the group who Lexi discovers has a long-absent African American father. Upon this discovery, Lexi’s only reaction is to say, “I don’t care that you’re part black. No one would really care” (95). She assumes the family dynamic that holds the band of skinheads together is stronger than the underlying ideology that they all purportedly follow.

If their friendship was stronger than their neo-Nazi ideals, then the book would seem to support the notion that hatred spawned by white supremacy is merely another set of values worth living by. Of course, this is not the case, as Mick, Serge, and the rest of the gang attempt to kill Devon when they discover his family background. When Lexi finds Devon in the woods, she finally has an epiphany about her friends:

> Tears spilled onto her cheeks, and she brushed them away. How could they have hurt their friend? Why? So what if he was part black? Did it really matter?
The knot in her stomach told her that yes, it did really matter. To them. Being a Nazi skinhead wasn’t just a place to go to hang out with friends. They weren’t a big happy family with relatives all over the country, all over the world. It wasn’t a game to them. (120)

The attack on Devon finally helps Lexi to realize that the friendship she so desired is based on shared values that she ultimately does not have. The larger message reminds readers that what Lexi ultimately values is friendship, a concept that would generally promote well-being in a variety of ways. When she faces the reality of her friends’ actions (taunting the blind, threatening old women, beating up Devon, and burning down a Synagogue), she is forced to recognize that their actions really only promote human misery. In this way, the text clearly illustrates how Lexi’s white supremacist values are not worth living by. The book ends with one of the gang’s leaders blinded by the fire he started in the Synagogue and a tearful reunion between Lexi, her mother, and her younger sister Shelby.9 Williams asks readers to reflect on the events of the novel as Lexi questions the idea she overhears: “Blame the parents. Kids are kids, and they don’t know what they’re doing” (134). However, Lexi wonders about the veracity of this statement, “Did they know what they were doing? Serge did. And Mick. What about Karen and Billy and Devon? And what about herself and Shelby? What did they really know about what they were doing? Who was to blame?” (134). While these are somewhat complex questions with which to end the narrative, the text is incredibly straightforward and didactic,

---

9 The book highlights how ironic it is that Serge ends up blinded after the arson attempt. Earlier in the text he had encouraged the gang to harass a blind kid in the neighborhood, brushing aside Lexi’s logical concern that “Maybe he wasn’t born blind. Maybe he got it from an accident or something” (70). Serge’s violence has left him outside the circle of his own ideals, a now “impure” person (70).
including a tidy resolution. Lexi has learned her lesson, and the only ones permanently harmed are the blinded Serge and another arsonist who may not survive her smoke-inhalation injuries. The blame in the situation is ultimately placed in the hands of the kids who committed the white supremacist acts, and taken their rebellion too far. The blame can also be assigned to those who have violent desires based on fabricated beliefs. This final resolution in the novel underscores that while broken homes may garner the compassion of readers, if characters maintain their focus on promoting human misery they will be punished. Lexi’s story shows how simplistic misunderstandings of the “Other” ultimately lead to poor choices. By engaging with Lexi’s character, readers may see the dangers in oversimplifying identity itself. This, in turn, asks readers to learn how to engage with and appreciate difference, rather than misname, ignore, or merely tolerate it.

Han Nolan’s *If I Should Die Before I Wake* provides a more complex portrait of the internal processes of a young neo-Nazi. The main character, Hilary, is in a coma throughout the book, meaning all of the neo-Nazi representations are directly filtered through Hilary’s thoughts. She is involved with a local group of skinheads, whom she sought out because of her loneliness and anger. These emotions are her response to her father’s accidental death and mother’s alternating neglect and religious outbursts.10 Hilary’s coma has been caused by a motorcycle accident involving her neo-Nazi boyfriend, Brad. While Brad comes away unscathed, Hilary is trapped in a liminal space between life and death throughout the story. She views this development as troubling in part because she recognizes she is being treated in a Jewish hospital. Hilary finds this ironic: “What a joke on me, huh? Having a motor cycle accident in some Hebe

10 Hilary actually equates her mother’s relationship with religion as similar to her relationship with the skinheads: “Mother found religion and I found Brad. We’re both looking for something to fill us up” (55).
town and coming here to the freakin’ Jew Hospital” (2). Hilary’s character early in the book is defined by this passage. She is angry, both at herself and the external world, and is comfortable expressing that anger in anti-Semitic slurs. During this time, a vision of an old, silent Jewish woman comes to her, and through seemingly supernatural abilities causes Hilary to go back in time by fifty years to inhabit the body of a young Polish Jew named Chana. When Hilary inhabits Chana’s body, she experiences the worst possible misery of Nazi Era Europe, including deportation, ghettos, and concentration camps. However, when Hilary is trapped in her own immobile body, she continually expresses vitriolic anti-Semitism and idolizes her white supremacist friends.

Much like Lexi in The Spider’s Web, Hilary comes from a broken family with an often intoxicated single mother as the only family support structure. Hilary holds a great degree of hatred for her mother who left her “all alone for three freakin’ days when [she] was only five years old” (22). Her mother experienced some sort of breakdown after Hilary’s father was killed in an accident. Hilary, in accordance with her beliefs, blames her father’s Jewish boss for his death. She views him as a “greedy Jew boss” who is probably “living in some fancy mansion, bought with his blood money” (92). Like Lexi, readers are encouraged to be somewhat forgiving of her anti-Semitic desires because of her broken home. However, the book gives the overall impression that no matter who caused her father’s work accident, her subsequent actions are not worth living by. Initially, her acts are limited to verbally attacking the vision of the older woman who appears during her coma and telling stories of how she interacts with her newfound family.

---

11 Chana’s story in Nolan’s book is actually a quite accurate representation of the events of the Holocaust for Polish Jews. Again, because I am focused on Neo-Nazi characters here I will not delve too deeply into this half of the narrative.
of neo-Nazis. After relaying her fascination with Brad and the rest of his white supremacist friends, she addresses the silent woman: “Only a Jew would stand here like a dummy and listen to someone insult them and then look at the person like she’s the one to be pitied. Only a Jew would do that. Only a dumb Jew” (9). Hilary’s interaction here with her elderly Jewish visitor is immediately followed by her first experience of living in Chana’s body. The narrative encourages the interpretation that her Jewish friend pities Hilary and is attempting to use the experience of the greatest possible misery to challenge Hilary’s hatred.

Because the books command complex emotional reactions, a close look at the concept of compassion is essential for understanding these two stories. Regardless of the situation, the main characters may provoke compassionate responses in readers. The interaction between Hilary and the old woman calls attention to an interesting facet of both The Spider’s Web and If I Should Die Before I Wake: the ways in which compassion is required for both the victims of anti-Semitism and the lost girls trying to recover from broken homes. In both of these cases, as Lauren Berlant suggests, compassion “is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is over there” (4). In Nolan’s narrative, Hilary is both defined as “over there” by her appearance as a shaved-headed neo-Nazi and as a girl trapped in a coma. However, Berlant notes the compassionate person also has “a resource that would alleviate someone else’s suffering,” often the resources of power and privilege that could be used to create political and social conditions that promote human well-being (4). It is also important to recognize that compassion should require individuals to take steps that promote action, rather than merely assuming an attitude of tolerance. Compassion must be more than a sense of moral superiority directed at the suffering of others as “the obligation to recognize and alleviate suffering is more than a demand on consciousness—more than a demand to feel right […] then it is crucial to appreciate the multitude of conventions
around the relation of feeling to practice where compassion is concerned” (Berlant 4, italics in original). Berlant’s connection between feeling and practice is similar to the cosmopolitan ideas of challenging the fact/value separation. Merely responding to oppression by “feeling right” in terms of the sympathetic responses evoked by a sense of compassion ultimately does nothing to challenge systems that allocate the social and political conditions for well-being differently. Instead of “feeling right” in regard to Hilary’s situation, readers can and should recognize this situation as warranting action and interfering with hateful moral values. Actions, in both The Spider’s Web and If I Should Die Before I Wake, are attached to the values of the characters. These values need to be recognized as not worth living by and possible to change. This can happen even while perhaps having compassionate responses to the broken homes of the main characters.

In terms of If I Should Die Before I Wake, the actions of Hilary’s friends quickly escalate from vandalism and insults to actual violence. She and her group of neo-Nazi friends, particularly her boyfriend Brad, have intensified their white supremacist behavior and kidnapped one of the area’s Jewish adolescents:

[Vandalizing a Jewish graveyard is] nothing compared to what Brad and Billy H. and Chucky B. did last night or yesterday or whenever the hell this accident happened. Hey, picture it. They dress up like Bozo the Clown, all three of them, and kidnap this Jew boy. […] So, they stuffed him in one of the big orange lockers they got in the boys’ locker room at school. He’s pint-sized anyway, just like all Jews. Tiny little monkeys, what they are. Tiny little crooks. […] Even if we are on spring break, Brad said, he was screaming loud enough to wake the dead. (3-5)
The group has trapped Simon in the school for at least a week with no food or water and most likely no access to anyone who will hear him call for help. It is Hilary’s concern for Simon throughout the book that marks her gradual shift away from promoting human misery to expressing concern for well-being. Her hesitance is evident even in this first passage, where she notes that “even if we are on spring break” there should be a way out for Simon (5). She wonders repeatedly about Simon’s status: “Do they leave the heat on over vacation? […] How long can a person live without food? […] Get Simon out, Brad. Okay? I never expected it to go this far. I never wanted it to go this far” (28, 93, 119). Hilary’s hatred is mediated by her experiences as a Holocaust-era Jewish girl, and she gradually becomes more and more concerned for Simon’s well-being.

After Hilary lives Chana’s life during the Holocaust, including the humiliations the Germans forced the Jews to face, the forced deportations and endless starvation and illness of the ghettos, and the horrors of living in a concentration camp, she is forced to face her former values armed with a new set of facts. Hilary, seeing the world through Chana’s eyes, has faced the worst possible misery, as defined by Sam Harris in the *Moral Landscape*. However, having faced that historical experience, Hilary is unwilling to maintain the values that promote suffering for others. She instead has to look towards a life where human well-being outweighs human suffering, and embracing this value not only requires a change of mind, but also a course of action. Hilary could have merely learned to tolerate the “Other” during her time in Chana’s head. However, as she begins to come out of her coma the silent older woman finally speaks. Hilary realizes that the “dumb Jew” she has been insulting throughout the book is the much older version of the same Chana whose life Hilary lived alongside during the Holocaust. The elderly
Chana encourages Hilary to “use what you know to change things. You can change the world, Hilary” (281). Although Hilary says, “I can change me, but nothing else,” Chana disagrees:

“You were an Aryan Warrior, a neo-Nazi. People will listen. Students will listen. Your past will be your gift.”

“I’m afraid. I don’t think I can do what you ask of me. I can’t go back.”

“You have to. You are part of the chain, Hilary. We are connected now. In hearing me, in understanding me, you have given my past new meaning. It will change the meaning of your past as well, and someday your life as an angry child who has turned her hate to love will change still another life. You’re part of the chain, one you cannot break.” (282)

Hilary’s first action after regaining consciousness is to tell her mother where to find the Jewish boy, Simon, that Brad and the others had locked in the school. Hilary is forced, through her rather supernatural experience of the Holocaust, to not only question her values but to take action in a way that promotes Simon’s well-being. While Hilary has certainly worked at changing herself, she also has changed Simon’s life, and perhaps saved an innocent life. Her life as an “angry child” is forgiven as she sees the neo-Nazi values as desires that only promote human misery and are therefore not worth embracing any longer. The compassion that readers are encouraged to feel in both The Spider’s Web and If I Should Die Before I Wake, however, is conspicuously absent in Stephen King’s “Apt Pupil.” King’s novella is perhaps not so much a book about a neo-Nazi character, but a story of how a fascination with human misery can be truly horrific. King’s protagonist has values and actions that are perfectly aligned. However, King’s prose refuses to let readers embrace those values as those worth living by. “Apt Pupil” is,
undoubtedly, a horror novella. The experience of reading it can ask readers to evaluate how power and privilege can be misused in the name of hatred and violence.

All-American Hatred in “Apt Pupil”

Both The Spider’s Web and If I Should Die Before I Wake feature individuals who have troubling home lives that push them to seek acceptance in the form of white power groups. Their behaviors are therefore actions that readers can view with a greater or lesser degree of compassion. Both Lexi and Hilary are suffering in their own ways, encouraging compassionate and forgiving responses to their hatred, largely because the girls grow and change by the end of the books. Additionally, both girls clearly learn that their values are wrong and they make strides towards mending their families and no longer participating in violent anti-Semitic or racist activities. In Stephen King’s novella “Apt Pupil,” the main character, Todd Bowden, is an entirely different neo-Nazi character. King’s books in general straddle the line between adolescent literature and adult literature, and they are overall incredibly popular. In his introduction to Stephen King, Harold Bloom comments on King’s books as a phenomenon for young readers: “Hundreds of thousands of American school children, who will read nothing else that isn’t assigned, devour King regularly. They turn to King as their parents resort to Danielle Steele and Tom Clancy” (2). His books are often consumed by young adults and very often feature characters in the liminal period of adolescence; however they commonly deal with

---

12 The ways sympathy is gendered through the girls in these books in opposition to revulsion for the boy, Todd, is worth commenting on as well. The girls’ fascination with hatred and violence has an external cause that deserves our pity whereas hatred is inherent in Todd’s character.

13 Bloom is clearly not a fan of this development, noting: “the triumph of the genial King is a large emblem of the failures of American education” (2).
various horrors, both real and imaginary. “Apt Pupil” is actually somewhat of a rarity in King’s work, as all of the fear and revulsion comes strictly from non-supernatural human motives, rather than monsters, ghosts, aliens, demons, animals, or machines. The book does deal in interesting ways with the notion of power and privilege. It does so particularly in terms of how the main character deals with his position within what bell hooks calls the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” of American culture (4). What Todd illustrates is how “growth in [adolescent literature] is inevitably represented as being linked to what the adolescent has learned about power” (Trites x). As the protagonist of “Apt Pupil,” Todd learns exactly how to use the power of secrets and his outward appearance to disguise his violent desires.

In many ways Todd Bowden bridges the two types of representations I have defined in this chapter: the reformed neo-Nazi and the characters harmed by white supremacists. Todd is described in the first sentence of the story as someone who “looked like the total ‘all-American kid,’” one who at thirteen was “five-feet-eight and a healthy one hundred and forty pounds, hair the color of ripe corn, blue eyes, white even teeth, lightly tanned skin marred by not even the first shadow of adolescent acne” (109). Todd, while defined as the perfect all-American kid, also obviously meets the guidelines for the Aryan ideal. The basic plot for the novella revolves around Todd tracking down a former Nazi who is living in hiding in their suburban California neighborhood. The two develop a relationship, initially based on Todd’s blackmail of Karl Dussander as he threatens to turn him over to the authorities. Todd then demands that Dussander spend literally days, weeks, and years describing his experiences as a Nazi killer, the stuff left

---

14 Examples of each would be Salem’s Lot, Bag of Bones and The Shining, IT, Needful Things, Cujo, and Christine. Other books that deal with strictly human psychology are much rarer, although Misery and Rose Madder are examples.
out of books that’s “real gooshy” (120). Later their relationship devolves into something more akin to mutually assured destruction, as neither can escape the situation without possible arrest and having to admit their actions publicly. Both Todd and Dussander indulge their sadistic or sociopathic tendencies in the course of the relationship. They separately murder homeless men, and the book ends with Todd shooting indiscriminately from a highway overpass, striving to kill as many people as possible in the five hours before the police can reach him (King 286).

King’s narration initially describes Todd as the all-American/Aryan ideal which, in turn, sets up some of the facets of his character. Todd definitely fits the ideal of the mythical norm that Audre Lorde describes: he is white, heterosexual, Christian, thin, financially secure, and good looking (707). He possesses the power and privilege that so many of the other characters in this study do not. Therefore, the choices Todd makes illustrate the ways in which power and privilege can be abused in order to promote human misery. After he encounters magazines with images of concentration camp victims, Todd becomes absolutely fascinated with them. He feels as though he has found what his teacher referred to on career day as “YOUR GREAT INTEREST” (117). The magazines cause him to “cope with the idea that they had really done those things, that somebody had really done those things, and that somebody had let them do those things” which makes “his head begin to ache with a mixture of revulsion and excitement” (118, emphasis in original). Todd knows this sense of excitement is not limited to him alone, particularly when he spots advertisements for “German knives and belts and helmets” and “German flags emblazoned with swastikas and Nazi Lugers and a game called Panzer Attack” (119). What Todd recognizes is both a troubling current of anti-Semitism in these old magazines,
as well as hints at how the Holocaust gets fetishized in American culture.\(^\text{15}\) Todd embarks on an investigation of the Holocaust, ostensibly for a school project where he was certain to “write that stuff a certain way […] like [the historians who wrote his research materials] got puking sick over what they were writing about” (121). Even at thirteen, Todd knows not to reveal his fascination with the facts of the Holocaust because of the attraction to the violence of the imagery he feels. Todd has learned to manipulate the systems which grant him unwarranted power and privilege such as his family life, school performance, and relationships with peers and women. He maintains his place as “golden boy” throughout the novella, saying all the right things, forging grades to appease his parents, lying to school counselors, and dating women his parents will approve of. Underneath this exterior he continually pressures Dussander for more Holocaust information, and eventually acts on his violent desires. He is absolutely willing to entertain his violent desires in secret, aided by his blackmail of Dussander.

Unlike many white supremacist or skinhead groups that practice revisionist history and Holocaust denial, Todd is uninterested in denying any of the events of the Holocaust. What Todd would like instead is to relive every experience of the German Bogeyman. This is a sharp contrast to how Hilary literally relives the experience of the Jewish victim in If I Should Die Before I Wake. The books’ messages about the dangers of suffering and the importance of human well-being remain quite similar. Yet these two characters’ experiences lead to vastly different ends for each of them. Todd is so fascinated with the idea of the Bogeyman figure that he eventually purchases a fake uniform and demands that Dussander dress up for him. While Dussander feels “a little touched in spite of himself” to be given a Christmas present from Todd,

\(^{15}\) For more on this topic see Flanzenbaum, Hilene. The Americanization of the Holocaust. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999.
his emotions quickly turn to horror once he discovers what is in the box: “It was a uniform. An SS uniform. Complete with jackboots” (139). At first, Dussander claims “I’ll die before I put it on,” but Todd’s blackmail power is too strong and he forces Dussander further into the ongoing violent fantasy world Todd is creating (139). Seeing the Bogeyman figure that even the ailing Dussander cuts in his uniform is enough to give Todd pause, if only briefly:

He didn’t look ludicrous in the least. He looked frightening. For the first time the corpses in the ditches and the crematoriums seemed to take on their own reality for Todd. The photographs of the tangled arms and legs and torsos, fishbelly white in the cold spring rains of Germany, were not something staged like a scene in a horror film […] but simply a real fact, stupendous and inexplicable and evil. (142)

While Todd is briefly frightened by the sight of Dussander in his full Bogeyman costume, his underlying fascination with Nazi atrocities makes him keep returning to speak to Dussander about his role in the concentration camps. The ways in which Todd’s fascination with death and human misery affect his overall worldview work just as much to underscore the values not worth living by as Hilary’s experiences while in her coma.

Todd’s internal stability slowly unravels during the course of the book, even as his outward persona continues to be wildly successful. Some of his success is only an appearance, as he doctors his report cards and lies to his guidance counselor about his family issues in order to stay out of trouble regarding his school performance. Much of his success comes from knowing what “normal” is and being absolutely fanatical about presenting a normal appearance to everyone except Dussander. Even while Todd wins awards like the “American Legion Patriotic Essay Contest” and “Athlete of the Year,” and works his way towards being valedictorian or salutatorian, he is going on “hunting expeditions” for derelicts, stabbing and
bludgeoning four his junior year alone (209-210). His attacks on the homeless men throughout his idyllic southern California region are echoed by Dussander’s similar hunting habits. Todd’s fascination with the violence and sadism of the concentration camps has developed into his second life as a serial killer, and his initial attacks on the homeless men draw to light another often unrecognized and easily dehumanized population. Both Todd and Dussander murder local winos because they assume they are in some way Lebensunwertes Leben, or lives unworthy of living. They both take for granted that no one will care about the disappearing population of the homeless in their area, and that is largely true. One journalist runs an article titled “Is Someone Stalking Santo Donato’s Down-and-Out?” but Todd notes that after the killings “none of his stewbums had ever gotten beyond page three” (235). The lack of media attention is a troubling development as the overall arc of the narrative places the murder of the homeless men as somewhere in the middle of Todd’s overall breakdown. While his ongoing murder of the vagrant population is horrific, King points to Todd’s murder of the “normal” people who surround him as the ultimate degeneration of his character.

Beyond his actions attacking the homeless, he begins to be unable to separate his daily, normal life from his desires to kill. He longs to purposefully crash the family Porsche “cutting a swath of destruction through the morning commuters” (249). His girlfriend only provokes the response that “kissing her lips was like kissing warm but uncooked liver” which eventually leads to his desires to “strangle her on the spot” (251, 253). He begins obsessively thinking of his .30-.30 and the variety of ways he could use it to get out of a multitude of situations (274-275). The eventual result of Todd’s years-long fascination with Dussander’s stories of the Holocaust is to murder first his high-school guidance counselor and later as many strangers on the freeway as he can kill before the police stop him (286). It is important to note that when considering
unrecognized populations, the early deaths that Todd and Dussander cause are seen as minor. The ultimate horror is when Todd turns his rage on others like himself, rather than the deaths of the homeless that he hunted all throughout high school. King’s narrative plays on the worst of the Bogeyman stereotypes in order to give readers a glimpse of the ways that the values Todd has readily embraced can absolutely be viewed as not worth living by. The revulsion that Todd’s character provokes is in part because his values are so little based on any sort of explanation at all and are therefore a cautionary tale. The text implies that if this could happen to Todd, it could happen to anyone. At least Lexi and Hilary had the excuse of broken homes and the redemption of seeing the error in their ways. Todd, on the other hand, has no viable set of reasons or logic behind his embrace of Dussander and his hatred. And yet, Todd’s story perfectly illustrates a series of values not worth living by because Todd uses his sadism and hatred to promote the worst possible suffering. He does this while slowly descending into what King explores as the most horrific of his actions: the disdain and lack of concern for the well-being of even those like himself. The random violence that results from Todd’s complete mental breakdown is one example of how innocent bystanders can be impacted by the violence perpetuated by characters fascinated with Nazi ideology. “Apt Pupil” illustrates how Todd’s values are clearly to be despised because it is so easy for him to align his thoughts with Dussander’s and lose all concern for human well-being. However, there are several other stories that offer accounts of suffering at the hands of white supremacists that create sympathy for the innocent victims, rather than either compassion or revulsion towards the perpetrators.

Responses to Neo-Nazi Violence

Both Carol Matas’ *The Freak* and Mats Wahl’s *The Invisible* deal with characters impacted by neo-Nazi violence. *The Freak* uses a plot device similar to the one that initiates the
events of “Apt Pupil.” Jade and her family discover there is a war criminal living in their suburban Winnipeg neighborhood. Unlike Todd’s reaction, however, Jade’s Jewish and Indian family would like to see him extradited for “the murder of an entire town of Jews during the war” (51). Her aunt’s partner Sahjit is a lawyer currently working with the B’nai Brith to deport him, and this job has brought Sahjit to the attention of local hate groups. Jade, the “freak” of the story’s title, has recently recovered from a case of meningitis that nearly killed her. While Jade is happy to be back in the land of the living, she has come back with psychic powers that often lead to her intervention in anti-Semitic attacks. Jade gets a distinct sense of forthcoming dangers to her friends and family’s well-being, which in turn helps illustrate how terrifying neo-Nazi violence can be not only to those who directly experience it, but also for the larger community. No one ever directly attacks Jade, but the anti-Semitic threats and violence against her family show how hatred of this sort becomes a form of terrorism for those involved. This is, in part, because the divide between believing what you are somehow will not impact what you do. Looking at the ways in which white power literature functions to terrorize characters such as Jade and her family can help encourage an understanding of how even those actions that ostensibly are separate from one’s job are signs that values have impact—and no-one’s best interest is served by hate speech.

After Jade’s newfound crush is beaten up on the way home from a poetry reading, rashes of hate-speech leaflets begin appearing at her high school. The first follows the common threat of Holocaust denial:

_The Jewish Conspiracy is not over._

---

16 A number of texts in this study deal with a variant of inherited Jewish mysticism. Nolan’s text and Matas’ text both involve the psychic abilities transmitted through Jewish families.
Who really caused WWII?

Hitler was a great Leader!

Did the Holocaust really happen?

No. It is,

Propaganda from the Jews to make Hitler look bad.

Jews who kill little Christian babies and bake them into their bread. (64)

This troubling flier incorporates both classic anti-Semitic claims about Jews stealing Christian babies and eating them as well as Holocaust denial and Hitler worship. The school, to its credit, responds by declaring Holocaust awareness week and gets students to read a variety of Holocaust literature, including The Diary of Anne Frank. Jade reacts by feeling “really sick inside” and pays close attention to her peers, “I feel all these pitying looks all day. There are quite a few Jewish kids at Kelvin, but we certainly aren’t the majority. I can feel that everyone feels sorry for us, and kind of embarrassed. Unless they agree with it. I get some of that, too. A kind of gloating” (67). Jade unpacks the various reactions of her peers with the help of her newfound psychic abilities. The embarrassment and pity that she senses in others point back to problems in tolerating difference rather than engaging with it. Students react with pity and embarrassment because the anti-Semitic fliers have called attention to difference in a way that they are not comfortable with. They react less with anger and more with bewilderment due in part to the problems with tolerance discourse. Teaching tolerance, coupled with cultural relativism, results in the inability for many of the students to act against the anti-Semitism in any sustained manner. Rather, they react by reinforcing the most problematic aspects of tolerance and compassion: they feel right, as Berlant says, but they only are able to go that far (4). Since Jade can literally sense their feelings, she knows that largely her fellow students are “feeling right.” For the most part,
the bulk of the school feels sympathy for all the Jewish kids faced with the accusation that they will “kill little Christian babies and bake them into bread,” yet they have no idea what else to do besides feel right (64).

The most important aspect of *The Freak* is in the actions of the larger community. Instead of tolerating the white supremacists in their community, town members join together to interfere with neo-Nazi behavior. The dispersal of hate mail in the book continues, the next time arriving at students’ homes. Again, the letters involve classic claims of Jewish barbarism: “*Jews kill little babies so they can drink their blood on the Sabbath. For centuries this practice has been going on unchallenged but it is time for civilized people everywhere to put a stop to it*” (93). However, violence in *The Freak* extends beyond the threatening letters sent to members of one high school. Sahjit’s son and Jade’s crush, Jon, is beaten up by “skinhead types” (59). Then Jade begins having premonitions that Sahjit is in danger, eventually saving him from a car-bombing (78). It appears that the Nazi war criminal has been attracting followers who are willing to defend him against deportation by murdering those against him. Like the characters of Lexi and Hilary, the Nazi war criminal attracts troubled youth like Roger, whom Jade knows comes from a broken home and has moved in with an uncle that is a “bad influence” on him (83). Unlike Lexi and Hilary’s stories, however, the violence in *The Freak* is better directed and more sophisticated. It all culminates in an attack on Jade’s synagogue on Yom Kippur, an incident she has been having nightmares about for months. Because of those dreams, Jade is able to spot the bomb that has been brought to the synagogue and dispose of it in the river before it has a chance to explode in range of anyone. She is particularly horrified by the way the attack happened because “it wasn’t enough for them to leave the bomb in the fridge so it would go off there. After all, with an empty kitchen maybe no one would die. They brought it to a room full of
children. Children! Every time I think about it I feel sick” (156). Jade saves the day, and is fortunately backed up by a law enforcement system that tracks down the source of the hate mail and the bombings. While the students’ response is lacking, Matas creates a portrait of a larger community of teachers, parents, and law enforcement willing to stand up against the neo-Nazi menace in their community.

Mats Wahl’s *The Invisible* shows how a refusal to deter behaviors that promote human misery can lead to terrible results. As the characters value profit and the image of “normalcy” above all else, the book illustrates how human misery and violence are supported by a larger community. Instead of a cooperative system that works to solve the anti-Semitic attacks that Jade experiences in *The Freak*, the ways neo-Nazism is dealt with by those with power and privilege in *The Invisible* is much more troubling. The title’s namesake, Hilmer Eriksson, awakes one morning to find that no one can see him. He tries to discover what happened to make him invisible and follows Harald Fors, the detective assigned to his missing person’s case. The investigation delves into the troubling neo-Nazi presence in their small Swedish town. It also demonstrates the frustrating reticence for anyone to cooperate with Fors, as locals fear the town’s image being tarnished by accusations of neo-Nazism. Fors eventually tracks down the visible Hilmer who has ultimately been beaten to death for standing up for the rights of the immigrant Muslim population. Wahl hints at the terrible things that have happened to Hilmer throughout, such as when he finds himself “upset that he had such a hard time breathing. Something was bubbling in his throat. *Blood*” (57). Later, the author poses the question of what one can know “about the person who lies bleeding, whose mouth is stuffed with rotting, wet

---

17 *The Invisible* was originally published in Sweden in 2000, and produced as a Swedish film in 2002. It was translated to English in 2007 and shortly after that made into a Hollywood adaptation.
leaves” (84). The implication that Hilmer is lying somewhere bleeding and choked with rotten leaves encourages readers to feel frustrated at the slow pace of the investigation, as it is continually hampered by those only looking out for their own best interests. Ultimately, those with power and privilege in Vallen prove the ways their values distance themselves from concerns of human well-being.

It is the neo-Nazi youth that are causing the trouble in Vallen, a problem that has been going on for some time, leading to the murder of Hilmer. The group targeted by the Swedish supremacists is the immigrant Muslim population. Marked as “Other” by their language, skin tone, and religion, they are easy targets for the neo-Nazi youth and the distain of the Swedish citizens. Repeatedly, they are referred to in terms of their failings. Mahmud, one of Hilmer’s fellow students is described by the soccer coach as speaking horrible Swedish, “even though he’s lived in this country for an eternity. In a few years he’ll be unemployed. Then the rest of us will have to support him” (25). Thoughts like these on the mind of average townspeople do nothing to discourage attacks on the immigrant areas of town, including cross burning and regular threats to students like Mahmud (37). Some of the town’s youth have picked up on these attitudes and taken them further, dressing in traditional neo-Nazi boots and threatening black, and referring to them as “migrant scum” (3). The sense of hatred for anyone different is palpable throughout the town, even though many of the immigrants are there seeking asylum, running from one persecution to another. The neo-Nazis in Hilmer’s school have been painting swastikas and participating in minor acts of violence and vandalism for a while, but it is when Hilmer steps in to speak up on behalf of the immigrants that they become incensed. When three of the most notoriously violent kids in town find Hilmer alone they attack him, screaming about how “he was a traitor and he sided with the immigrants and that he shouldn’t give a damn about them”
and they want to know “why the hell Hilmer was defending the darkies.” This is followed immediately by the attack that kills Hilmer: “Both Anneli and Bulterman kicked him. They yelled the whole time that he was a traitor” (164-165). Ultimately, the skinheads’ anger is taken out on Hilmer, one of the few people in the town who would stand up for the immigrant population. In Vallen, hatred and fear of the migrant population is normalized to such an extent that kids like Anneli and Bulterman are shocked and angered to the point of murder when someone stands in opposition to their behavior. Their actions are only underscored by the town’s larger reticence to do anything about the racism in their community.

The local population turns away from concerns about human well-being in favor of selfish concerns about their own individual success. In contrast to the reactions of authority figures in *The Freak* when neo-Nazi literature shows up in the school, officials in *The Invisible* refuse to even acknowledge that the skinheads, the swastikas, or the threats add up to anything other than kid stuff, as the principal claims, “We don’t have any neo-Nazis here. We have some troublemakers who do what they can to scare adults. No one gets anywhere by calling them neo-Nazis. […] If I start labeling kids as neo-Nazis based on a few tussles they’ve had with other students, things will go to hell in a hurry” (67). There is no real indication of what the principal means by things going to hell, as he gets distracted and his conversation with Detective Fors ends. However, local councilman Berg makes it a bit clearer:

“This thing with the swastikas is sensitive business,” said Berg.

“What do you mean?”

“It can be misunderstood.”

[…]}
Berg leaned towards Fors again and drove his hands into his jacket pockets. “You don’t think Fritz and Hans from Berlin will want to come here and fish with their kids if the place gets known as a hangout for Nordic Nazis, do you?”

“Is that what this is?”

Berg shook his head. “Of course not. See you.” (50)

Berg has been counting on German tourist revenue to carry the town through difficult economic times, and is terrified that any bad press will discourage tourism. He actually goes so far as to tell Fors “I think it would be best if you didn’t find [Hilmer]” (94). It is only when Fors reminds Berg, “what will happen if it gets out that a council chairman hindered the investigation of a child’s disappearance—a disappearance that could very well be criminal?” that he finally caves and gives the detective key information that leads to the arrest of Anneli and Bulterman (94).

Berg and the Vallen elders hold values that maintain their power and privilege, they are never concerned for the well-being of others, whether they are kids like Hilmer or the people attempting to take asylum in Sweden.

Fors reflects on the ways in which the townspeople’s attitude is in some ways less forgivable than the actual actions of the young adults involved. Many of the neo-Nazis, again, come from broken homes and unhappy backgrounds. When Fors meets with the mother of Marcus, one of the ringleaders of the Vallen skinheads, he finds himself contemplating his feet, thinking, “You tiptoe respectfully at the victim’s home but not around the possible culprit’s mother. Do you think one of these two mothers is less a victim than the other?” (87). Both women have “lost” sons—one to violent death and one to committing violent acts. This draws attention to the wide affects of spreading human misery and ignoring values and actions that express only hatred and violence. Wahl’s book makes it clear that there is something
fundamentally broken in the ways that values are expressed in Vallen, and that has trickled down to Marcus, Anneli, and others in ways that tear families apart and ultimately kill Hilmer. There is no attempt on the part of school officials or town leaders to quell or discourage the activities of the neo-Nazi kids in town. Vandalism is concealed, threats and bullying overlooked as minor troublemaking, and public perceptions of the town’s non-white population are nearly always discriminatory. Hilmer’s death is caused by years of looking the other way and the community’s failure to intervene when hatred and violence are expressed. His death therefore illustrates the importance of having a larger culture that is willing and able to stand up to hate speech and oppose the promotion of human misery.

Conclusion

Books for young adults that feature neo-Nazi characters are potentially powerful sites for illustrating values not worth living by. In texts like The Spider’s Web and If I Should Die Before I Wake, the protagonists clearly learn that their participation in skinhead organizations often clashes with the very values they were hoping to find: friendship and love both evaporate in favor of hatred and violence. Lexi and Hilary, at the end of the novels, have learned valuable lessons about what is actually feels like to promote human misery over human well-being. “Apt Pupil,” on the other hand, is a cautionary tale of where an obsessive fascination with the ways that power and privilege are used to limit the well-being of others can lead. King’s ultimate message is a troubling one, as Todd is represented as the most horrific only when he goes after others like himself. Still, Todd shows readers how the fetishization of violence and Bogeymen of the Holocaust can poison one’s mind. Todd, the “all-American kid” secretly embraces violence as his primary value—his GREAT INTEREST. King’s book clearly expresses revulsion for these values in ways that cannot be explained away by modern relativism. Finally,
*The Freak* and *The Invisible* both illustrate the importance of community reaction to neo-Nazi behavior. Both books illustrate how values that promote human suffering can be dealt with in ways that either limit or exacerbate violence.

Harris asks readers in *The Moral Landscape* to consider how “In practice, relativism almost always amounts to the claim that we should be tolerant of moral difference because no moral truth can supercede any other” (45). Yet all of these books for young adults illustrate how there are moral truths that can supercede others. These moral truths must also involve intervention and challenges to hatred and violence, particularly when done in service of a set of values like the neo-Nazis discussed here. These books help readers not only engage with those that may be different than themselves, they also motivate responses that go beyond cultural relativism or tolerance. In showing that certain behaviors are, in fact, not to be tolerated these books can help promote an ethical foundation that demands action in the light of persecution.
CONCLUSION

And what'll you do now, my blue-eyed son?
And what'll you do now my darling young one?
I'm a-goin' back out 'fore the rain starts a-fallin'

... And I'll tell and think it and speak it and breathe it
And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it
—Bob Dylan, “A Hard Rain’s A Gonna Fall”

The Holocaust is not so much the end of ethics as it is the proof that ethics can be misused and even perverted into pseudo-ethics. Auschwitz shows the vulnerability of ethics—not only then but also now; not only in the Nazis hands but also in ours.—John K. Roth

Tolerance is a value that is widely embraced yet often not critically considered. Throughout various social systems, particularly educational institutions, the discourse of tolerance is deployed and encouraged as the appropriate response to anyone different than oneself. However, tolerance rarely requires the tolerant individual to take real action when faced with discriminatory or oppressive situations. More often than not, tolerance supports existing systems of power and privilege that maintain rigid classifications of difference in the first place. The heavy encouragement of tolerance and cultural relativism can then lead to tolerating the intolerable such as various anti-Semitic, racist, sexist, homophobic, and abelist groups. The counter to this overenthusiastic embrace of tolerance as a value is instead recognition, acknowledgement, and appreciation differences in others. For young adults this is particularly important, as they may have limited experiences of the world and those different from themselves. With its broad range of texts and specific focus on identity and persecution, adolescent Holocaust literature can be the perfect site for this sort of engagement. I believe that young adult Holocaust literature has the potential to encourage readers to recognize and accept
lives other than their own in ways that can lead to a more cosmopolitan worldview and, ideally, a broader understanding of what the “human” might be.

Throughout this project I have encouraged what I refer to as a transformative ethics. An ethical bearing of this sort takes into account difference in a sophisticated manner and does not turn a blind eye to how American social norms allocate power and privilege differently. Power and privilege are generally more available, still, to those who meet the qualifications of Lorde’s mythical norm, the “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” individual so easily recognized as human (704). A transformative ethics would challenge the primacy of these identity categories and work to destabilize the systems that reify normal/abnormal binaries through tolerance discourse. This is a powerful way to reconceptualize multicultural education. Instead of viewing multiculturalism as “the rainbow coalition where we would all be grouped together in our difference” educational institutions have the power to acknowledge that there may be more appropriate responses to the “Other” that will challenge systems of inequality rather than ignore them in favor of simplistic understandings such as those bell hooks criticizes here (31).

There is a much larger project to be done on the ways in which these ideas can be specifically deployed in the classroom, one that I hope will be pursued in terms of Holocaust education as well as other discussions on diversity and difference. However, I think there are some brief notes I can suggest for how to promote cosmopolitan engagement and transformative ethics in the classroom. First and foremost, there must be a consideration of how identity and culture are structured and explained in young adult literature. Books like *Escape from Warsaw* fail to ever acknowledge that the characters are different from the mythical norm, and create such a generalized picture of persecution that there is no consideration of how identity specifically
factored into the experience of orphaned Polish children during World War II. Second, educators must keep a close eye on how stereotypes are potentially being presented in the texts they are bringing into the classroom, and engage in open discussions on how those representations mask the complexities of identity. In teaching a text like *Farewell Sidonia*, for example, it would be essential to challenge the ways in which Hackl represents Sidonia’s character as both racially “Other” and naturally unable to learn like the “normal” children at her school.

Finally, there should be an acknowledgement of how identity is “forged in history and relations of power” and is never as simplistic as one all-consuming category (hooks 30). Polish Jews had different experiences than Danish Jews, largely due to the fact that the Poles were also viewed as racially inferior by the Nazis and therefore held under tighter control by German forces. Anne Frank’s experience in hiding is deeply impacted by not only her religion, but also by her gender and age, as she faces the frustration of growing up in circumstances where her opinions can be easily dismissed based on these two defining characteristics. Boiling any individual’s identity down to one trait and then tolerating that one particular category only encourages and solidifies normal/abnormal binaries. Multicultural education, in general, needs to focus on the idea of intersectionality—there is a matrix of domination revolving around the many and varied categories that deviate from the mythical norm.

I have chosen to organize this project in such a way that each chapter does focus on one particular identity category. Judith Butler argues that even within frameworks of recognition, like those I argue for here, the tendency is still to “efface complex cultural realities” in relation to identity categories (*FoW* 143). My conclusion, then, needs to draw attention to the interconnected nature of “complex cultural realities” (*FoW* 143). No individual is defined
strictly by one identity category. In order for multicultural education to move beyond this view, it is important to focus on how differences “must be understood not through the fixity of place or the romanticization of an essentialized notion of history and experience but through the tropes of indeterminacy, flows, and translations” (Giroux 208). I have tried to complicate the romanticization of Anne Frank as the Holocaust victim here, and encouraged the need to look at all the many and varied histories and experiences that made up the Holocaust for members of the communities targeted for elimination. It is also important to note that the persecutions leveled against these groups were often not about individual identity, but instead attacks on entire cultures. Texts like Friedrich, Emil and Karl, or And the Violins Stopped Playing are excellent sites for examining how genocidal persecution is a cultural attack leveled on individuals with complex identities.

I hope the structure also highlights the ways in which categorization and essentialization were the hallmarks of Nazi persecution. Individuals were targeted for social death and cultural annihilation before their physical death, based on the imaginary constructs of the “Other” that Semelin describes. The way that I have laid out discrete categories here is the way they were categorized by Nazi science and politics as well as the way they are all too often still labeled and judged in contemporary society. This line of thinking insistently claims the Jew is fundamentally different than the Aryan, Roma-Sinti irrevocably different from the Jew, and the homosexual Aryan man different from the good reproductive Volk idealized by Nazi policies. Because of their very categorization and identity, they were targeted for elimination. Yet there is no platonic ideal of a Jew, no fundamental Roma-Sinti, no gay man who is also not a German, or a Jew, or a pretzel baker, as the rabbi in Mara’s Stories reminds us.
In order to recognize the complex cultural realities that characters in young adult Holocaust literature face, it is central that the books fulfill two functions. First, they must be historically accurate. Virtually all scholars of children’s literature on the Holocaust agree with this fact. Without historical accuracy the events of the Holocaust themselves have the potential to be trivialized in dangerous ways. Some of the texts I have covered here ultimately fail at this first criterion. *Escape from Warsaw*, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, and *Anne Frank and Me* all have such significant historical missteps that they must be read only with a great deal of caution and considerable outside intervention. None of the three even contain acceptable paratextual material to help readers negotiate the disparities between historical events and the fiction these books present.

Second, young adult Holocaust literature must engage with the way that Nazi persecution explicitly attacked the values and mores of a particular group of individuals. The Holocaust was never just about murder. It was about cultural annihilation, and if texts for young adults efface the complexities of these cultures, then they are receiving an incredibly simplified version of the Holocaust itself. I am in agreement with Hamida Bosmajian on the fact that “no one book is likely to have made a young reader a life-long witness to the Shoah,” and also believe that no one book can give readers access to the complex cultural realities that faced the citizens of Europe during the Nazi era (242). When books successfully deal with the attempted annihilation of numerous European cultures, they also help readers recognize the differing values of these cultures, yet also allow access to understanding the validity of those values. This sort of engagement can encourage a transformative ethics, one where other goals besides tolerance can be attempted. As John Roth notes in his collection *Ethics After the Holocaust*,
Ethics after Auschwitz must be characterized by openness to the Other. Any ethical system that thinks it has the solution to every problem has the potential to be genocidal. Ethics must no longer be a closed system but a way of living (thinking, feeling, doing) in openness to the vulnerability of others, especially the defenseless. (xv)

Roth points to the importance of developing an understanding of the multiplicity of human lives as well as the importance of being open to new experiences, identities, and values. In a rigid system, organized around normal/abnormal binary relationships, there is always the danger for the limitation and destruction of the rights of those labeled “abnormal.”

Instead of supporting this rigid binary system, young adult Holocaust literature has the potential to ask readers to recognize their mutual vulnerability. When looking at the experiences of the characters in *Night, Briar Rose, and T4*, the focus is on the defenseless and how easily they can be exploited and murdered. This can ideally help readers think through the ethics of living openly, or having a more cosmopolitan worldview, as I have advocated for here. This sort of ethical formation stands in contrast to tolerance, because “Toleration seems to be more a disposition that results from a compromise than one which could count as having positive ethical and political value in its own right” (Galeotti 21). Tolerance is an empty value, not one that promotes any sort of transformative ethical behavior or political justice.

Tolerance is, naturally, “preferable to violent civil conflict” (Brown 202). Yet the imperialism and continuation of unequal systems of power and privilege that tolerance discourse supports does violence to unrecognized individuals and overlooked lives. These concerns regarding systems of power and privilege that allocate recognizability and grievability differently can, of course, be seen and examined through a variety of lenses. This project has examined approximately forty different texts in order to see how young adult Holocaust literature succeeds
or fails at recognizing the lives of others. While universally the books send the message that "violent civil conflict" is bad, that message ultimately seems very simplistic. Of course violence is bad and to be avoided. There needs to be more sophisticated layers to diversity and multicultural education beyond this limited message. It is impossible to do so unless texts deal explicitly with difference and encourage readers to both engage with the “Other” and accept or appreciate the differences that make up their lives.
Primary Sources


<http://www.daa.org.uk/index.php?page=are-disabled-people-included>


<http://azstarnet.com/news/world/article_f706f2bc-64da-5717-b87024d1c4d24322.html>


Kleingeld, Pauline, and Eric Brown. "Cosmopolitanism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)." 


Smee, Jess. "German Children Taught Graphic Truth about Nazis | World News | The Guardian."  


"Summer of My German Soldier (TV 1978) - IMDb." The Internet Movie Database (IMDb).  


